

BIBLICAL ERRANCY

Issue No. 1

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COMMENTARY

(A) One of the most important concepts in Christianity is original sin or the belief that all mankind has inherited a sinful nature brought about by the acts of Adam and Eve.

Rom. 5:12 "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:"

Rom. 5:19 "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners,..."

1Cor. 15:22 "For as in Adam all die, ..."

Yet, no amount of theological reasoning can make an inherently unjust idea seem right. Punishing billions of people for the acts of one is not only inherently unfair and unwarranted but also in opposition to other Biblical verses such as:

Deut. 24:16 "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers (2Chron.25:54) :every man shall be put to death for his own sin." (2 Kings 14:6)

Ezek. 18:20 "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father; neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him."

Ezek.33:20 "O ye house of Israel, I will judge you every one after his ways."

Jer. 31:29-30 "In those days they shall say no more, The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge. But every one shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge."

Rom. 2:6 "Who will render to every man according to his deeds."

Ezek. 18:4 "... the soul that sinneth, it shall die."

Each of these verses shows that every person should only be punished for those sins which he commits, not those of others.

Original sin makes about as much sense as if I were sitting at home one evening and the following occurred. The police came to my door and stated I was under arrest because my father in Europe just shot and killed someone. I responded by asking what that had to do with me and they said, "He's your father isn't he?"

(B) Another false conception held by many Christians is that the Bible is without contradictions. Few beliefs are more erroneous. For this reason, contradictory statements will be highlighted not

only in this issue of Biblical Errancy but all those that follow. The following examples are only a fraction of those that could be mentioned:

Rom.3:23 "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

1Kgs. 8:46 "...for there is no man that sinneth not,...."

(2Chr. 6:36)

Prov.20:9 "Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?"

Eccl. 7:23 "For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not."

Mark 10:18 "And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God."

Rom. 3:10 "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one."

(Also 1 John 1:8 & 10, Rom. 3:12, 5:12, Gal. 3:22)

Versus

Gen. 6:9 "Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God."

Job 1:1 There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil.

Job 1:8 "...my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?" (Job 2:3)

Gen. 7:1 "And the LORD said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation."

Luke 1:5-6 "In the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, there was a priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abia: and he had a wife of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.(RSV)

(C) Another clear contradiction concerns whether or not God repents.

Num. 23:19 "God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent."

1Sam. 15:29 "And also the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for he is not a man, that he should repent."

Versus

Jonah 3:10 "And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not."

1Sam.15:11 "It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king...."

Exod. 32:14 And the LORD repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people.

Psalms.42:10 "... for I repent me of the evil that I have done unto you."

Gen. 6:6 "And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart."

1Sam. 15:35 "...and the LORD repented that he had made Saul king over Israel."

(D) One final contradiction is worthy of note. It concerns the question of whether or not God's face has been seen.

John 1:18 "No man hath seen God at any time;..."

Exod. 33:11 "And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend."

John 6:46 "Not that any man hath seen the Father, save he which is of God, he hath seen the Father."

1John 4:12 "No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us."

Versus

Gen. 32:30 "And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved."

Exod. 33:11 "And the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend."

Num. 14:14 "...that thou LORD art seen face to face,..."

Job 42:5 "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee."

Deut. 34:10 "And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face,..."

Deut. 5:4 "The LORD talked with you face to face...."

(also Psalm 63:2 Isa.6:1 & 6:5, Amos 7:7-8, Ezek. 20:35, Ex 24:9-10)

REVIEWS

In April 1982 Zondervan Publishing House issued one of the most comprehensive writings in recent memory to justify Biblical fallacies. Entitled An Encyclopedia of Biblical Difficulties, the promotional campaign by "Christian Readers News" describes it as a work which "exhaustively studies every difficult passage in the Bible-Genesis to Revelation." This is erroneous as this issue of Biblical Errancy, and those that follow, will show. For example, the author, Gleason Archer, a professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, neither explained how we could all be victims of original sin because of the deeds of one nor how Noah could be perfect if all have sinned.

Incidentally, it is always interesting to note the terminology employed by Biblical apologists with respect to contradictions. They are rarely referred to as contradictions per se. Such words a

"difficulties," "discrepancies," "detractions," and "problem," are far more evident than contradictions, fallacies, and falsehoods. Using the former denotes an obvious attempt to minimize inconsistencies. A minor discrepancy sounds far less serious than a contradiction.

(E) What then are Gleason Archer's explanations for the above mentioned contradictions. In regard to the problems of God's repentance, he offers the following:

"...it is a mistake to infer from this (God's omniscience-ed) that he is incapable of emotions or reactions to willful depravity of his creatures."(p. 80)

(1) If the word repent means anything, it says, I somehow made a mistake, not that I merely regret the results of my acts. I went down the wrong road. If you regret the outcome you are also saying, I wish I had done something else. (2) But even if repent is restricted to the very narrow sense of emotion and remorse, the fact remains that God does not repent in any sense. 1 Sam. 15:29 and Num. 23:19 makes this quite clear. Whether he is sorrowful or not is irrelevant. God does not repent, period. Apologists use the phrases universally when it suits their purpose, but in a restricted sense when it is obviously wrong to employ the broad sense.

After saying God could repent in a sorrowful or remorseful sense, Archer states:

"Yet when it comes to His announced covenant purposes toward His covenant people, God is indeed incapable of repentance."

(1) But there is no evidence of such a distinction in scripture. Num. 23:19 and 1 Sam 15:29 says that God does not repent. They do not say this applies only to those situations which involved "His announced covenant purposes toward His covenant people." Archer has inserted a provision which clearly nowhere in evidence.

In groping for a way out of this quagmire, Archer has grasped at two straws. Readers are free to choose either. "Repent" is only meant in an anthropomorphic sense or God does not repent "when it comes to His announced covenant purposes toward His people." There is not the slightest evidence for either assumption.

(F) With respect to seeing God's face Archer says: "The Bible draws a clear distinction between gazing on God in his unveiled glory and beholding a representative or reflection of God..."

(1) The issue concerns whether or not God's face is seen, not whether his glory or a mere reflection is viewed. Archer has reframed and rewritten the problem. Ex. 33:11 and Gen. 32:30 clearly say God's face was seen, not a representation.

(2) The Bible draws no distinction in these verses between his glory and a mere reflection. Archer has artificially created a difference which does not exist. He is trying to escape from the problem by admitting a reflection of God was seen but not his essence, his glory.

Archer continues:

"John 1:18 declares, "no man has seen God at any time (that is, his full glory as Creator and Sovereign of all the universe.

(1) John 1:18 says nothing about "his full glory as Creator and Sovereign of all the universe." There is no such proviso, not even implicitly.

Archer then says: "We behold the face of God by faith as we look to Christ, 'He who has seen Me has seen the Father.' (John 14:9) God therefore showed His face and declared His glory through His Son, who was God Incarnate."

(1) Yes, the Bible does say men see God through Jesus but it also says God is seen face to face. The latter is prominent also. The Bible nowhere states that one excludes the other.

Archer proceeds: "God showed His face through an angel (as at the interview with Moses at the burning bush (Ex. 3:2-6), or else through his glory cloud,..."

(1) The Bible clearly states that Moses(Ex. 33:11) and Jacob (Gen.32:30) saw God face to face, not "through an angel" or "through His glory cloud." Archer is guilty of insertionism-the unwarranted and unsubstantiated insertion of words into Biblical verses to escape contradictions or a mistake.

(2) Archer chose a bad example from his perspective when he used Ex. 3:2-6. It says "And Moses hid his face: for he was afraid to look upon God." How then, could he have seen God's face through an angel or otherwise.

He adds:

"We are therefore to understand that Yahweh met with Moses and talked to him in some glorious representation that fell short of a full unveiling of His face. In that sense He talked to Moses face to face..."(1) Again Ex. 33:11 and Gen. 32:30 say "face to face" not "in some glorious representation that fell short of a full unveiling of His face.

And finally, Archer falsely alleges the in Ex. 33:18: "Moses asked to see the very face of God."

(1) This verse actually states that Moses asked to see God's glory, not his face. They are not identical. God did not deny this request as verse 19 shows, but stated in verse 20 (RSV) that it would not extend to revealing His face.

Issue No. 2,

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RESURRECTION--Among those beliefs crucial to Christianity few are of greater importance than that of the Resurrection. Paul went so far as to allege the very foundation of Christianity rests upon its occurrence.

1Cor. 15:14 "And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain." (also: 1 Cor. 15:17)

Yet, why should the Resurrection be of such significance.(?) Elijah raised a child from the dead (1Kings 17:17, 21-22); Samuel said to Saul, "Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me" (1Sam. 28.7, 11, 15); Elisha raised the dead son of a Shunammite (2 Kings 4:32, 34-35); a dead man being lowered into a grave revived when he touched the bones of Elisha (2 Kings 13:21); Moses and Elijah revived at the time of the Transfiguration (Luke 9:28, 30);the saints arose at the time of Jesus' death (matt. 27:52-53); Jairus' daughter rose from the dead (Matt. 9:18, 23-25); the widow at Nain's son rose from the dead (Luke 7:11-15); and Lazarus rose from the dead (John 11:43-44). All of these people ascended from death and all did so before Jesus. So why attribute so much importance to the event. By the time Christ rose from the dead this was a rather

common occurrence. Moreover, people not only before Jesus but after as well. Peter raised Tabitha and Paul raised Eutychus.

While participating in a radio call-in program several years ago, the author was told by a caller that, except for Jesus, all of the above-mentioned people eventually died again. But Paul clearly asserted it's the Resurrection, per se, that matters not the fact Jesus never died again. The caller was asked to cite a passage that justified his contention. There was no reply.

A second major difficulty associated with the Resurrection lies in the contradictory accounts in the four gospels of what occurred. The following represent some of the major disagreements surrounding the events connected with the Resurrection:

- A. At what time in the morning did the women visit the tomb?- At the rising of the sun (Mark 16:2) vs. when it was yet dark (John 20:1)
- B. Who came?- Mary Magdalene alone (John 20:1) vs. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary (Matt. 28:1) vs. Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Salome (Mark 16:1) vs. Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James and other women (Luke 24:10)
- C. Was the tomb opened or closed when they arrived? - Open (Luke 24:2) vs. closed (Matt 28:1-2)
- D. Whom did they see at the tomb?- The angel (Matt. 28:2) vs. a young man (Mark 16:5) vs. two men (Luke 24:4) vs. two angels (John 20:11-12)
- E. Were these men or angels inside or outside the tomb? -Outside (Matt. 28:2) vs. inside (Mark 16:5, Luke 24:3-4, John 20:11-12).
- F. Were they standing or sitting? - Standing (Luke 24:4) vs. sitting (Matt. 28:2, Mark 16:5, John 20:12).
- G. Did Mary Magdalene know Jesus when he first appeared to her?-Yes, she did (Matt. 28:9) vs. no she did not (John 20:14).

If the stories were consistent, one could write one long continuous narrative incorporating all four versions without fear of divergencies. Yet, this has never been done without adding, altering or omitting key verses. Apologists often submit the witness-at-an-auto-accident argument which is quite irrelevant since two diametrically opposed and mutually exclusive versions of the same event can not be simultaneously accurate. One or the other is false. Moreover, witnesses at an accident, unlike gospel writers, are not claiming inerrancy.

Thomas Paine summarized the relationship between the gospels quite well.

"...it is, I believe, impossible to find in any story upon record so many and such glaring absurdities, contradictions, and falsehoods, as are in the books (Matthew, Mark, Luke & John). They are more numerous and striking than I had any expectation of finding, when I began this examination,..." (Age of Reason by Thomas Paine, page 167)

A third major problem connected with the Resurrection lies in the fact that even if Jesus had risen, nobody is going to follow his example.

Eccle. 3:19-21 (RSV) "For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same: as one dies so dies the other. ...man has no advantage (pre-eminence-KJV) over beasts;... All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again. Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down to the earth."

Job 7:9-10, 1 Tim. 6:15-16, Isaiah 26:14 say as much. Robert Ingersoll, one of the greatest Biblical commentators in American history, spoke wisely when he said: "The Old Testament tells us how we lost immortality and it does not say a word about another world, from the first mistake in Genesis to the last curse in Malachi. No man in the Old Testament stands by the dead and says, "We shall meet again." From the top of Sinai came no hope of another world." (Orthodoxy, Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 2, page 424.

And lastly, others participated in even more momentous events. Adam was never born to begin with (Gen. 1:27); he came into the world as a full-grown adult. Enoch (Gen. 5:22-24) and Elijah (2 Kings 2:11) never died. The latter went straight to heaven, which, incidentally, contradicts Hebrews 9:27 which says, "And it is appointed unto men once to die..."

In fact, what did Jesus ever do that had not already been accomplished? He rose from the dead but only after others. He performed miracles but so had others. He raised people from the dead but so had Old Testament prophets. He healed but so had others. What, then, did Jesus do that was different, that had not already be [been] done? Plainly stated, "What makes him stand out from the crowd?" Thousands have claimed to be the savior; so what are the acts that substantiate his credentials. Assertions alone prove nothing. Anyone can claim to be the Messiah and thousands have.

Jesus, The Imperfect Beacon--For two thousand years Christians have alleged that Jesus of Nazareth is God incarnate, the sinless being, the embodiment of perfection.

1Pet. 2:22 Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth:

Isa. 53:9 And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

Yet, the New Testament has many statements and acts by Jesus which prove the contrary. He, like Paul, repeatedly made false statements and inaccurate prophecies. Here are a few examples:

John 7:8-10[KJV] Go ye up unto this feast: I go not up yet unto this feast: for my time is not yet full come. When he had said these words unto them, he abode still in Galilee. But when his brethren were gone up, then went he also up unto the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret.

John 7:8-10 RSV Go to the festival yourselves. I am not going to this festival, for my time has not yet fully come." After saying this, he remained in Galilee. But after his brothers had gone to the festival, then he also went, not publicly but as it were in private.

Jesus broke his promise[word] by going up secretly after saying he wouldn't.

(B) In John 13:38 Jesus said: "...Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou (Peter-ed) hast denied me thrice."

And yet, what actually occurred is shown in Mark 14:66-68

"And as Peter was beneath in the palace, there cometh one of the maids of the high priest: And when she saw Peter warming himself, she looked upon him, and said, And thou also wast with Jesus of Nazareth. But he denied, saying, I know not, neither understand I what thou sayest. And he went out into the porch; and the cock crew."

According to Jesus' prophecy the cock was not to speak until after the third denial, not after the first.

(C) Jesus told the thief on the cross: Luke 23:43 "... Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise."

This prophecy could not have been kept unless Jesus went to heaven that day, in which case he would not have been buried for three days.

(D) Jesus told a man: Mark 8:34 "... Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."

This statement was made early in his ministry. Yet, the cross could not have become a Christian symbol until after the Crucifixion. There would be nothing to pick up. This utterance would have made no sense whatever to the man being addressed.

(E) In Matthew 5:22 he said:

Matt. 5:22 "...but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire."

Yet, Jesus repeated called people fools: Matt. 23:17,19 "Ye fools and blind..." Luke 11:40 "Ye fools,..."

(F) In Matthew Jesus said: Matt. 12:40 " For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

Mark 15:37 and 15:42 show Jesus died on the day before the sabbath which would be Friday. Mark 16:9 and Matthew 28:1 show he allegedly rose sometime during Saturday night or Sunday morning. Friday afternoon to Sunday morning does not encompass three days and three nights. His prophecy failed.

(G) John 3:13 Jesus falsely stated: "And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven."

This verse is not only inaccurate historically as 2 Kings 2:11 shows: 2 Kings 2:11 "...behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven." but also absurd on its face. If the son of man (Jesus-ed) is down here on earth speaking then how could he be in heaven.

(H) And in Matthew 27:46 Jesus cried with a loud voice say: " Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

How could Jesus be Savior of all mankind when he couldn't even save himself. These aren't the words of a man who went to the Cross willingly to die for our sins. These are the words of a man who could think of a hundred places he would rather be. They certainly the words of someone who has the situation under control.

These examples of Jesus' duplicity represent only a fraction of the 193 that could have been presented. The New Testament provides more than enough evidence to demonstrate Jesus' inability to provide a reliable beacon to lighten the way to truth and honesty, to claim the Messiahship. As Thomas Paine said: "The priests of the present day profess to believe it (the story of Christ-ed). They gain their living by it, and they exclaim against something they call infidelity. I will define what it (ifidelity-ed) is. HE THAT BELIEVES IN THE STORY OF CHRIST IS AN INFIDEL TO GOD." (The Life and Works of Thomas Paine, Vol 9, page 292)

Jesus is not perfection incarnate. As Robert Ingersoll once said: "The theological Christ is the impossible union of the human and divine-man with the attributes of God and God with the weakness of man."

In closing this month's commentary several contradictions are worthy of note. Joseph's father is Jacob in Matthew 1:16 but is Heli in Luke 3:23. David slew the men of 700 chariots of the Syrians and 40,000 horsemen according to 2 Samuel 10:18 while 1 Chron. 19:18 says it was the men of 7,000 chariots and 40,000 footmen. Solomon had 40,000 stalls of horses for his chariots in 1 Kings 4:26 while 2 Chron. 9:25 says it was 4,000 stalls.

REVIEWS

Although such previously mentioned contradictions as "take up the cross," "go to the feast," and the warning not to call others fools were avoided by Gleason Archer in his apologetic work, The Encyclopedia of Biblical Difficulties, (discussed in January's issue of Biblical Errancy, p. 3), he did direct his attention toward several others.

His explanation for the "Today thou shalt be with me in paradise" problem is especially revealing. It abounds in suppositions, conjectures and hypotheses, virtually none of which is supported by Scripture. On page 367 Archer says: "The answer lies in the location of paradise on Good Friday. Apparently paradise was not exalted to heaven until Easter Day. Jesus apparently refers to it in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus as "Abraham's Bosom," to which the godly beggar Lazarus was carried by the angels after his decease (Luke 16:19-31).

Apparently, apparently! "Apparently paradise was not exalted!" "Jesus refers to it in the parable of the rich man!" There is no solid evidence either assumption is true. However, from Archer's point-of-view it would be nice if they were so the problem would vanish.

He continues:

"Thus Abraham's Bosom referred to the place where the souls of the redeemed waited till the day of Christ's resurrection. Presumably this was the same place as paradise... Doubtless it was to the infernal paradise that the souls of Jesus and the repentant thief repaired after they each died on Friday afternoon."

Presumably! Presumed by whom? Archer's entire explanation is based on conjecture and unwarranted assumptions. Where is the evidence that paradise did not become heaven until Easter Day, that paradise was identical with Abraham's Bosom, or that souls went to paradise before later entering heaven. Moreover, even if both did enter "paradise" rather than heaven after death, Jesus would still not have been in the earth three days as he had prophesied in Matt. 12:40.

Like many apologists, Archer assumes that if he can devise reasonably viable explanations for Biblical difficulties then substantive evidence is not required. Plausible theories enraptured in

carefully devised speculation are sufficient unto themselves. Most apologetics is more concerned with rationalization and justification than truth and objectivity.

In regards to the number of Solomon's stalls and the proper-name disagreements between 1 Kings 4:26 and Chron. 9:25, Archer frankly admits the contradictory aspects. On page 222 he says:

"In explanation of these transmissional errors (As we believe them to be), let it be understood that numerals and proper names are always more liable to copist errors than almost any other type of subject matter..." "As we believe them to be" is a frank admission that speculation is involved. It would be just as rational to assume there were no copyist errors, just independent writers following independent traditions while reporting on the same events. "Copyist error" is employed far too many instances by biblicists to escape what are otherwise impossible dilemmas.(See: Alleged Bible Discrepancies by Haley). It provides a quick means of escape.

DIALOGUE & POLEMICS

Letter # 1 from Michael Hauerstir of Dayton, Ohio

I've read your "Bible Errancy" Newsletter. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 2: 14, " But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." You are dealing with a spiritual book when you deal with the Bible. The Holy Spirit moved men to write the Scriptures, and to understand the Scripture, you must be spiritual. To you, as 1Corinthians 2: 14 states, you find the Bible foolish, full of contradictions and errors(seemingly).

Actually, you need to be born again. Jesus, God manifested in the flesh, said "Ye must be born again."The enclosed tract will tell you how to be saved, be born again. You need to be saved, please read it.

Editor's Response to Letter #1

You asked me to read your small tract entitled, "In Devil's Hell." Well, I did and found it to be typical of the pamphlets that we often find in bus terminals, on library tables and on door knobs. It is permeated with the urgent need to accept Jesus, confess sins, be saved and fear hell. Much was asserted; nothing proved.

Now I ask you to respond in kind. Read Biblical Errancy, but not through a filter composed of Christian fundamentals. Among other things the January issue proved the Bible is not to be trusted as a reliable source. Yet, your tract avoided the evidence entirely and blindly plodded forward with such quotes as: "The wicked shall be turned into hell;" "Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead;" and "that if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus...thou shalt be saved." You were`shown clearly contradictory utterances which you completely ignored.

You assumed the very point in dispute, that the Bibleis truth, per se. If asked how you know your statements are true, you would probably say, because they are in the Bible. But, instead of asking yourself the Bible is true, you just assumed as much. But I have proven the contrary; it is not the truth. It says for instance, that "all have sinned," which is completely false. How do I know, because your own book says so. Don't you believe it? "Noah was a just and perfect in his generation,..." (Gen. 6:9); "... that man (Job-ed) was perfect and upright,..." (Job 1:1). These men were perfect, so obviously they could not have been sinners. How can you be a sinner and be perfect? The Bible has hundreds of problems of this nature and if you bear with me, I will prove

as much in the issues to come. But please be reasonable; I can't cover the entire Book in two issues.

Quoting from a work is fruitless unless you first prove the book is valid, truthful and reliable. I provided evidence the Bible fails this test. Instead of proving my evidence to be false or invalid, instead of proving the Book to be true, valid and inerrant, you merely assume as much and proceeded to quote at will. Don't you believe the Bible when it says, "Prove all things..." (1 Thess. 5:12) or "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then...open to reason,..." (James 3:17). What have you proved? Where is your reasoning? The Bible says, "Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you;..." (1 Peter 3:15). Where is your defense? Mere assertions prove nothing.

You sent me a tract that implies people are wicked and sinful, while confident you abide in Jesus. Yet, the Bible says, "No man who abides in him sins;..." (1 John 3:6). If you abide in him, as you believe, why are you still sinning. Surely you are not saying you no longer sin. My friend, with all due respect, if there is any verse in the Bible you and those of like mind should commit to memory it is Proverb 14:15, which says, "The simple believeth every word: but the prudent man looketh well to his going."

Letter # 2 from an Anonymous Reader in Cleveland, Ohio.

Your Biblical Errancy discusses contradictions but how important are they. The Bible was not meant to be scientifically precise. It isn't a history book. It was written to provide a path to salvation through Jesus Christ Our Lord. You are concentrating too much on details and not seeing those things that really count. Accept Jesus and you will have the answer to your questions.

Editor's Response to Letter # 2

My friend, all you know about Jesus comes from Scripture. The validity of Jesus depends upon the validity, reliability and accuracy of Scripture. Rarely do I agree with Evangelicals but I couldn't agree more when a fundamentalist group, The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy (ICBI) of Oakland California, said the following when told, "Inerrancy is not important. It is the quibbling about insignificant details. What really matters is a person's relationship with Jesus Christ:"

"... But how do you know Jesus except as he is presented to you in the Bible? If the Bible is not God's Word and does not present a picture of Jesus Christ that can be trusted, how do you know it is the true Christ you are following? You may be worshipping a Christ of your own imagination." (Does Errancy Matter by James Boice, page 24)

Once conceding there are errors in the Bible, you have opened a Pandora's Box. How do you know which parts are true if you admit some parts are false. As ICBI said: "... But this position (claiming truthfulness for those parts of the Bible where God, as opposed to men has spoken-ed), is unsound. People who think like this speak of Biblical authority, but at best they have partial Biblical authority since the parts containing errors obviously cannot be authoritative. What is worse, they cannot even tell us precisely what parts are from God and are therefore truthful and what parts are not from God and are in error. Usually they say that the "salvation parts" are from God, but they do not tell us how to separate these from the non-salvation parts." (Does Errancy Matter by James Boice, page 8)

The ICBI was also correct when it said the following statement of belief is an attack on the Bible:

"... Sure I believe in the Bible, as do you, but what difference does it make if there is a few mistakes in it? After all, the Bible isn't a history book. It's not a science book. It only tells us about God and salvation." This belief is more than an attack; it's a refutation. As the religious reformer, John Wesley, said:

"If there be any mistakes in the Bible, there may as well be a thousand. If there be one falsehood in that book, it did not come from the God of truth."

Well spoken! And Biblical Errancy will expose the falsehoods.

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March 1983

COMMENTARY

SALVATION--Next to Jesus probably no topic occupies the Christian mind more than salvation. We must do everything to be saved assuming, of course, salvation exists. We must obtain eternal life. That's the Christian attitude. The fundamental problem in this regard, however, is that even if one were to say to a believer, "OK, I believe you; so what must I do to be saved," he still couldn't obtain a rational response. Why? Because the answer would depend upon what the Biblical verses were selected. Some scriptural passages say you are saved by works; others say you are saved by faith; others say your destiny has already been predetermined; and still others say it is decided by God's whim. He simply looks down and arbitrarily selects those He wants.

(1) Salvation by works, for example, is clearly shown in Matthew 19:16-19[actually it should be to verse 21] where a man asked Jesus what he must do to have eternal life:

Matt. 19:16-18 "And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet? Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me."

Clearly, according to Jesus salvation is obtained by works. Good works, good deeds, following the commandments are all that is necessary. Jesus said nothing about believing in anything. Faith or belief isn't even mentioned. Robert Ingersoll correctly stated:"(In the 19th Chapter of Matthew we find-ed.) a child of God is asking God what is necessary for him to do in order to inherit eternal life... Now, if there ever has been an opportunity given to the Almighty to furnish a man of an inquiring mind with the necessary information upon that subject, here was the oppornuity... (And yet Jesus-ed) did not say to him: You must believe in me- that I am the only begotten son of the living God. He did not say: You must be born again. He did not say: You must believe in the Bible. He did not say: You must remember the Sabbath, to keep it holy... What right has the church to add conditions of salvation?" What Must We Do To Be Saved?, Ingersoll's Works Vol. 1 p 465.

Incidentally, only five of the Ten Commandments were listed and "Love thy neighbor is not even a commandment. It's actually found in Leviticus 19:18.

Mark 10:17-19 repeats the essential message of Matthew 19:16-18 and also lists a commandment-defraud not that doesn't exist. Again, five of the Ten Commandments were omitted. (See also: Luke 18:18-22, 10:25-28, Acts 10:35 Ezek.18:4-9, James 1:25, 27, 2:21, 25, Romans 2:13, 1 Cor. 7:19, Luke 19:8-9, John 5:28-29, Deut. 10:12, Ecclesiastes 12:13). All the above verses resemble Micah 6:8 which says:

Micah 6:8 "...what doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

All of them state one is saved by good works; none mentions anything associated with belief or faith. Good deeds alone are sufficient.

(2) Some verses contend your destiny has already been predetermined. It's fixed. Acts 13: 48

Acts 13:48 "And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed."

and Ephesians 1:4-5:

Eph. 1:4 "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, 13:8, 2 Thess. 2:13, Eph. 1:11, Matthew 24:24, 31, Proverbs 16:9, 20:24, 2 Tim. 2:10, 1 Peter 1:2, 2:8.

(3) Some passages allege God merely selects people as He sees fit. Psalm 65:4 is a good example.

Ps. 65:4 "Blessed is the man whom thou chooseth, and causeth to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts."

(See also: John 6:44, 65, 17:9, Acts 22:14, Romans 9:16, 18, Psalm 86:13)

(4) And of course, there are those verses which Christians quote to prove one is saved by faith. Acts 16: 30-31 is as representative as any.

Acts 16:30 And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. (See also: John 14:6, 3:15-16, 18, 36, 6:28-29, 47, 11:25-26, Acts 4:12, 13:39, Romans 1:16-17, Hebrews 11:6, Ephesians 2:8-9)

All the above clearly shows that even if one were to surrender himself completely to Christian teachings, he still wouldn't know what to do. If he is saved by works then he had better commit good deeds; if he is saved by a Godly act of merciful selection then he can only hope to be chosen; if he is saved by faith, then he must choose the correct beliefs; and if his destiny is predetermined, he should ignore the entire matter. Why become concerned about something that is unalterable. It is interesting to note that although Paul often says saved by faith, Jesus clearly states you are saved by works. And unless "Christianity" is actually "Paulianity," Jesus' assertions take precedence.

Thomas Paine once made an astute observation with respect to Paul's salvation by faith: "One set of preachers make salvation to consist in believing. They tell their congregations that if they believe in Christ their sins shall be forgiven. This, in the first place, is an encouragement to sin, in a similar manner as when the prodigal young fellow is told his father will pay all his debts, he runs into debt faster, and becomes the more extravagant. Daddy says he, pays all, and on he goes: just so in the other case, Christ pays all, and on goes the sinner." *The Life and Works of Thomas Paine Vol 9, p. 27*

Paine made an equally apt comment with respect to predestination: "Another set of preachers tell their congregations that God predestinated and selected, from all eternity, a certain number to be saved, and a certain number to be damned eternally. If this were true, the day of judgement is Past: their preaching is in vain, and they had better at some useful calling for their livelihood. This doctrine has a direct tendency to demoralize mankind." *The Life and Works of Thomas Paine, Vol 9, p. 208*

Is it any wonder that Jesus' prophecy:

John 10:16 "... and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd." has never materialized. One can easily understand how a book as inconsistent as the Bible has given rise to more than fifteen hundred separate Christian denominations. The deficiency lies not so much with the preachers as the book from which they preach.

Prophecy--Christians often assert alleged inspiration of the Bible is proven by accurate prophecies contained therein. Yet, any reasonably objective analysis of the Book will expose many inaccurate predictions. Generally speaking, prophetic failures can be grouped into three separate categories: Those which were fulfilled in a manner different from that promised, those which have never occurred, and New Testament references to Old Testament prophecies that don't exist. Besides Jesus' inaccurate predictions with respect to the cock crowing, the attainment of paradise by the thief on the cross, and the similarity in time between His internment and Jonah's period in the whale (See 2nd issue, Feb. 1983, p.3) the following falsehoods could be mentioned. In Genesis 2:17 God told Adam.

Gen. 2:17 "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Yet, Adam ate the fruit and did not die that day. In fact, he lived to be 930 years old (Gen. 5:5). If a spiritual, as opposed to a physical, death was intended, as apologists allege, then why wouldn't this be true of what Nathan told David in 2 Samuel 12:14. David had sinned against God and Nathan said:

2 Samuel 12:14 "Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme, the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die." Verse 18 clearly shows that the child died physically, not spiritually, shortly thereafter. [Which also goes against Deut. 24:16.]

Unless the context shows a verse should be given a spiritual interpretation, we should adhere to a literal approach. The well-known apologist W. Arndt aptly stated: "It must be remembered that a deviation from the literal sense is not justified unless the Scriptures themselves prescribe such a course." *Bible Difficulties, W. Arndt, p. 133.*

Another inaccurate prophecy is found in Genesis 28:13: Gen. 28:13 "...I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed." Jacob never received the promise land and it is questionable whether the spot on which he lay ever came into the possession of his descendants.

In Genesis 35:10 God said to Jacob:

Gen. 35:10 "And God said unto him, Thy name is Jacob: thy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name: and he called his name Israel"

Yet, just 11 chapters later the text says:

Gen. 46:2 "And God spake unto Israel in the visions of the night, and said, Jacob, Jacob. And he said, Here am I."

A concluding false prophecy among the scores of available is found in Deuteronomy 23:

Deut. 23:3 "An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD for ever."

Ruth a Moabitess, not only entered the congregation of the Lord as Ruth 1:4, 1:22, 4:13, 4:17 show but gave birth to the ancestors of David and Jesus.

Even more noteworthy are prophecies that don't exist such as found in Matthew 2:23.

Matt. 2:23 "And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene." He shall be called a Nazarene does not exist in the Old Testament. There is no such prophecy.

Jesus, The Imperfect Beacon--I thought it might be appropriate to conclude this month's commentary with some additional statements and acts by Jesus which disprove his perfection. In Matt. 5:44 Jesus told people to: Matt. 5:44 "...Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, ..." Yet repeatedly called his opponents names and hurled epithets. (See Matt. 23:15, 23:17, 19, 27, 33, John 10:8, Luke 11:40, Matthew 12:34)

In John 23:32 Jesus said: John 12:32 "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." Jesus alleged lifted up but he is far from having drawn all men to him. The majority of mankind have never heard his name.

In Matthew 8:20 Jesus said: Matt. 8:20 "And Jesus saith unto him, The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." while in Mark 2:15 says: Mark 2:15 "...Jesus sat at meat in his house." Jesus had no place to lay his head, yet he owned a house. According to psalm 24:1 he owned everything.

And lastly, in Matthew 19:19 Jesus said: Matt. 19:19 "Honour thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." while he said to his own mother:

John 2:4 "...Woman, what have I to do with thee?" Apparently Jesus' love escaped him. This is the same Jesus who told everyone else to "Honor thy father and mother."

REVIEWS

In regard to eating the forbidden fruit, a related problem is especially troublesome to Biblicists. How could evil arise in the beginning if God created everything was good, yeaperfect. Certainly Adam and Eve couldn't have created evil since they were part and parcel of the perfect creation. As perfect beings they couldn't have created imperfection, i.e. sin. If they did, or could, create sin, then by definition they weren't perfect. The apologist W. Arndt said it well:

"Here we face a mystery, baffling to all thinkers, for which we, standing on the Bible, can offer no explanation than the one given in divine revelation, to wit; that Satan brought sin into the world. If the inquiry is pushed beyond this point(which I wouldn't hesitate to do-ed) and it is asked, How could Satan, who evidently was created as a good being, become perverted and an enemy of God? We are not able to give a solution. It is a question on which God has not thought it necessary to inform us in His holy Word." Bible Difficulties, W. Arndt, p.132

Why no answer is given is quite easy to understand. There isn't any.

This directly parallels the problem presented by Isaiah 44:24, Eccle. 11:5, John 1:3, Eph. 3:9, Rev. 4:11 and other verses saying God must have created everything. If God didn't create everything and evil then either evil doesn't exist or God did not create some things, namely evil. It's that simple. In attempting to remedy the problem W. Arndt alleged"

"... there are angels who did not remain in the state of righteousness and holiness in which they had been created, but who sinned, leaving their own habitation, the mansions of Heaven, and by God were cast down to hell... It is here where we have the origin of evil in the universe. One of these fallen angels is Satan, and it was he who employed the serpent in his successful endeavor to lead mankind into sin." Ibid. p136

This explanation has an obvious fatal flaw. If God's original creation was perfect, then no aspect of it could have create evil. If the fallen angel was originally perfect then he could no more have committed an evil act than could the allegedly perfect Jesus.

DIALOG & DEBATE

Letter #3 from Ray Wigdal of Cedarville, Ohio

(After quoting 2 Tim. 3:16 which contends all scripture is inspired, Ray continues-ed)

The first question I would like to ask is why are you going to such lengths to disprove the authority of the Word of God. Secondly, Do you believe that a Christian who loves the Lord Jesus has the authority to refute the Word of God? Thirdly, do you believe this verse (2 Tim. 3:16-ed) to be the Word of God or the word of men? I believe it to be the verbal plenary inerrant word of God!... Fourthly, do you believe our God is a God of truth? We know from Titus 1:2 "God who cannot lie" that God cannot lie. Lastly, Mr. McKinsey If you do not know Jesus Christ personally as a Savior then your heart and mind is darken by the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. See Eph. 2:1-10... (After asking me some common questions generated by preachers on the stump, Ray continues-ed) Are you saved by faith? I would like sometime to personally meet with you and discuss this matter more personally. Please respond to my questions. The only reason I can ask you these questions is because it is so vital to know Christ in order to rightly divide and understand the truth. I definitely would enjoy responding to some of your arguments on errancy and the various verses you have quoted! But I trust that you are looking to the word of God for salvation in Christ and not to prove your own convictions."

Editor's response to Letter #3

Ray, I appreciate receiving your letter not only because several major fallacies within Christian beliefs are exposed but also because dialogue can occur. Unlike Christian preachers on radio and television, I believe both sides with respect to the Bible's validity deserve a hearing. The emergence of truth is impossible when millions listen to or read only one side. In large measure

that is the problem with denominations today. Each group lives in an ideological cocoon with all the accompanying feelings of superiority.

Let me respond to your statement one at a time. You begin by making the most serious mistake of all Christians asserting the Bible is the Word of God. I'd like to give you a list, a litany, of the deeds that God committed somewhere in the Old Testament. Now remember, God, the Perfect Being, did all of following in what is supposedly His book. He created evil (Lam. 3:38, Jer. 26:3, 36:3, Ezek. 20:25-26, Judges 9:3, 1 Sam. 16:23, 18:10); He deceived (Jer. 4:10, 15:18, 20:7, 2 Chron. 18:22, Ezek. 14:9, 2 Thess. 2:9-12); He told people to lie (Ex. 3:18, 1 Sam. 16:2); He lied (Gen 2:17, 2 Sam. 7:13); He rewarded liars (Ex. 1:15-20); He ordered men to become drunken (Jer. 25:27); He rewarded the fool and the transgressor (Prov.26:10); He delivered a man, Job, into Satan's hands (Job 2:6); He mingled a perverse spirit (Isa. 19:14); He spread dung on people's faces (Mal. 2:3); He ordered stealing (Ezek. 39:10, Ex. 3:22); He made false prophecies (Jonah 3:4, Gen. 5:10); He Changed his mind (Jonah 3:10); He caused adultery (2 Sam. 12:11-12); He ordered the taking of a harlot (Hosea 1:2, 3:1-2); He killed (Num. 16:35, 21:6, Deut. 32:39, 1 Sam. 2:26, Psalm 135:10); He ordered killing (Lev. 26:7-8, Num. 25:4-5); He had a temper (Deut. 13:17, Judges 3:8); He was often jealous (Deut. 5:9, 6:15); He wasn't omnipresent (Gen 4:16, 11:5, 1 Kings 19:11-12); He wasn't omniscient (Deut. 8:2, 13:3, 2 Chron. 32:31); He often repented (Ex. 32:14, 1 Sam. 15:35); He practiced injustice (Ex. 4:22-23, Joshua 22:20, Rom. 5:12); He played favorites (Deut. 7:6, 14:2, 1 Sam. 12:22); He sanctioned slavery (Ex. 21:20-21, Deut. 15:17); He degraded deformed people (Lev. 21:16-23); He punished a baster for being illegitimate (Deut. 23:2); He punished many for the acts of one (Gen. 3:16, 20:18); He punished children for the sins of their fathers (Ex. 12:29, 20:5, Deut. 5:9); He prevented people from hearing his word (Isa. 6:10, John 12:39-40); He supported human sacrifice (Ex. 22:29-30, Ezek. 20:26); He ordered cannibalism (Lev. 26: 29, Jer. 19:9); He demanded virgins as a part of war plunder (Num. 31:31-36); He ordered gambling (Joshua 14. 2, Num. 26:52, 55-56); He ordered horses to be hamstrung (Joshua 11:6); He sanctioned violation of the enemies women (Deut. 21:10-14); He excused the beating of slaves to death (Ex. 21:20-21); He required a woman to marry her rapist (Deut. 22:28-29); He taught war (Psalm 144:1); He ordered the burning of human feces to cook food (Ezek. 21:3-5); He intentionally issued bad laws (Ezek. 20:25); He excused the sins of prostitutes and adulterers (Hosea 4:14); He excused a murderer and promised his protection (Gen. 4:8-15); He killed a man who refused to impregnate his widowed sister-in-law (Gen. 38:9-10); and He is indecisive (Gen. 18:17).

Now, can you imagine anyone saying, "Yes, that's my book, that represents me; that's the way I am." -especially a supposedly perfect being. What villain, what criminal, in all history had a record to match?

Second, you ask if I believe a Christian who loves the Lord Jesus has the authority to refute the Word of God. To begin with, it is not a question of "authority," its a question of "right." Everyone, Christian or otherwise, has a right, indeed, an obligation, to question the truth of what he is told and to demand evidence. Blind obedience leads to disaster. And every part of BIBLICAL ERRANCY proves the Bible is something other than God's word.

Third, you ask if I know and love our Lord and Savior. My answer should already be obvious. He isn't the Lord and he isn't our Savior. But mere assertions by you or me prove little; evidence, such as that provided by BIBLICAL ERRANCY is what counts.

Fourth, you ask if I believe the Bible to be the Word of God. You say you believe it is plenary and inerrant. But what you or I believe is irrelevant and immaterial. As is true in court, the evidence, must speak for itself.

Fifth, you ask if I believe our God is a God of truth. BIBLICAL ERRANCY is not concerned with the nature of God; it is concerned with the Bible. By definition God cannot lie, but the Bible does.

Six, constantly saying Jesus is our Savior proves nothing. Why do you keep repeating this, while providing little or no proof. Believers seem to think that if they repeat a statement long and hard enough people will eventually succumb.

Seven, am I saved by faith? No, neither are you according to Jesus. How one is saved, assuming salvation exists, was discussed earlier. The Bible can't give anyone a definitive answer to this question.

And, in answer to your last question, Ray I am sorry to say you are wrong on both counts. I am not looking to the Bible for salvation in Christ because it isn't God's word and Jesus isn't my Savior; and I am not proving my own convictions. I provide facts, evidence, documentation and information. Others formulate the convictions; they are the jury.

Editors Note: BIBLICAL ERRANCY will always provide a hearing for apologist. Indeed, creating a forum for debate between proponents and opponents of the Bible's validity is one of the primary reasons for it's existence. However, increasing numbers of apologists want more than a hearing; they seek to turn the publication into little more than a spokesman for fundamentalism by putting unacceptable controls on their letters. For example, one writer sent a 13 page handwritten analysis of BIBLICAL ERRANCY and stated his writing could only be published if done so verbatim and en total. Another writer sent me a lengthy tract and said, it too, must be published verbatim. If this continues, they will be wanting me to publish entire books. BIBLICAL ERRANCY is composed of 6 pages not 60. I would be glad to address the points made in both writings but the conditions imposed are unreasonable. Any submitted manuscript having less than 200 words will be probably be published verbatim, but those exceeding 200 words must, of necessity, be edited with only the stronger aspects being published. I suggest those having many points to make either write several letters over a period of months or submit one comprehensive summary. They could even write a lengthy letter divided in such a matter that one section could be discussed each month. Secondly, any literature sent to BIBLICAL ERRANCY could very well be published unless the submitter indicates otherwise.

Issue No. 4,

April 1983

COMMENTARY

MORALITY--Defenders of the Bible, such as fundamentalists, never cease criticizing the evils and immoralities of modern society. And environment, a return to the "Bible" movement is hardly the answer. The Bible is definitely not the fountain from which truth, goodness and purity spring as its proponents would have us believe. Many Biblical verses are permeated with corruption, degeneracy and immorality. Awakening our children on Sunday morning to participate in Biblical readings could easily to that which is being opposed. Much of the Bible dwells on immorality, fasters profanity and honors corruption. If children were not diverted from various parts of scripture, they could easily be influenced by such negative language as the following:

Gen. 38:9 "...and it came to pass, when he went in unto his brother's wife, that he spilled it on the ground."

Lev. 21:20 "... a man that is brokenfooted or...hath his stones broken."

2Sam. 16:21 "... and Absalom went in unto his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel."
Ezek. 23:20 "..Yet she increased her harlotry, and doted upon her (RSV) paramours there, whose members were like those of asses, and whose issue was like that of horses. Thus you longed for the lewdness of your youth, when the Egyptians handled your bosom and pressed your young breasts." Song 5:4 "My beloved put in his hand by the hole of the door, and my bowels were moved for him." I don't think many people need to be told what "it," "stones," "went unto," "members," and "issue," and "by the hole of the door," are referring to.

One school of apologists alleges that some of these verses are to be understood figuratively, not literally. But what does it matter? The words are equally disgusting and should be kept away from impressionable people. Children, for example, are not going to make subtle distinctions as to intent and meaning. Other apologist contend:

"When it (the Bible-ed.) speaks of sin, it describes it in its ugliness, so that disgust and horror enter the heart of the reader. Not once, for a moment, does it leave the high moral level of stern opposition to unrighteousness in all its forms." Bible Difficulties, W. Arndt, p. 63

"Disgust and horror" are clearly produced but where is the "high moral level;" where is the opposition to profanity. The context of each verse shows they have nothing to do with moral teachings.

The following verse aren't going to elevate the morality of society either. If anything they are worse: Deut. 23:1-2 "He that is wounded in the stones, or hath his privy member cut off, shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD. A bastard shall not enter ..." 2Kgs. 18:27 "... that they may eat their own dung, and drink their own piss with you." Prov. 5:19 "... let her breasts satisfy thee at all times;..."

Biblicists allege that the Song of Solomon's infatuation with breast comprises part of a love poem between either with a man and his wife or Christ and His Church: Song 1:13 "A bundle of myrrh is my wellbeloved unto me; he shall lie all night betwixt my breasts."

Song 4:5 "Thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins, which feed among the lilies."
Song 8:10 "I am a wall, and my breasts like towers:..." But regardless of motive, such language is still offense.

Many other verses could be quoted but the point is made. Enough is enough. I don't like writing verses of this nature any more than decent people like reading them. How could the Bible be a book of goodness, moral teachings and purity when it actually indicts itself:

Prov. 15:26 "... the words of the pure are pleasant words."

Later issues of Biblical Errancy will discuss morality in regard to patriarchs and numerous events but what better way to close this month's commentary than quoting Robert Ingersoll and Ashley Monagu who said:

"The believers in the Bible are loud in their denunciation of what they are pleased to call the immoral literature of the world; yet few books have been published containing more moral filth than this inspired word of God... Until these passages are expunged from the Old Testasment, it is not a fit book to be read by either old or young... There are chapters that no gentleman would

read in front of a lady... and the time will come when mankind will wonder that such a book was ever called inspired." "Some of Mistakes of Moses," Ingersoll Works, Vol.2, p. 177

"If the Bible is not obscene, what book is?... The Christian world should never say another word against immoral books until it makes the inspired volume clean. These vile and filthy things were not written for the purpose of conveying and enforcing moral truth but seem to have been written because the author loved an unclean thing. "Some of Mistakes of Moses," Ingersoll Works, Vol.2, p. 178

"THE GOOD BOOK - one of the most remarkable euphemisms ever coined." Ashley Montagu

DIALOG & DEBATE

Letter #4 from Michael Hauenstein of Dayton Ohio (Part 1)

Dear Mr. McKinsey, Thank you for reading the tract("In Devil's Hell"-ed) that I sent you. I hope that you'll also read the tract("Today's Keys to Everlasting Life"-ed), that I've enclosed this time. You have asked me "to respond in kind: Read Biblical Errancy." I have read Issue Number two.

You said that my tract avoided the issue ("your tract avoided the evidence entirely..."), however that is not true. The issue I pointed out (See: Letter #1, Feb. 1983 Issue-ed.), is that you Mr. McKinsey "must be born again." The tract dealt with that subject alone. You need to be saved more than anyone I know. The reason why I say that is because you are so bent on trying to prove the Bible false. The Holy Spirit must really be reproving you of sin, so to avoid the point, you are trying to air condition Hell. There are no air conditioners in hell, its jut hot all the time...

The issue therefore is, are you Mr. McKinsey, born again? Please answer that question, openly. Be open with your readers. The front page of your "periodical" states that you provide a hearing for apologist... Why didn't you print the tract (the first tract he sent-ed.) in toto? Why refer to it out of context? You are not providing much of a hearing when you won't present all of the evidence which the other side has to offer!... Having made my point, I will proceed by the grace of God, to correct your periodical....(To BE Continued-ed.)

Editor's response to Letter#4 (part I)

Since your letter is long, Mike, I will respond to one section at a time in this and subsequent issues. First, I read your small tract, "Today's Key to Everlasting Life," and found it to be erroneous in several major respects. First, it claims to know the specific procedures one must follow in order to be saved. As I showed in the March, 1983 Commentary of Biblical Errancy this can't be done since the Bible is hopelessly inconsistent in this regard. Second, it claims "all have sinned" which clearly contradicts such verses as Gen. 6:9 and Job 1:1 (See Jan. 1983 Issue, p.3). Third the following verses in your tract:

Hebr. 9:27 "It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment." contradicts:

1Ths. 4:17 "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

2Kgs. 2:11 "... there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven."

Hebr. 11:5 "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God." (See: Gen. 5:24)

Each of the latter verses clearly shows an instance in which people have gone to God without dying. Fourth, the tract says, "You must admit that you are a sinner who deserves to die and go to hell." According to Christian beliefs this is true of anyone the moment he becomes a human being. But Biblical Errancy demonstrated in January, 1983, issue that Original Sin is patently unjust on its face and could not possibly be sanctioned by a just God. There is not now, never has been, and never will be an adequate answer as to why humanity is being punished (allegedly) for what one man, Adam, did.

"The absurdity of the doctrine known as 'The Fall of Man,' gave birth to that other absurdity known as 'The Atonement.' So that now it is insisted that, as we are rightfully charged with the sin of someone else, we can rightfully be credited with the virtues of another." "Orthodoxy," Ingersoll Works, Vol. 2, p. 370

And fifth, the pamphlet states, "God is Holy and Righteous. There is no sin in Him." Although this may be true of God, it is in direct opposition to "His" Book's description of him. According to "His" Book he not only violated his own Ten Commandments by killing individuals, telling people to lie, causing adultery, and ordering stealing but committed a wide assortment of other despicable acts. (See: Biblical Errancy, March, 1983, p. 5) As Thomas Paine and Robert Ingersoll said:

"A false friend, an unjust judge, a braggart, a hypocrite, and tyrant, sincere in hatred, jealous, vain and revengeful, false in promise, honest in curse, suspicious, ignorant, infamous and hideous—such is the God of the Pentateuch." "Some Mistakes of Moses, Ingersoll Works

"All our ideas of the justice and goodness of God revolt at the impious cruelty of the Bible. It is not God, just and good, but of a devil, under the name of God, that the Bible describes." The Age of Reason", Thomas Paine, p.198

"... A book so full of contradictions and wickedness could not be the Word of God, and...we dishonor God by ascribing it to him." The Life and Works of Thomas Paine, Vol. 9, p. 177

"...for in my opinion the Bible is a gross libel against the justice and goodness of God, in almost every part of it." The Age of Reason, Thomas Paine, p.199

"... as I never will believe any book that ascribes cruelty and injustice to God. I therefore reject the Bible as unworthy of credit." The Age of Reason, Thomas Paine, p.199

"I seek to rescue the reputation of the Deity." "What We Must Do To Be Saved," Ingersoll's Work, Vol. 1, p.470

You stated in your letter, Mike, that the issue is, "You must be born again." But that is by no means the issue. The issue is, "Is the book from which that statement comes, valid? Is it the word of God?" That's the real issue. If it isn't God's Word, who cares what it says. It's no more inspired and deserves no more credence than any other book. Thomas Paine could not have said it better: "... but before anything can be admitted as proved by the Bible itself must be proved to be true; for if the Bible be not true, or the truth of it doubtful, it ceases to have authority, and can not be admitted as proof of anything." The Age of Reason, Thomas Paine, p.89

You say I need to be saved. But the truth is, you need to be aware of the fact that you have accepted a book, adopted its precepts and expounded its teachings without investigating its validity or performing a reasonable intelligent critique of its contents. Apparently you are so desperate for something to believe in that you are willing to minimize or ignore all contrary information. As I told some college students recently after a protracted discussion, "As long as it looks good, sounds good, feels good, and seems to make sense, you really don't care whether it is true or false. Having something to believe in is more important to you than the accuracy of that which you believed." Francis Bacon, the philosopher said it well: "Man prefers to believe what he prefers to be true."

You say I am "bent on trying to prove the Bible false." In truth, Mike, I am trying to awaken people to the tremendous number of problem contained within Scripture. For several years I have been sending a letter of introduction to call-in radio stations which says, in part, "Since the 1960's most of my time has been devoted to a searching analysis of the Bible. Like Thomas Paine and Robert Ingersoll, I was disturbed by the large number of difficulties contained therein and decided to initiate a calm, dispassionate presentation of that which was not being exposed to the laity. My intent was not to injure people's feelings but to inform. Once individuals have the data, only they can decide how it should be employed." I also stated a fundamental judicial tenet that, "People can only formulate an informed reasoned analysis of any subject when given both pro and con information." On the other hand, Mike, those representing your position, especially the evangelicals, are bent on making sure people are allowed to hear only one point of view. When did you ever hear a preacher on radio or television state the Bible was mistaken in some respect. I'm not "bent" in any direction, Mike. I'm trying to straighten matters out. The world's conditions are bent enough already; they don't need any assistance.

You say the "Holy Spirit must really be reprovng me of sin." I think you had better consult the Holy Spirit again, Mike. Since when has he been driving people away from "God's Word." When and where does the Bible relate an instance in which the Holy Spirit punished someone by urging him to go elsewhere. Incidentally, in regard to one of your comments, I hope you didn't mean to question my integrity. Neither of us has any reason to doubt the decency of the other. Ad hominen arguments prove nothing, are irrelevant, and only generate ill will. So let's stay with the Book and not shift the discussion to personal comments.

You accuse me of wanting to "air-condition" hell, while all I'm trying to do is let some fresh air into the minds of many. You ask me to open up to my readers and imply I failed in this respect by not publishing your tract in toto. As I stated in the March 1983 Issue, copying extended tracts such as yours is not practical (See: Editor's Note in Issue #3). Moreover, so many of your tracts fallacies have already been exposed that little can be accomplished by printing the rest. Why discuss the remaining secondary information. I have been providing you with a hearing, Mike, and will continue to do so. So will you please relate one instance in which your tract was quoted out-of-context or were denied an adequate hearing.

Letter #4 Continues:

You say the "Elijah revived at the time of the Transfiguration." I'd say that in the context of your sentence that the word "revived" meant "came back to life." Yet you say on page two, line 32, that Elijah never died! If he didn't die, how did he revive?

Editor's Response to Letter #4

Good Question, Mike! That's the most intelligent comment you have made. But don't ask me; ask the Bible. I've wondered how apologists resolve this contradiction. I didn't say Elijah never

died; the Bible says as much (2 Kings 2:11). I never said Elijah rose from the dead; the Bible shows as much (Matt. 17:3). I am merely repeating the Biblical account. If you insist that Elijah never died and, thus, never came back to life at the time of the Transfiguration, then why was he mentioned along with Moses who did return to life. The problem is, "Does Matt. 17:3 mean Elijah rose from the dead." The context seems to say yes.

Letter #4 Continues:

You say, "How could Jesus be the savior of all mankind when he couldn't even save himself." That's how He was the Savior of Mankind, He gave himself for us to pay for our sins. In a sense- Jesus couldn't save Himself from dying on the cross, if any person was to ever be born again, because Jesus had to make the sacrifice which would pay for the sins we've committed against God.

Editor's Response to Letter #4

Mike, you just ignored what I wrote in Feb. 1983 issue on page 3. How could Jesus have been giving himself for mankind when he said on the cross, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me. Clearly he was not dying willingly for anyone and was not "giving himself for mankind. You keep saying he is dying for you when he says he isn't. Why don't you believe him.

What do you mean by, "In a sense Jesus couldn't save himself." Either he could or he couldn't. There is no inbetween. And his words clearly show he couldn't, although he wanted to.(Part II of Letter #4 will be in next month's issue.

Letter #5 from Abigail Brown of Fort Worth, Texas

Dear Mr. McKinsey, Even if every copy of the Bible were destroyed and there was no way to reproduce the Bible again, the story and message of Jesus Christ would live. It will continue to live and to grow, as long as the world needs love. Every aspect of creation needs care and concern (love). Survival of life itself is in jeopardy. I send this sermon(a copy is attached-ed) in hope it can get through to you.

Editor's Response to Letter #5

Dear Abigail, I'm sorry to tell you that of all the apologetic letters I have received your approach is among the weakest. What have you proved? Nothing! What evidence have you provided? None! Where is your data?All you have done is utter some assertions that make you feel good. You haven't even bothered to support your position with some Biblical verses. I might just as well say I am positive I will be elected president of the United States in 40 years. Now prove this false. How do you know what is going to occur until it's happened. How do you know the message of Jesus would live on if the Bible were destroyed and couldn't be reproduced. But even more importantly, who cares. The question is not whether the Bible's message will endure, but whether it is accurate. Continued support by the majority doesn't prove it is truth. To quote a wit: "Majorities mean nothing: during the Flood only one man knew enough to get out of the rain." The majority wants to hang a man at a lynching but that doesn't make it right.

I agree with you that "living" aspects of creation need love and survival itself is in jeopardy, but what has that to do with the Bible's truthfulness. The need for love doesn't prove Jesus is the answer; it only causes some people to look to him for love.

As far as the sermon you sent me is concerned, it is difficult to see how it could get through to anybody in light of its glaring inaccuracies. Proof for this is shown by looking at a statement on page 2. It says, "He (Jesus-ed) did not believe there was a devil, but he believed that power was demonic." Yet, Jesus not only believed the devil existed but had conversations with him (Matt. 4:3-10, Luke 4:3-8).

Letter #6 from Paul Hutchinson of Cincinnati, Ohio

The fact that present-day individuals still base their political, social and even economic philosophies and outlooks on overt and demonstrable false pronouncements of ancient figmental deities is alarming to say the least. And although I would never deny anyone the right of free expression and belief, your efforts, Dennis are precious in that they point out blatant falsehoods in what far too many people have for far too long held absolute, uncontested truths. The overall importance of our philosophies, religious or otherwise, are far greater than one would automatically assume. Our outlooks often determine how we observe, interpret and react to our environments and ourselves, and it is mostly for this reason that it is important our philosophies stand in accord with the available facts-an uncommon occurrence. I heartily salute your efforts to separate fact from fiction. If all had your desires to better know and understand our complex world, there's little doubt it would be much more enjoyable place to live. Keep up the good work (and God be with you).

Editor's Response to Letter #6

What can I say, Paul! Your kindness is exceeded only by your wisdom.

Letter # 7 from BR of St. Cloud, Minnesota

I received your issue #2(Feb.) and found it to be extraordinary. It has long been my belief that the Christians have to be defeated on their own turf (that is, Christian who seek to convert) which is the Bible itself. So sign me up for six months(and may I have a copy of No.1 as well?) My check is enclosed.

Editor's Response to Letter #7

Dear BR: I think we both agree with Paine who said, "I will not go out of the Bible for proof against the supposed authenticity of the Bible. False testimony is always good against itself." The Age of Reason, Thomas Paine, p. 105

Letter #8 from M. Potts of New York, New York

Sorry to keep you waiting on this subscription, it was one of the many waiters on the pile. Anyway, here we go for six months. Love your article, keep up the good work mate. This is great stuff! By the way. I've only gone as far as No.2 so could you follow on from there please. Thanks again for the wonderful information. (A subscription was enclosed-ed.)

Letter # 9 from Rev. Heins of Wisconsin

Dennis: I like the material you're putting in the newsletter. I'd like to try and give it a shot to publish some working manuals for Bible study. There must be some way to get the message out that Biblical interpretation must be based on other than literal interpretation. Keep up the good work

Issue No. 5,

May 1983

COMMENTARY

Peter--The Bible has many heroes who play a crucial role in the formulation of Biblical concepts and ideology. Jesus, Paul, Abraham, David and Peter are among the more prominent figures. Unfortunately, each of these individuals has serious deficiencies in his character and should not be depicted as models for our children to emulate. Peter is as good an example as any of one lacking in courage and integrity. All of the following acts, statements, and events in the New Testament show poor judgement associated with naming churches, cathedrals, basilicas, and so forth after him, and the absurdity of granting him sainthood:

- He denied Jesus three times and lied under oath in the process (Matt. 26:70, 72.74-75);
- he will be denied by Jesus in Heaven because he denied Jesus before men (Matt. 10:33);
- he falsely and deceptively stated he would never desert Jesus, although all others may (Matt. 26:33);
- he lied when he said he would stand behind Jesus to the end (Luke 22:33);
- he was called Satan by Jesus (Matt. 16:23);
- he admitted he was sinful (Luke 5:8); he drew a sword and violently cut off a man's ear (John 18:10);
- he was rebuked by Jesus for having little faith (Matt. 14:31) and intruding into Jesus' affairs (John 21:21-22);
- he rebuked Jesus and accused him of making a false statement (Matt. 16:22);
- he repeatedly failed to stay awake at the Garden of Gethsemane when asked to do so by Jesus (Matt. 26:40-45);
- he wanted to know what was in it for him if he followed Christ (Matt. 19:27);
- he acted afraid and cowardly by refusing to eat with converted Christian gentiles because Jewish legalists were approaching and would object (Gal. 2:11-12);
- he, along with other apostles, felt the report of the Resurrection by the women was an idle tale (Luke 24:10-12);
- he entered Samaritan villages (Acts 8:25) in direct defiance of Jesus' commands (Matt. 10:5);
- he alleged Lot was righteous (2 Peter 2:7-8) despite the fact that Lot offered his virgin daughters to a crowd (Gen. 19:8), was wicked like the others, and did not deserve to be saved from Sodom and Gomorrah's destruction;
- after publicly accusing Ananias before the entire community and frightening him to death, he repeated the act with Ananias' wife (Acts 5:1-10) in contradiction of Jesus' admonitions to show concern for the sensibilities of others (Matt. 5:7. 39);

- he deceptively asked Jesus who was going to betray him (John 21:20), yet was present when Jesus exposed his future betrayer at the Last Supper (Matt. 26:25) and was present when Judas led the soldiers to arrest Jesus (John 18:3-5, 10);
- he asked for signs to be given to his generation (Acts 4:29-30) in opposition to what Jesus said would be done (Mark 8:12);
- he unjustly accused Pontius Pilate of being responsible for Jesus' fate (Acts 4:26-27) when Pilate clearly said he was innocent and did not want to be associated with the taking of "this just person" (Matt. 27:24);
- he said Jesus was killed and then hanged on a tree (Acts 5:30); whereas, he was crucified on a cross before he died (Matt. 27:40, 46);
- and he said God made Jesus both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36) which would mean he was neither at one time.

Later issues of BE will discuss the accuracy of additional statements by Peter.

Despite this deplorable record, Peter is considered to be a "saint" by many, and one branch of Christendom has even gone so far as to use Matt. 16:18-19 to designate him as first Pope. Of all the Apostles, Peter was the most important; yet he often demonstrated a sorrowful lack of honor, truthfulness and integrity. One can only pity any institution having him as a founding father.

Contradictions

--If there is any area in which the Bible's imperfections and errancy is most apparent, it is that of inconsistencies and contradictions. The book is a veritable miasma of contradictory assertions and obvious disagreements, which is to be expected in any writing formulated over approximately 1,500 years by 40 or 50 different writers, few of whom seemed to be precisely concerned with what the others had penned. Moreover, the highly repetitive nature of the Bible accounts for many of the conflicts. It would have been far better for those attempting to defend the Book if, for example Deuteronomy had not repeated so much of Exodus, Chronicles had not repeated so much of Samuel and Kings, and the gospels had not been so repetitious. But they do repeat and, thus, problems exist. Yet, despite all historical, mathematical, ethical, philosophical, geographical, and chronological difficulties contained therein, some die-hard fundamentalists carry their hopelessly doomed resistance to the bitter end. As incredible as it may seem, there are some individuals who still say, "The Bible is perfect and inerrant. There are no inaccuracies." So, for the benefit of these holdouts, I am going to provide a list of some simple, straight-forward problems that even some well-known spokesmen for the fundamentalist position grudgingly concede:

- (a) David took seven hundred (2 Sam. 8:4), seven thousand (1 Chron. 18:4) horsemen from Hadadezer;
- (b) Ahaziah was 22 (2 Kings 8:26), 42 (2 Chron. 22:2) years old when he began to reign;
- (c) Jehoiachin was 18 (2 Kings 24:8), 8 (2 Chron. 36:9) years old when he began to reign and he reigned 3 months (2 Kings 24:8), 3 months and 10 days (2 Chron. 36:9);

- (d) There were in Israel 800,000 (2 Sam. 24:9); 1,100,000 (1 Chron. 21:5) men that drew the sword and there were 500,000 (2 Sam. 24:9), 470,000 (1 Chron. 21:5) men that drew the sword in Judah;
- (e) There were 550 (1 Kings 9:23), 250 (2 Chron. 8:10) chiefs of the officers that bore the rule over the people;
- (f) Saul's daughter, Michal, had no sons (2 Sam. 6:23), had 5 sons (2 Sam. 21:6) during her lifetime;
- (g) Lot was Abraham's nephew (Gen. 14:12), brother (Gen. 14:14);
- (h) Joseph was sold into Egypt by Midianites (Gen. 37:36), by Ishmaelites (Gen. 39:1);
- (i) Saul was killed by his own hands (1 Sam. 31:4), by a young Amalekite (2 Sam. 1:10), by the Philistines (2 Sam. 21:12);
- (j) Solomon made of a molten sea which contained 2,000 (1 Kings 7:26), 3,000 (2 Chron. 4:5) baths;
- (k) The workers on the Temple had 3,300 (1 Kings 5:16), 3,600 (2 Chron. 2:18) overseers;
- (l) The earth does (Eccle. 1:4), does not (2 Peter 3:10) abide forever;
- (m) If Jesus bears witness of himself his witness is true (John 8:14), is not true (John 5:31);
- (n) Josiah died at Megiddo (2 Kings 23:29-30), at Jerusalem (2 Chron. 35:24);
- (o) Jesus led Peter, James, and John up a high mountain after six (Matt. 17:1, Mark 9:2), eight (Luke 9:28) days;
- (p) Nebuzaradan came unto Jerusalem on the seventh (2 Kings 25:8), tenth (Jer. 52:12) day of the fifth month.

Besides hundreds of singular contradictions, the Bible has several instances in which contradictory statements appear in blocks or groups of anywhere from 10 to 25. The numerous problems associated with the Resurrection show this quite well (See: BE #2). Probably the most blatant example concerns the listings in Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7 of the family units of the returning exiles. There are about 33 units that appear in both lists, starting with the children of Parosh. **Fourteen** of these units disagree, as can be seen by simply reading down the lists and comparing the numbers. Moreover, Biblical writers often had difficulty in adding figures, and this instance is no exception. Ezra 2:64 says the whole congregation together was 42,360, whereas, one need only add the figures to see that it is actually 29,818. Neh. 7:66 says the total number of returnees was 42,360, whereas, the actual number of people listed in Nehemiah 7 is 31,089.

REVIEWS

For many years apologists have been using a wide assortment of rationalizations and justifications to explain away obvious contradictions or inaccuracies in Scripture. Many have become masters of distortion, prevarication, and obfuscation, often going as far to make that which is patently false on its face seem rational, if not extraordinarily wise. They have developed an ability to make that which is irrational and absurd seem sensible and profound. The noted Biblical scholar J.T. Sunderland said it well:

Men (theologians-ed) allow themselves conveniently to drop into the background some of the more incredible or objectional things which the books contain; they develop a marvelous facility in explaining away contradictions and inaccuracies and things which the increase of knowledge has shown not to be true, and in reading into the books in a thousand places all sorts of new meanings and so-called "deeper interpretations" to make the teachings of the books harmonize with the increase of knowledge. That which really belongs to the mind of the reader is attributed to that of the writer. The natural and simple meaning of the words is set aside. Forced interpretations are put upon passages for the purpose of compelling them to harmonize with that which it is supposed they ought to mean. Statements, doctrines, and allusions are discovered in the books which not only have no existence in their pages, but which are absolutely foreign to the epoch at which they were written." *The Origin and Character of the Bible*, by J.T. Sunderland, p. 12.

In light of this fact, let us look at some of the explanations apologists often submit to explain problems such as those already discussed. In his work, *The Encyclopedia of Biblical Difficulties*, professor Gleason Archer of Evangelical Divinity School attempted to wrestle with many of the contradictory aspects of the Bible and produced a work which is something less than definitive. Although a strong evangelical fundamentalist, he admits the previously-mentioned inconsistencies (a, b, c, d, and e) are in fact, contradictory. He doesn't dispute the point, but attributes this to copyist errors. A Biblical writer supposedly transcribed something incorrectly. This explanation is often employed by apologists when any other approach would obviously be false. Facts are stubborn things, and close-mindedness might begin to show through. But how does one know if a copyist has made a mistake, when Archer himself admits the original writings longer exist? "...we must deal with the very real problem of the complete disappearance of the autographa (the original writings-ed) themselves... it is technically true that there are no extant inerrant originals." (p. 27). "it may be true that we no longer possess any perfect copy of the inerrant original manuscripts of the Bible." (p. 28). Having said this, Archer then makes a statement bordering on the absurd. "So also, we must cherish the inerrant originals of Holy Scripture as free from all mistakes of any kind, even though we have never actually seen them." (p. 29). Imagine the nonsense of this! We are told, Yes, there are contradictions in the KJV of the Bible. Why? Because somebody copied something wrong from the original writings. But no one has ever seen the original writings, so how does Archer know that something was copied incorrectly? How does he know the original itself is flawless? The originals themselves could very well contradict each other. In fact, how does Archer know there were original writings to begin with? Apologists constantly talk about the autographa, which admittedly do not exist, and no living person has ever seen. Modern versions of the Bible such as the King James, the New American standard, the Revised Standard, and the New International are nothing more than compilations, put together by a team of scholars who, after viewing a wide variety of Biblical manuscripts and codices (e.g., Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Vaticanus), attempted to reconstruct the alleged original writings. The fatal flaw in the entire process, even if there had been original writings, lies in the fact that hundreds of manuscripts disagree on hundreds of verses. Consequently, any version of the Bible is nothing more than the outcome of a popularity contest, in which conflicting

manuscripts were reconciled with conflicting scholarly opinion. Votes, not God, gave man the Bibles of today.

Turning from the copyist error defense, let's examine some other common responses apologists often give to problems. With regard to the contradictions between Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7, Archer says, "But it may well be that Ezra used the earlier list of those who originally announced their intentions to join the caravan of returning colonists, whereas Nehemiah's list reproduces the tally of those who actually arrived in Judea at the end of the long trek..." (Ibid. p. 230). Archer then dismissed the inaccurate totals by saying, "At any rate, the difference in totals that do appear in these two tallies should occasion no surprise whatever. The same sort of argumentation and attrition (while en route-ed) has been featured in every large migration in human history." (Ibid. p. 230).

This explanation has no strength whatever, since Ezra 2:1 and Nehemiah 7:6 clearly show both lists are referring to those who actually returned to Jerusalem and Judah. What happened while they journeyed is irrelevant. Thus, there are contradictions with respect to the number in each tribe and total number of arrivals. Archer closed his commentary by attributing some of the difficulty to copyist errors. "...it is very easy to see how uncertainty as to the digit might join with absent-mindedness on the part of the copyist to produce an inaccuracy in reproducing the figures." (p. 230).

In regard to the Ezra/Nehemiah problem, W. Arndt, an apologetic professor of New Testament exegesis and hermeneutics at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, said copyist errors were responsible. "It is quite likely that where so many names and figures had to be copied, errors of transcribers crept in, and that these are responsible for some of the variations." *Does The Bible Contradict Itself?*, W. Arndt, p.49.

Chronological contradictions exist throughout much of the Bible, and nowhere is this more evident than in the gospels. For instance, Luke 4:5-9 says the devil took Jesus up to an (sic) high mountain and then to the pinnacle of the temple, while Matt. 4:5-8 says he took him to the pinnacle first and then to the mountain. Archer's attempt to resolve this problem relies almost entirely on one word. He claims that Matthew uses "then" (Matt. 4:5), which shows a logical sequence of events, while Luke uses "and" (Luke 4:9) between the two events, which obscures the sequence of events (p. 230). The problem with this approach is that several versions of the Bible (NIV, Modern Language, the Living Bible) say that the Greek word which has been translated as "and" in the KJV (Luke 4:9) should be translated as "then". Moreover, there are 44 verses in Luke's fourth chapter, and 34 of them begin with "and". If Archer's logic is adhered to, 34 of the verses could be rearranged in any manner a translator desired, and no one could possibly know the sequence of events.

Another chronological contradiction Archer attempts to reconcile concerns whether Jesus overthrew the tables of the money-changers (Matt. 21:12) and subsequently cursed the fig tree (Matt. 21:19), or cursed the fig tree (Mark 11:14) and then threw out the money-changers (Mark 11:15). Archer's resolution of this problem borders on the pathetic. He admits Mark 11:14-15 is arranged sequentially, but says of Matthew,

"As we study the narrative technique of Matthew in general, we find that he sometimes arranges his material in topical order rather than in the strictly chronological order that is more often characteristic of Mark and Luke" (Ibid p. 334). Yet, one need only read Matthew 21:12-19 to see that the narrative is arranged chronologically, not topically. Matthew 21:18 clearly shows the fig tree was cursed the day after the money-changers were expelled, in clear opposition to Mark's account.

Anyone desiring a more comprehensive listing of head to head Biblical disagreements can consult such works as: *The Bible Handbook* by G.W. Fooote, *Is It God's Word?* by Joeseoph Wheless, *The Bible* by John Remsberg, *The Age of Reason* by Thomas Paine, or *The Christ* by John Resburg. Each book is well worth reading.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #4 from Michael Hauenstein of Dayton, Ohio (PART II)

You say that Jesus repeatedly made false statements (See: BE #2-ed.). Using a RSV (Revised Standard Version-ed), a corrupt piece of junk if there ever was one, you say, "Jesus broke his promise" in John 7:8-10. First of all, AV 1611 (King James Authorized Version-ed.) is the only Bible without a provable error in it. By using a RSV you'll find all kinds of mistakes. But the AV 1611 is correct every time, it won't miss a lick. The AV 1611 says, "I go not up yet." Jesus didn't lie. He just wasn't going to go up when they went. Now, who made a false statement: God and the Bible or you?

Editor's Response to Letter #4 (PART II)

Mike, let's don't be absurd. The fact that the King James Version of the Bible has obvious and provable contradictions is beyond rational dispute. Holding strongly to one's beliefs and defending them with firm conviction is one thing; fanaticism is another. Anyone who can read can see contradictions abound. That's not the issue. The question is: Are they of sufficient numbers and of such overriding importance as to destroy the Bible's validity? Do yourself a favor, Mike. Don't try to protect an utterly indefensible position. You said the King James Version "won't miss a lick." Don't let yourself be licked by relying on it.

You contend the KJV, unlike the RSV, protects Jesus by having "Yet" in the verse (John 7:8). But I suggest you observe other versions of the Bible, such as the New American Standard Bible (NASB) because it omits "yet" also. Before calling it a "piece of junk" too, you'd better consult such fundamentalist evangelicals as Josh McDowell and Don Stewart, whose writings are quite prominent in Christian bookstores. In *Reasons Skeptics Should Consider Christianity* they say, "Although it is not as readable as some translations, its accuracy is second to none. If one desires to study the Scripture, the New American Standard Bible is perhaps the best Bible available." (p. 71). There was no "yet" in the manuscripts scholars studied. and that's why the RSV of 1952 and NASB of 1971 omitted it. Biblicists are well aware of this problem, Mike, and certainly would have put "yet" in, if at all possible. They don't want to confront this difficulty any more than you do. (Letter#4 will be continued-ed.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #10 from M.B. of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin

Dear Sir, It is refreshing to hear a sound rebuttal against literalists and "their" Bible. I am an unfortunate person who works with three "fundies" (one of whom is a self-taught Reverend) on an almost daily basis. Furthermore, these "fundies" have friends, so I am constantly bombarded with biblical rhetoric.

The so-called Reverend is smugly reviewing your first two issues. His comments, I'm sure, will only be defensive at best, since your logic is impeccable. Having enjoyed your first two issues of BE, I would be interested in knowing about yourself and your background. Indeed the fervor of your attack seems to suggest a former fundamentalist past. In any case, I'll be looking forward to your next issues.

Editor's Response to Letter #10

Dear M.B. I always avoid leaving the Bible and discussing myself, but since your letter is so nice I guess a slight divergence won't matter. I have a bachelors's degree in philosophy and a master's in the social sciences. I've been in the field of education for over 15 years, and passed the age of 40 some time ago. Serious reading, chess, and tennis are my favorite pastimes, and probably show I have no fundamentalist background whatever. I grew up as a religious neutral and have been teaching myself since age 16, thus avoiding the usual one-sided instruction. Incidentally, ask your "so-called" reverend friend to write me. I'd like to hear from him.

Letter #11 from Don Morgan of Crusade Publications of P.O. Box 200, Redmond, Washington 96052-0200

Dear Mr. McKinsey. Your March issue was, as usual, very well done. With regard to letter #3, and your response to it, I would like to offer a few comments. When 2 Tim. 3:16 was penned (and it was probably NOT written by the so-called Paul) THE BIBLE DID NOT EXIST--the verse could not, therefore, refer to the Bible as we know it. At the most, it could only have pertained to the Old Testament. All of "Paul's" letters were completed BEFORE the first word of any of the so-called gospels was penned, and long before the question of biblical canon was settled (as you probably know). In addition, the verse can be correctly translated as follows: "All scripture WHICH IS INSPIRED by God..." (which puts the verse into an entirely different perspective). 2 Tim. 3:16 can only be used by, or on, the gullible to "prove" the inspiration of the Bible. When so used, not only is the verse being used incorrectly in terms of Biblical chronology and in terms of probable intended meaning, it is also used being used in a circular reasoning process (as I am sure you are aware). One must also take note of the fact (as one fundamentalist minister admitted to me) that "all scripture" can, in this case, mean nothing more than "all writing." Thus, 2 Tim. 3:16 becomes completely worthless in supporting the notion of biblical inspiration!

In response to questions such as: "Why do you go to such great lengths to prove the Bible wrong?" I respond that I consider it my DUTY to expose the true nature of the Bible in order to offset those who go to such great lengths to prove that the Bible is the word of God. I point out that a perfect being WOULD BE APPALLED to be associated in any way with such an imperfect book.

In addition (and you can tell "Ray" about this), I was once a born again, Bible believing, God fearing, fundamentalist Christian (See: Letter #3 in Issue #3-ed.). "God" gave me a reasonably good set of brains. I could not help but notice, in my on-going Bible studies, that there were problems with the Bible that were more than apparent. I gingerly began investigate. One thing led to another. What started as a timid investigation became a full-blown hobby, which has constantly occupied my time for almost six years, and I am now a born-again agnostic/atheist. I contend that ANYBODY who looked into the Bible as I have done would either: 1) become an agnostic or atheist, or 2) keep his "faith" only by subverting his own reasoning and denying reality.

Editor's response to Letter #11

Well, said, Don! Many scholars have stated the points you have made about 2 Tim. 3:16. Whether it should be translated, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God" (KJV) or "Every scripture which is inspired by God is also..." (Many Greek scholars) makes a tremendous difference. The latter translation implies some scripture is not inspired and would destroy the strongest verse fundamentalists use to prove the Bible's inerrancy. Incidentally, it really isn't necessary to go to "great lengths" to disprove the Bible. One need only open the Book and read with a critical eye.

Letter #12 from S.B. of Portland, Oregon

Dear Dennis: To put my reaction to *Biblical Errancy* in today's vernacular, "totally awesome!" Herein (I'm a ... student and we all talk with words like that), please find my check for \$3 for the next six issues of BE, as per your offer on page six of issue #3. Are Issues #1 and #2 possible to obtain? If they're as good as #3, I ought to start keeping a set of these things...

Editor's Response to Letter #12

Dear S.B. Any back issue of BE is available. Just send 75¢ for each issue you desire.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

(a) Any letter sent to the editor may be published unless the author stated he/she does not want it put into *Biblical Errancy*. (b) The name of any individual submitting a letter to BE will no longer be revealed when the letter is published. Only initials will be used unless the source says he/she wants to be identified. Letters to BE are always welcome and will be encouraged (c) Anyone not wanting his initials and/or address revealed should so state.

Issue No. 6

June 1983

COMMENTARY

The Virgin Birth--The Virgin Birth is among those concepts that are crucial to an adequate understanding of Christianity, one of the stones in the ideological foundation. Yet, like other stones, it is premeated with problems and contradictions that need to be exposed. Apologists contend the miraculous nature of the event could only be associated with the birth of a divine being, namely Jesus Christ. But what is so miraculous about a virgin birth? Webster's Dictionary defines it as a birth in which the mother retains her virginity by having no contact with a male. But this isn't a miraculous event. An egg can easily be taken from a virgin, united with a sperm in a test tube and re-inserted into the uterus without any physical contact being involved. Indeed, the parents that eventually emerge from this union don't even need to know one another. Where is the miracle? Webster defines miracle as, "an event or action that apparently contradicts known scientific laws and is hence thought to be due to supernatural causes, esp., to an act of God." But God doesn't need to act in this instance. It's not necessary. A fundamentalist apologist was correct when he said: "The Bible Believer should not defend the possibility of virgin births within the human race; rather he should argue that the virgin births cannot happen naturally or artificially, and that the only reason why Christ was virgin born was because of the miraculous ministry of the Holy Spirit." (*The Virgin Birth*, by Gromacki, p.96.)

Most of the difficulties associated with the Virgin Birth arise from within the Bible itself. To begin with, several statements contend Mary was a virgin at the time of the birth and that Joseph did not have contact with her until afterwards (Luke 1:34-35, Matt. 1:24-25, 1:18, 20), while other verses say Jesus was Joseph's son (John 1:45, 6:42, Luke 2:27, 41, 4:22, Luke 2:33,43 in NASB, Matt. 13:55, Luke 3:23). Even Mary said Joseph was the father of Jesus (Luke 2:48), and she ought to know. Several others verses show Jesus had a natural birth, according to the flesh (Rom. 1:3, 9:5). It's hard to believe the birth was natural if one of the parents was an Un-natural Holy Spirit.

A second major problem connected with the Virgin Birth arises from some of the previously-mentioned verses which allege Joseph was the actual father of Jesus. According to the genealogies in the first chapter of Matthew (1-16) and the third chapter of Luke (23-31), Joseph was a descendant of David. Therefore, Jesus was a descendant of David, which is required of one claiming the Messiahship (Jer. 23:5, 2 Sam. 7:12-13, Psalms 89:3-4, 132:11). But Joseph couldn't be the father of Jesus and Jesus couldn't be of David's seed (2 Tim. 2:8, Acts 13:22-23, Rev. 22:16) "according to the flesh" (Rom. 1:3, 9:5) if he emerged from a virgin birth. Christians must abandon one of two concepts, either the Virgin Birth or Messiahship of Jesus. They are incompatible. How could he be of David's descent "according to the flesh" if Joseph was not his physical father? A virgin birth would destroy the physical chain, the link between generations.

Apologists attempt to resolve this dilemma by alleging one of the genealogies (Luke 3) pertains to Mary, not Joseph. (See: *Tough Questions Skeptics Ask* by McDowell and Stewart). It allegedly shows he is a physical descendant of David, and since Jesus was from her flesh, he is also a physical descendant of David and can claim the

Messiahship. However, there are several problems with this explanation. Although Joseph was from the house of David (Luke 1:27, 2:4), Mary appears to have been from the house of Judah since her cousin Elizabeth (Luke 1:36) was a daughter of Aaron, i.e. from the house of Judah (Luke 1:5). Moreover, Mary's name is never mentioned in the genealogy of Luke 3, and only arises incidentally in that of Matthew 1. Both genealogies clearly pertain to Joseph. Both clearly trace the descent of Joseph, not Mary. In fact, none of the genealogies in either the Old or New Testament trace the lineage of a woman. Women are never given a position of such importance in the Bible as to merit a genealogy, and there is no evidence Luke 3 provides an exception. The superiority granted men in the Bible would forestall any possibility of women being considered as equals. (More will be said about this in later issues of BE).

A third problem arising from the birth of Jesus lies in the fact that the Bible repeatedly says nothing pure can come from woman (Job 25:4, 14:4, Job 15:14 NIV), and anyone touching a woman within seven days after she has menstruated (Lev. 15:19) is impure. Mary had to be purified (Luke 2:22-24) according to the Old Testament law (Lev. 12:8), and it's difficult to see how Jesus could have avoided touching her during these periods. Mary was under the curse of Original Sin, like all of us, and thus was no purer than anyone else. Realizing the problem an impure Mary presents, Catholics tried to resolve this difficulty by proclaiming the Immaculate Conception in 1854. They alleged that Mary herself was conceived apart from sin: she was pure. But that does not resolve the problem; it's only removed one step. If this were true, how could Mary's sinful parents produce a pure daughter? Moreover, if Mary were sinless, like Jesus, then why would she say in Luke 1:47: "And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour." If Mary had been sinless, holy, and the mother of God, why did she need a Saviour? According to Christianity, only sinners need saviours.

A fourth problem with the Virgin Birth arises from the wording of Isaiah 7:14, which supposedly prophesies the virgin birth of Jesus. According to the King James Version (KJV) the verse says: "...Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son and call his name Immanuel." Translators hotly debate the use of the word "virgin", which came from the Hebrew word "almah". Hebraic scholars say "almah" means a "young woman", not a virgin. They further contend that the real Hebrew word for virgin is "bethulah". They refer to Gen. 24:43 and Ex. 2:8 which show "almah" means a maid, not a virgin. Who knows Hebrew better, the Hebrews or the Christians? And the Hebrews say in their Masoretic text that "almah" should be translated as the young woman, not virgin. Some scholars further allege that "shall conceive" should have been translated as "is with" child, which is in the present tense and shows the prophecy pertains to a woman existing in Isaiah's time. Other critics claim "shall conceive" was translated from "harah" which actually means "has conceived". They say "harah" (conceived) is the Hebrew perfect tense, which represents past completed action in English. Additional evidence that Isaiah 7:14 does not pertain to Jesus lies in the fact that Jesus was never referred to as Immanuel in the New Testament, is never called Immanuel except by those who do so in order to fulfill the prophecy, and, according to Luke 1:31, was to be called Jesus, not Immanuel.

A fifth problem associated with the Virgin Birth is that some Christians allege Mary remained a virgin after the birth of Jesus. But this couldn't have occurred unless all of Jesus' brothers and sisters were products of virgin births also. Many verses show Jesus had brothers and sisters (Matt. 13:55-56, Mark 6:3, Gal. 1:15, Luke 8:19, John 2:12, 7:3-5, 7:10, Acts 1:14), that Jesus was only the first of several offspring (Luke 2:7), and that Joseph had no contact with Mary till she had brought forth her firstborn (Matt. 1:25).

Besides these major problems, there are also several difficulties related to the Virgin Birth. If Joseph was the natural father of Jesus, as some previously-mentioned verses allege, then Jesus was illegitimate, a bastard, since Joseph and Mary were engaged, not married. Luke 2:5 proves the latter quite clearly in the Revised Standard Version (RSV), the New American Standard Version (NAS), and the New International (NI) Version. Moreover, Jesus couldn't claim the throne of David. To quote the fundamentalists: "...if Jesus had been sired by Joseph, He would not have been able to claim the legal rights to the throne of David. According to the prophecy of Jeremiah 22:28-30, there could be no king in Israel who was a Descendant of King Jeconiah, and Matthew 1:12 relates that Joseph was from the line of Jeconiah. If Jesus had been fathered by Joseph, He could not rightly inherit the throne of David, since he was a relative of the cursed line." (*Answers to Tough Questions*, by McDowell, p. 56). Secondly, several other figures in the Old Testament also had miraculous births. Issac was born to an aged woman, Sarah, who no longer menstruated (Gen. 18:10-11), and Samuel was born to a woman, Hannah, whose womb had been closed by the lord (1 Sam. 1:5, 2:21). And thirdly, it's difficult to believe that the scruples of Jesus were far from those of his ancestors. Was his morality really that different from theirs? Abraham married his sister and seduced herhandmaiden; Judah committed incest with his daughter-in-law; David was a polygamist, an adulter, a robber, and a murderer; Solomon had a thousand wives and concubines; and Rehoboam, Abijam, Joram, Ahaziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Manasseh, Amon, and Jehoiachin were all described as purveyors of iniquity. Only four women are mentioned in Jesus' ancestry, besides Mary, and yet each was morally deficient. Tamar seduced the father of her late husband; Rahab was a common prostitute; Ruth went to bed with one of her cousins instead of marrying another cousin; and Bathsheba was involved in adultery. Despite this litany, apologists ask the world to believe these unprincipled malefactors gave rise to a perfectly sinless being, God himself.

Greek and Hebrew--In discussions with respect to the Bible's validity and meaning of verses (exegesis), apologists often say, "But you have to go to the original Greek and Hebrew to determine the meaning of words and phrases in order to see what the author meant." The implication, of course, is that if you don't know Greek and Hebrew, you can't really understand the Bible. There are several flaws in this tactic, however. To begin with, an apologist correctly stated: "With the various revised versions at hand, with an analytical concordance, with reliable commentaries, and with the help of dictionaries of the Bible language, the reader need not know Greek and Hebrew to verify the original meaning of a given passage. He has in his mother tongue the means whereby he may determine the correctness of most of the obscure translations." (*Bible Difficulties*, by W. Arndt, p. 20). Robert Ingersoll also made an

appropriate observation in this regard: "It has been contended for many years that no one could pass judgement on the veracity of scripture who did not understand Hebrew. This position was perfectly absurd. No man needs to be a student of Hebrew to know the shadow on the dial did not go back several degrees..." (*Ingersoll's Works*, Vol. 11, p.297-98). But equally important is the fact that returning to the "original" Greek and Hebrew doesn't really solve the problem, because thoroughly knowledgeable Greek and Hebrew scholars often can't agree on the translation of many words and phrases. They not only can't agree on the best translation of many terms, but they can't agree on which manuscripts are the best reproductions of the non-existent original manuscripts and, thus, which manuscripts the translations should come from. To make matters worse, they can't agree as to the authorship of many books in the Bible or when they were written. Disputes in these matters are never-ending and often boring. All of this disagreement has given rise to the many versions of the Bible that currently exist. Which is the best version? Who knows? They all claim validity; they all came from Greek and Hebrew scholars, often teams of individuals; and they disagree on significant points. For example, what is the correct translation of Isaiah 7:14? Should it say a "virgin" or a "young woman"? What is the correct translation of Luke 2:43? Does it say, "Joseph and his mother" (KJV) or does it say, "His parents did not know it" (RSV)? The distinction is crucial because the KJV implies a virgin birth, while the RSV shows a natural birth. To further complicate the problem, some manuscripts, which are felt by some scholars to be accurate reproductions of the originals (the autographa,) don't even include many verses in most current versions of the Bible. For example, some of the most ancient authorities don't even have the last 12 verses of Mark, which are quite important to critics of the Bible's validity.

These are only some of the major problems one will encounter if he thinks returning to the Greek and Hebrew will resolve problems. If there were unanimity among the scholars, this would be a wholly viable approach. But one need only compare the KJV with the RSV to see that it's still a matter of selecting whom you wish to believe. Any true believer in the Bible is really placing his bets and hoping for the best when he chooses a version. Apologists try their best to put a gloss of confidence over the whole situation. They confidently assure their followers that the latter are getting the truth straight from God's mouth, that there is nothing to worry about, they are receiving the words of God as originally written. "The text of the Bible has been translated accurately. We may rest assured that what we have today is a correct representation of what was originally given." (*Reasons Skeptics Should Consider Christianity*, by McDowell & Stewart, p. 77). "What of the New Testament? Again, based on the evidence, the conviction comes that there is a text which does not differ in any substantial particular from the originals of various books as they came from the hands of the human writers." (*Know Why You Believe*, by Paul Little, p. 42). But that's just the question, Mr. Little. What text? Scholars agree there is a text that "does not differ in any particular from the originals" but they can't agree on what that text says. "The number of manuscripts of the New Testament...is so large that it is practically certain that the true reading of every doubtful passage is preserved in some one or other of these ancient authorities." (*Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, by McDowell, p. 45). The question is not, has the "true reading" been preserved, but what is the "true reading". The many versions of today show scholars can't agree. Any layman walking

into a bookstore to buy a version can only guess and take his chances. Anyone trying to reconcile the Living Bible(LB), the RSV, or the NWT with the KJV, for example, is destined for a migraine. Before one can discuss the Bible's validity with a fundamentalist, there must first be agreement as to the version to be discussed.

REVIEWS

A professor of the Bible and Greek and chairman of the department of Biblical education at Cedarville Bible College, attempted to resolve some of the problems related to the Virgin Birth. He alleged, for example: "Joseph and Mary were legally married or betrothed" (Matt. 1:18). She was called "his wife" twice (Matt. 1:20,24). He was called "her husband" (Matt. 1:19) (*The Virgin Birth*, by Robert Gromacki, p. 76). Obviously, Gromacki doesn't like the idea of believing his alleged Saviour was illegitimate. Of course, what he has done is opt for the Biblical version that suits his needs, a common ploy of apologists. The KJV of Matthew 1:18 says they were "espoused", which Gromacki equates with "being married," while the Modern Language (ML), the LB, the NWT, and the NI versions clearly say "engaged." There are no valid grounds for equating espoused with being married. Even the RSV and the NASB versions say they were betrothed, i.e. engaged. Gromacki uses the word "married." Although Matthew 1:20, 24 in the KJV strongly imply Mary is Joseph's wife, the ML, the LB, the NAS, and the NI versions show she is not his wife. And while the KJV of Matt. 1:19 says Joseph is Mary's husband, the ML and the LB versions refer to Joseph as her fiance. As stated earlier, the version people use depends on what they want to prove. Every Christian is putting his/her money on a Biblical version favored by one group of scholars and taking his/her chances. You could be an expert in Greek and Hebrew and still find scholars who would firmly disagree with your translation of many verses.

In trying to explain why Mary referred to Joseph as Jesus' father, Gromacki says, "In public, Mary had to refer to Jesus as Joseph's son in order not to arouse any suspicion about His origin." (Ibid. p. 75). this explanation is pure speculation, since Gromacki couldn't possibly know Mary's motives, and is also alleging the "Blessed Mother" lied. We are to believe the mother of God deliberately told a falsehood.

In a Life Magazine article Robert Coughlan took a position somewhat similar to that of BE. He said: "On the other hand, both Gospel writers (Matthew and Luke-ed.) give genealogies showing that Jesus was a descendant of King David through the male line--that is, the line of Joseph--an incongruity increased still more by the fact that the genealogies differ." (Life, Dec. 25, 1964, by Robert Coughlan, p. 90). Apologist Gromacki's response to this was: "If both genealogies did record Joseph's physical lineage, then Coughlan was indeed correct; however, no reputable evangelical embraces that position. Coughlan's rejection of the accuracy of the two genealogies was based upon his subjective equation of the two. He nowhere proved that they both belonged to Joseph." (*The Virgin Birth*, by Gromacki, p.151). Coughlan doesn't need to "prove it." All one needs to do is read the genealogies in Matt.1 and Luke 3 to see they pertain to Joseph. It's stated quite clearly. The burden of proof lies on the shoulders of Gromacki. He needs to prove the genealogy in Luke 3 pertains to Mary,

which isn't possible unless some unwarranted assumptions are made. Her name never appears once in the entire third chapter of Luke. It's rather difficult to believe a genealogy pertains to someone who isn't even mentioned. Another apologist said: "The reason that Mary is not mentioned in Luke 3 is because she has already been designated the mother of Jesus in several instances." (*Answers to Tough Questions*, by McDowell and Steward, p. 60). Why would this be of significance? The point at issue is not whether Mary is the mother of Jesus, but whether the genealogy in Luke 3 pertains to Mary.

DIALOG AND DEBATE

Letter #4 from Michael Hauenstein of Dayton, Ohio (Part III)

You say, "Quoting from a work is fruitless unless you first prove the book is valid, truthful and reliable." Have you proved that the works of Ingersoll and Paine (atheists and infidels), that their work is more truthful, valid and reliable than the Bible? If so, please explain to us dumb, dumbs, how you so ingeniously accomplished this fact.

Editor's Response to Letter #4 (Part III)

To begin with, Mike, you haven't read the works of Thomas Paine. He was a deist, not an atheist. Read *The Age of Reason* and you'll see quite clearly he believed in God. Secondly, I use accurate statements from Ingersoll and Paine's writings; I'm not supporting everything they said. They never claimed the perfection for themselves that you claim for the Bible, and I wouldn't believe them if they had. Thirdly, quotes from these men are used to disprove the Bible's validity, not to propound a position. Are we discussing the "inerrant Bible" or the infallibility of Ingersoll and Paine? They don't have to be perfect in everything they wrote to prove the Bible is imperfect. They aren't on trial; the Bible is. It's claiming perfection, they aren't. Fourthly, Mike you are the infidel. You lack fidelity to logic, evidence, science, and reason. Infidelity depends upon one's perspective. And finally, I've never implied you or those of your persuasion are dumb, dumbs. Pejoratives only build walls. You just haven't been given a lot of vital information.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #13 from N.S. of Richman, Indiana Dear Dennis, LOVE IT! Received April issue, and now want Jan. and Feb. Don't want to miss a word! I'll let you do all the work and I'll have all the discussions with my Christian friends. This is just the fuel I've needed. I just haven't the patience to read that horrible book. Thanks again for a wonderful job-- well done.

Letter #14 from S.W. of New York

Dear Dennis, I just want to tell you how much I appreciate your publication. You certainly are a sharp and perceptive individual, and I admire you greatly for your work to expose the Bible for the fraud that it is... Keep up the good work and remember that there are a lot of people out here supporting you.

Editor's response to Letter #14

Dear S.W: I would appreciate any assistance you or others can provide in urging my

supporters out there to contact me. Tell your friends and relatives. I always need publicity and more subscribers.

Letter #15 from Rev. E.E. of St. Louis

I am a retired pastor in the United Church of Christ, and for most of my career I have had to deal with and sometimes attempt to work with "Biblical Inerrancy" people. Aside from quoting a few unacceptable passages from Paul's epistles... I have found little help, like you are offering in BE, which I saw offered in the April issue of Progressive magazine. I would be very grateful to receive a copy of BE for one of my committees in my United Church of Christ denomination, Missouri Conference.

Letter #16 from D.W. of Dayton, Ohio

I can appreciate that yours is the only national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists; however, in future issues I hope that you will establish a balance between the Commentary section and the Dialog and Debate section. I realize that you are attempting to bend over backward in an effort to allow ample space for the apologists. If you give them the whole magazine, they still would not be satisfied. If you and Mike Hauenstein want to maintain a long-winded personal dialogue, fine; do it through your personal letters. Obviously he does not want to listen to the facts, and you will not change him. In the meantime, the work you do with the commentaries is excellent, and I, for one, do not want to see that cut short. I can go to the Christian bookstore and obtain all of the tracts that I could ever care to burn, but yours is the only place to get the objective commentaries. All I am asking is that in future issues the space be allocated more on a 50/50 basis.

Editors Response to Letter #16

Your point is well taken, D.W. A balance is important. However, Mike wrote BE a lengthy letter, replete with arguments often made and appropriate for this publication. Biblical Errancy is not meant to be an anti-Bible publication. It's intended to provide a forum for a dialogue on the Bible's validity, a platform for all points-of-view. Debate, argumentation, and polemics are an indispensable part of its overall philosophy. You seem to be quite intelligent and have probably discovered this for yourself. The April issue became overly involved with the correspondence between Mike and myself. I apologize. Who sent whom what publication can be rather confusing to outside observers. I think this was the real problem. Henceforth, I will make amends.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

A sizable number of BE critics seem to think the DIALOGUE AND DEBATE section is actually entitled HIT AND RUN. They write one critical letter and then vanish into the darkness of anonymity. Perhaps they are fearful; perhaps that is all they had to say. I don't know. I do know that if they aren't willing to engage in an open discussion over several months; if they aren't willing to defend the "perfect" book; if they don't have the courage of their convictions, then they are trying to circumvent the very purpose for which BE was created. Over the years I've talked to many ministers and other biblicists and found they, too, want to avoid additional discussions. Yet they

continue making absurd claims about the Book's accuracy. I've even tried to get Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses to return to my home. They won't.

Issue No. 7

July 1983

COMMENTARY

Original Sin-- In the fifth chapter of Romans Paul created a concept--Original Sin--that is crucial to Christianity. He alleged humanity is under a curse because of Adam's failings in the Garden of Eden. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned (Rom. 5:12)." "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive (1 Cor. 15:22)." (Also note Rom. 5:17-19). Yet, despite Paul's assertions it's difficult to see how the condemnations pronounced upon Adam, Eve, and the Serpent in the third chapter of Genesis (Gen. 3:14-19) condemned all mankind to eternal punishment. Paul's interpretation is just not warranted by the narrative. Gen. 3:14, for example, says:"And the Lord God said unto the serpent, 'Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life'". Clearly this bestows no curse upon Adam and doesn't materially affect the serpent. How did the serpent move before, if not upon its belly? It's difficult to imagine a serpent walking upright or finding one that eats dust. Even if he had walked on legs, the alteration is not germane to the issue. It is the curse on Adam that matters.

Gen. 3:15 (NIV) says: "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers (her seed- KJV, RSV); he will crush your head and you will strike his heel." These curses sound ominous but are of little consequence for several reasons. In the first place, the serpent, i.e., the Devil, didn't have offspring. According to Christianity the battle between good and evil is between the Devil and all others. Nothing is said about the Devil's children. Secondly, if "the woman" refers to Eve, then her offspring could refer to any person who lived. By what rationale can Paul say this verse is referring to one specific individual, Jesus, who lived hundred of years later in another part of the world? Her seed (RSV) must be referring to one person. If not, if it is referring to all of Eve's descendants, then to whom does "he" refer? Thirdly, the waters are muddied even further by the fact that the KJV and the RSV say "her seed" and seed is always plural in the Old Testament. It's never used to refer to a single individual, such as Jesus. And lastly, the "he" couldn't be Jesus, as Paul contends, because Jesus never crushed the head of Satan. If he had, then how could there still be "sinners" and how could the Serpent still be doing injury? Romans 16:20, which says: "And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly" and 1 Thess. 2:18, which says: "Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again; but Satan hindered us" show that even after the death of Jesus,

Satan still lived and exercised control over people. The best Christians can do with this problem is allege Jesus will destroy Satan when Christ returns. Assuming his return, however, is pure speculation, relying on hope and a promise.

Gen. 3:16 says: "Unto the woman he said, 'I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee'." Even if this verse were true, it would not mark the establishment of Original Sin, but only explain why women have pain during childbirth and have been dominated by men. "Thy desire shall be to thy husband" doesn't sound like a curse or punishment.

Gen. 3:17 says: "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life(RSV)." This verse does little more than condemn man to work for a living and curse the ground upon which he labors.

Gen. 3:18 says: "...thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plants of the field (RSV)." According to Gen. 1:29: "And God said, 'Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food'," the plants of the field were already bestowed upon man for food. It's difficult to see this as a curse, in any event.

Gen. 3:19 says: "In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground...(RSV)." eating bread in the sweat of his face or working to produce food partly explains why man was created in the first place. Gen. 2:5, which says: "...and there was not a man to till the ground (RSV)" and Gen. 2:15, which says: "And the Lord took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it (RSV)" show man was put into the Garden of Eden to work and keep it up-- a blessing of healthful work instead of idle existence. Except for having to work for a living, this is no curse upon Adam or mankind.

In summary, much of the "Curse" is upon the helpless earth which Yahweh (God) had just created. There is not a single word or remotest hint at sin, at death, or eternal damnation. Every clause of the "curse" is no curse at all. God told Adam that because of what he did the ground is cursed, he must toil for food, thorns and thistles shall be brought forth to him, and he must eat the plants of the field. Where is the curse of Original Sin?

From the first curse in Genesis 3 to the end of Malachi, amid all the ravings threatening death upon the Chosen People, there is not the remotest reference in all the Old Testament to the Snake Story, the Curse of Adam, the Fall of Man, or the necessity of Redemption from "Original Sin" and the fires of Hell. Hell and its fires are totally non-existent in the Hebrew scheme. All the furies of God are temporal terrors and end with death of the accused. Jesus never once mentioned Adam or the pretended curse and fall. He never implied his mission was to undo what Adam had done. Not one of the gospel writers uttered anything about Adam, the Curse, or Redemption.

Messianic Prophecies--Christian apologists claim only one man in history, Jesus, fulfills the Old Testament prophecies with respect to the Messiahship. From their perspective he, and he alone, meets all of the requirements one must fulfill in order to be the prophesied Saviour of mankind. But do the facts confirm this claim? Can Jesus truthfully allege he is the Messiah outlined in the Old Testament? This question can best be answered by analyzing those prophecies which appear to provide the strongest support for such an assertion. Among those often discussed, none are more relevant to this issue than the prophecies in Isaiah 7, Micah 5, and Isaiah 53. If these can't withstand critical analysis, if they aren't applicable to Jesus, then what prophecies are? Since each is specific, detailed and rather lengthy, they will be discussed in this and subsequent issues of BE.

Micah 5-- The fifth chapter of Micah, one of the most quoted sections in the entire Old Testament, marks a fine place to begin an analysis of Messianic prophecy. Although touted as a fountain of truth and prediction, it's difficult to see its applicability to Jesus. Micah 5:2, for example, says: "But thou, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel." Apologists smile with glee over the fact that the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem appears to have been predicted hundreds of years before the event. But if they had read elsewhere they would have seen that Bethlehem was the name of a man whose father was Ephrathah. First Chron. 4:4 says: "These are the sons of Hur, the firstborn of Ephrathah, the father of Bethlehem." First Chron. 2:50 also shows Bethlehem was a man descended from Ephrathah. And since neither Bethlehem nor Ephrathah appears in the genealogies of Matt. 1 or Luke 3, they could not be ancestors of Jesus, and Jesus couldn't be the ruler referred to. Bethlehem refers to the name of both a man and a town. Another problem with Micah 5:2 lies in the fact that thousand of children have been born in Bethlehem, but that doesn't give each of them the right to claim to be the Messiah. Thirdly, Jesus was by no means a ruler in Israel. Quite the contrary, the people ruled over him, as is shown by his death. Micah 5:2 continues with: "...whose goings forth have been from old, from everlasting (KJV)." "Everlasting" is not a correct translation from the Hebrew. The Hebrew word actually signifies times long past as in Amos 9:11, Isaiah 63:9, Malachi 3:4, and Deuteronomy 32:7. No Jewish Old Testament writer ever taught that the Messiah was divine or his birthplace was eternity. The literal translation from the Hebrew is "from the days of ancient time." Not only the Jewish Masoretic text but several Christian versions--the RSV and the NIV--say "from ancient days." Although the writers of the RSV and the NIV have translated the Hebrew correctly, they have fallen into a dilemma. How could "from ancient days" refer to Jesus, since he is allegedly God, and God exists before ancient days? God is eternal and without beginning. Micah 5:4 (RSV) says: "And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth." This verse means the Messiah will bring peace and security to the world, as is stated in Isaiah 2:4. But if this verse is referring to Jesus, why did he not bring peace? Even more important is the fact that Jesus said he came not to bring peace but a sword (Matt. 10:34). But the really crucial verse is Micah 5:6, which says: "...thus shall he deliver us from the Assyrian when he cometh into our land,...." If any verse proves the fifth chapter of Micah has nothing to do with Jesus, this is it. In the first place, Nineveh, the capital of Assyria, was destroyed and Assyrian power ceased to exist

606 years before Jesus was born. Secondly, Jesus never became a military leader. Thirdly, the Romans, not Assyrians, conquered the land of Judah during the lifetime of Jesus. Jesus struggled with Romans, not the Assyrians. And lastly, Jesus did not drive out anyone, especially the Romans. On the contrary, they signed the warrant for his execution. More will be said in subsequent issues of BE about other "sure-fire" prophecies of Jesus. Apologists often accuse their opponents of taking verses out-of-context, yet that's precisely what they did with Micah 5.

Biblical Inerrancy--On page 23 in *Reasons Skeptics Should Consider Christianity*, McDowell and Stewart provide a list of 8 commonly given reasons for believing the Bible is inerrant.

The evidence that the very words of the Bible are God-given may be briefly summarized as follows: (1) This is the claim of the classical text (2 Tim. 3:16); (2) It is the emphatic testimony of Paul that he spoke in Words...taught by the spirit (1 Cor. 2:13); (3) It is evident from the repeated formula, "It is written;" (4) Jesus said that which was written in the whole Old Testament spoke of Him (Luke 24:27, 44, John 5:39, Hebrews 10:7); (5) the New Testament coinstantly equates the Word of God with Scripture (Matt. 21:42, Rom. 15:4); (6) Jesus indicated that not even the smallest part of a Hebrew word or letter could be broken (Matt. 5:16); (7) The New Testament refers to the written record as the "oracles of God" (Rom. 3:2, Heb. 5:12); (8) And occasionally the writers were even told to "diminish not a word" (Jer. 26:2); John even pronounced an anathema upon all who would add to or diminish from this book. The fallacy in this above lies in the fact that all 8 reasons are making the same point in different words--the Bible is inspired because it says so, which, of course, is no proof whatever. Many writings in history have claimed divine perfection, but no prudent observer would accept them on this basis alone. McDowell and Stewart acknowledge as much on page 1 of *Tough Questions Skeptics Ask*. "...the Bible claims to be a record of the words and deeds of God, thus the Bible views itself as God's Word. The mere fact that the Bible claims to be the word of God does not prove that it is such, for there are other books that make similar claims."

The Resurrection--In *Tough Questions Skeptics Ask* McDowell and Stewart attempted to answer the following questions: How do you explain the contradictions in the Resurrection story? Their response is almost as unbelievable as the resurrection itself. They state:

A common objection to the...resurrection is that the four Gospel narratives contain hopeless contradictions. If the four accounts were placed in parallel columns a number of apparent differences would be highlighted. However, these apparent differences ultimately confirm the truthfulness of these accounts, rather than refute them. If all four Gospels gave exactly the same story, in exactly the same order, with exactly the same details, we would immediately become suspicious.

On the contrary, wisdom dictates that one become suspicious when they don't agree. Suspicion or not, if contradictions are to be avoided, they must give the same account. How contradictions, hidden under the euphemism of "differences," confirm truthfulness and agreement is difficult to fathom. McDowell and Stewart continue:

It is quite clear that all of the Gospels relate their portraits of Jesus differently. This is what we should expect. No four witnesses (or news reporters), all of whom witness a series of events, will write them up in exactly the same way, detail for detail. If they did, there would be obvious collusion.

Every time I have appeared on the radio, some caller has invariably made the "witness at a car accident" argument, which is no proof at all. Contending people always give conflicting reports of traffic accidents doesn't resolve anything. When there are contradictions, somebody isn't telling the truth, and that's all that matters. When witness A says there were 4 people in the northbound car and witness B says there were 2, when witness A says the accident happened at 2 o'clock and witness B says 3 o'clock, somebody's wrong. Collusion isn't even an issue. Whether it exists is of no consequence. All that matters is whether or not the stories agree. They either do or they don't. McDowell and Stewart's apologetic continues:

If the differences concerned the main points of the story, then there would be justification for doubt, but when the salient points are agreed upon by every witness, insignificant differences add to, rather than subtract from, the validity.

Any kind of differences major or minor, couldn't possibly add to a story's validity. But even more important is the fact that the accounts differ in nearly every major aspect. They don't agree on who went to the tomb, when they arrived, who was there, the status of the tomb, and so on. McDowell and Stewart then state: "It should be noted, too, that none of the details necessarily flatly contradicts any others, but in some plausible way they correlate together to supply the larger picture." If they really believed this, then I would challenge them to write one consistent narrative incorporating all four gospel accounts. The details are wholly incompatible and only confuse the overall picture. They continue:

One of the seeming contradictions that bothers people concerns the time the women came to the tomb, related differently by John and Mark. Mark's account has the women coming to the tomb at the rising of the sun, while John states that Mary Magdalene came to the tomb when it was dark. This difficulty is solved when it is realized that the women had to walk quite some distance to reach the grave, since they stayed in Jerusalem or Bethany. It was dark when they left the place in which they were staying, but when they arrived at the tomb the sun was beginning to shine. Therefore, Mark is speaking of their arrival, while John refers to their departure. McDowell and Stewart are apparently having difficulty reading the English language. So, for their benefit I'll quote the exact words of Mark and John. "And very early in the morning the first day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun (Mark 16:2)." "The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre,...(John 20:1)." Clearly both accounts are referring to the time of their arrival, and their time of departure is of no consequence.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #17 from J.S. of Santa Barara, California

Dear Dennis. In reading your Biblical Errancy periodical (Issue #2, Feb. 1983) I found some glaring mistakes in your line of reasoning. For example, in your explanation of apologists, you claim that, "...the witnesses-at-an-auto-accident argument...is quite irrelevant since two diametrically opposed and mutually exclusive

versions of the same event cannot be simultaneous accurate. One or the other is false." (That's all J.S. said on this matter-ed)

Editor's Response to Letter #17

Yes, J.S. I did make such a statement. So where is my mistake? You forgot to say where I allegedly erred. I stand behind the statement and always will.

Letter #17 Continues

Furthermore, you claim that Matt. 8:1-2 supports the theory that the tomb was "closed when arrived." This, in fact, is not the case! A tomb is not even mentioned in either verse!! In your own line of reasoning, therefore, your periodical (or more directly you) must be a fallible source, and hence I should not use your "version" because it is false. Perhaps you will claim that it is a "copyist error," in which case, you owe an apology to the apologists and moreover to this Archer fellow; this is because in the four years I have taught Physics at College level, I have learned that it is at least as likely (if not more likely) to confuse 40,000 with 4,000 than 28 with 8.

Editor's Response Do you realize what you have done, J.S.? You have written an entire letter because I made a typing error in my February issue. You are correct. Matt. 8:1-2 does not support the theory that the tomb was "closed when arrived" but Matt. 28:1-2 does. My typist left off the "2" on the number "28." So what are you trying to prove, that I am fallible? Of course I am. Do you know anyone who isn't? I've never claimed infallibility, but the Bible does. As I stated in the last issue (June 1983) of BE, the Bible is under the microscope, not its critics. It's claiming perfection, they aren't. The context of Matt. 8:1-2 in the February issue clearly shows Matt. 28:1-2 was intended. Have I criticized you, J.S., because you misspelled "explanation," capitalized "physics," and omitted a "the" in front of the word "college"? Moreover, you falsely stated I have a "version". In truth, I analyze the versions of others, but I don't advocate one of my own. What is my "version"? I'd be interested in knowing, since every version in existence has hundreds of problems. You read my entire second issue and only mention one typing error. If that is the best you can do, J.S., you have practically endorsed the February issue.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #18 from N.S. of Richmond, Indiana

Dear Dennis, First here's my three dollars for six issues of BE. I think it's wonderful! I'm an Agnostic, or Atheist, or whatever you wish to call me, but have had problems answering some of my Christian friends' arguments. I've always known they were wrong, and actually have pity on people who will not question what they read in the Bible. That's what first got me started. I never even opened a Bible till 4 or 5 years ago, and the more I read, the more I was astonished at the doubletalk and downright filth. I'm grateful to my parents, who weren't religious, that they weren't. Therefore I was able to see through this garbage (and I must call it this) for I had not been conditioned all my life. Incidentally, I'm no child, I'm 55. As you say, millions are only getting one side of the story, and what a pitiful story it is. Thanks again for something that's needed.

Editor's response to Letter #18

I see you agree with Thomas Paine, N.S. "Garbage," "filth," and "doubletalk" remind me of some of his comments: "Yet this is trash that the Church imposes upon the world as the WORD OF GOD; this is the collection of lies and contradictions called the HOLY BIBLE! this is rubbish called REVEALED RELIGION!"

The Life and Works of Thomas Paine, Vol. 9, p.201.

"...but if thou trust to the book called the Scriptures thou trust to the rotten staff of fable and falsehood."

The Life and Works of Thomas Paine, Vol. 9, p. 248

Letter #19 from S.S. of Vienna, Virginia

I have long been aware of God's atrocities in the Bible. If people will only take the trouble to READ the damned thing and let it speak for itself, then there could be no lingering doubt that the so-called "Word of God" is among the most profane and repulsive collections of writing ever to exist. I refer to the human sacrifices of Leviticus, Judges, and 2 Samuel; the sanctioning of slavery in Exodus and Leviticus; the selling of one's daughter, the killing of witches, death for heresy and violating the sabbath, all to be found in Exodus. And for all those Bible-thumping sexists out there, for unchastity at the time marriage--a PENALTY IMPOSED ONLY UPON WOMEN (Deut. 22:20-21)

And so far as the New Testament is concerned--it is a compendium of both historical and logical contradictions (read: S.G.F. Brandon, Joel Carmichael, or G.A. Wells) filled with paganism and old time superstition. Easter is named after the old goddess of Spring. Christmas falls upon the winter solstice, which is when the Saturnalia was formerly celebrated.

I could go on and on, as any good amateur Bible critic could do. The point is that the more carefully one reads the Bible, the more absurd and utterly ridiculous it becomes. Anyone who believes that the Bible is the word of some god cannot claim to be at all rational (to paraphrase Clarence Darrow); and what future is there in store for mankind if there is to be this disdain for rationality?

Please enter my subscription for six months.... Please keep up the excellent work you are doing. This country needs more freethinking, independent-minded people like you. Is it any wonder that the Bible warns that "the simple believe anything (Prov. 14:15)? Indeed, it takes a simple mind to swallow such worn-out fables and mythology as are found in the unholy-as-can-be Bible.

Editor's response to Letter #19

I see you also agree with Paine, who said:

People in general know not what wickedness there is in the pretended word of God. Brought up in habits of superstition they take it for granted that the Bible is true, and that it is good; they permit themselves not to doubt it, and they carry the ideas they form of the benevolence of the Almighty to the book which they have been taught to believe was written by his authority. Good heavens! it is quite another thing, it is a

book of lies, wickedness and blasphemy; for what can be greater blasphemy, than to ascribe the wickedness of man to the orders of the Almighty.
(*The Age of Reason*, Paine, p.103)

Issue No. 8

August, 1983

COMMENTARY

Slavery--The Indianapolis Star, one of the most conservative newspapers in the nation, has always quoted 2 cor. 3:17, "Where the Spirit of Lord is, there is liberty," on the front of each and every issue. Yet, if the Bible were, indeed, the Word of God, as apologists allege, it would be difficult to find a comment more at variance with the facts. All of the following verses show the God of the Bible sanctioned, indeed, instituted slavery--the absence of liberty. "Then thou shalt take an awl, and thrust it through his ear unto the door, and he shall be thy servant for ever. And also unto thy maidservant thou shalt do likewise (Deut. 15:17, KJV)." (In order to minimize the Bible's support for slavery, the King James translators used "servant" instead of "slave" in this verse and others. The RSV translators used "bondman." Any knowledgeable authority knows slaves are being discussed, and several versions, e.g. the NWT and Living Bible, are honest enough to admit as much.)

But to continue: "Your male and female slaves are to come from the nations around you; from them you may buy slaves. You may also buy some temporary residents living among you and members of their clans born in your country, and they will become your property. You can will them to your children as inherited property and you can make them slaves for life, but you must not rule over your fellow Israelites ruthlessly (Lev. 25:44-46, NIV)." "If a man beats his male or female slave with a rod and the slave dies as a result, he must be punished, but he is not to be punished if the slave gets up after a day or two, since the slave is his property (Ex. 21:20-21, NIV)." "I (the Lord-ed) will sell your sons and daughters to the people of Judah, and they will sell them to the Sabeans, a nation far away (Joel 3:8, NIV)" (See also: Ex. 21:2-6, Deut. 15:12, 28:68, and Jer.27:8,12).

Apologists attempted to gloss over the situation by alleging these verses came from the God of the Old Testament and his laws, while the New Testament's God is supposedly one of love, liberty and compassion. If so, somebody forgot to tell Peter and Paul. The latter said: "Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men....(Eph. 6:5-7, NIV)." "All who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of full respect, so that God's name and our teaching may not be slandered (1

Tim. 6:1, NIV)." "Slaves, obey your earthy masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord (Col. 3:22, NIV)." "Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them,....(Titus 2:9, NIV)." Paul not only sanctions slavery but equates serving one's master with serving God. To serve one faithfully is to serve the other faithfully. Peter agrees with Paul: "Slaves, submit yourselves to your master with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also those who are harsh....Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps (1 Peter 2:18,21, NIV)." Clearly, according to the Bible, the spirit of the Lord has little to do with liberty. If they were inseparable, God wouldn't be supporting the slavemasters. Confederate leaders during the Civil War were quite correct when they contended the Bible supported slavery. "...Let the gentleman go to Revelation to learn the decree of God--let him go to the Bible,.... I said that slavery was sanctioned in the Bible, authorized, regulated, and recognized from Genesis to Revelation.... Slavery existed then in the earliest ages, and among the chosen people of God; and in Revelation we are told that it shall exist till the end of time shall come. You find it in the Old and New Testament--in the prophecies, psalms, and the epistles of Paul; you find it recognized, sanctioned everywhere (*Jefferson Davis* by Rowland, Vol. I, p. 316-17)." The well-known reverend Alexander Campbell contended: "there is not one verse in the Bible inhibiting slavery, but many regulating it. It is not then, we conclude, immoral." However, biblical support justifies nothing. Slavery was no more right in 2,000 B.C. than in 2,000 A.D. Morality has not changed that much, regardless of cultural difference and time differentials.

Women--Any discussion of bondage and the Bible would be remiss if the Biblical role outlined for women was omitted. In both the Old and New Testaments women are assigned a position not appreciably different from that of domestic servants. Their status is demeaning, debilitating, and wholly incompatible with self-respect and confidence. Except for Mary, Eve, Ruth, Sarah, Rachel, and a few lesser figures, few biblical women have roles of significance, and even fewer are worthy of emulation. Eve, for example, is blamed for the creation of Original Sin. The Bible says as much: "For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner (1 Tim. 2:12-14, NIV)." Is it any wonder that women's groups oppose this narrative? With his usual wit, Ingersoll once observed: "...nearly every religion has accounted for all the devilment in this world by the crime of woman. What a gallant thing that is! And if it is true, I had rather live with the woman I love in a world full of trouble, than to live in heaven with nothing but men (*Ingersoll's Works*, Vol. I, p.358)." One of the saddest and most perplexing dilemmas one can experience in modern society is confronting women who strongly believe and defend a book that so clearly assigns them a degrading and subservient status. How do you reach those who are defending a philosophy that is so totally opposed to their interests? To use the vernacular, the Bible is sexist and permeated with male supremacy, as the following verses show only too well: "...and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee (GEN> #:16)." "But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man;.... (1 Cor. 11:3)." "Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman

for the man (1 Cor. 11:9)." "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husband, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife.... Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husband in every thing (Eph. 5:22-24)." Anyone desiring more proof should read: Deut. 21:10-14, 24:1-4, Judges 5:30, Esther 1:20-22, Rom. 7:2, 1 Col. 3:18, Titus 2:4-5, 1 Peter 3:1, Lev. 12:2, 5, Gen. 3:20.

If these are not sufficient, there are more. The evidence is overwhelming. Apologists try to soft-pedal the entire matter, but facts are stubborn things. It isn't just Paul, but the entire Bible that's guilty. Is it any wonder that feminist Elizabeth Cady Stanton, once said: "The Bible and the Church have been the greatest stumbling-blocks in the way of woman's emancipation (*Free Thought Magazine*, Vol. 14, 1896)." "I know of no other book that so fully teaches the subjection and degradation of women (*Eight Years and More*, Elizabeth C. Stanton, p. 395)." Not to be outdone, Ingersoll again displayed his wisdom by saying: "...it (the bible-ed) is not the friend of woman. They will find that the writers of that book, for the most part, speak of woman as a poor beast of burden, a serf, a drudge, a kind of necessary evil--as mere property (*Ingersoll's Works*, Vol. 12, p.43)." "As long as woman regards the Bible as the charter of her rights, she will be the slave of man. The Bible was not written by a woman. Within its lids there is nothing but humiliation and shame for her. She is regarded as the property of man.... She is as much below her husband, as her husband is below Christ (*Ingersoll's Works*, Vol. I, p. 396)." But, perhaps, George Foote made the most poignant comment of all: "It will be the proud boast of woman that she never contributed a line to the Bible."

In closing, it should be noted that the Bible sanctions the subservience of woman far more than it sanctions the slavery of blacks. Indeed, although many verses support slavery, none clearly prescribes white dominance over blacks.

Coping with Apologists--Although BE rarely goes outside the Bible to make observations, an occasional exception is warranted. Throughout the years I have noticed differing philosophies employed by those seeking to cope with defenders of the Bible. Generally speaking, they can be grouped into nine broad categories with some overlap. Each is worthy of note.

- The first approach involves seeking to smother biblicists with humor and ridicule by asking such questions as: Surely you don't believe Jonah was swallowed by a whale, a donkey spoke, or a stick turned into a snake. How childish can one be!
- A second approach involves trying to alter beliefs by holding the Bible in contempt and its adherents worthy of profound pity. The problem with this tact is that biblicists respond in kind.
- The "bleeding heart" is the essence of the third approach, at least that is the label applied by the Bible's defenders. Its adherents make comments as: "How can you support, defend, and propound a book that has so much blood, gore, and immorality?" To this, the obvious and most common response is: "That's life, friend. The Bible deals with the real world."

- A fourth approach is not particularly effective either. Critics of the Bible will say, for example: "How can you support capital punishment when the Bible says, Thou shalt not kill?" Or, "How can you support warfare when the Bible says, love thy neighbor as thyself?" The Bible is made-to-order for criticisms of this sort. Everybody has heard the well-know maxim that you can prove anything you desire from the Bible. "...the Bible decides nothing, because it decides any way, and every way one chooses to make it (*The Age of Reason*, Thomas Paine, p. 196)." "It has often been said that anything may be proved from the Bible (*The Age of Reason*, Paine, p. 89)." One can easily find verses to justify capital punishment and warfare. The point is, it is difficult to take pot-shots at the Bible from a distance and hope to strike home. The more inconsistent a book is, the more it is able to cope with this tactic. And no book is more qualified than the Bible. It is truly unique in this respect.
- Scientific precision is the essence of the fifth strategy. Critics of the Bible attempt to compile so much data to disprove accounts, such as the Creation and Flood stories, that opponents are overwhelmed. Unquestionably, such information exists, but apologists have their "scientists" also. The Creation Research Society of California, for example, boasts of having 100 members with scientific degrees. But even more importantly, any reliance on extra-biblical evidence to disprove the Bible is doomed to failure. A fundamental aspect of the biblicist mentality is that no matter what information one can produce, no matter what data outside the Bible may show, if it contradicts that which is within, then it is false. And that is that!
- The core of a sixth approach to the Bible's defenders involves providing an alternative. Humanism, atheism, agnosticism, skepticism and so forth provide a far more rational view of the Bible. But why would biblicists accept another view of scripture when they are convinced they already have the truth? Why would someone abandon plan A and accept plan B when they have never been shown why plan A is erroneous?
- A seventh approach to biblicists entails a "live and let live" philosophy, as shown by: "If I can't change them, then I'll just ignore their nonsense." The fatal flaw in this approach lies in the fact that there is no response-in-kind. Biblicists, such as the "Moral Majority," are constantly devoting large amounts of time, money, effort, and personnel to inject their philosophy into the schools, the laws, the courts, social agencies and so forth. You may want to leave them alone, but anyone acquainted with current church-state issues knows their assaults are never-ending. You either struggle and protect or lose and succumb. They are not going to leave you alone, regardless of what you do. Their evangelical thrust is incessant. Ingersoll aptly stated: "Churches are becoming political organizations.... It probably will not be long until the churches will divide as sharply upon political, as upon theological questions; and when that day comes, if there are not liberals enough to hold the balance of power, this government will be destroyed. The liberty of man is not safe in the hands of any church. Wherever the Bible and sword are in partnership, man is a slave (*Ingersoll's Works*, Vol. 2, p.)." Ingersoll proved to be quite a prophet in light of the fact that that day has already arrived.

- An eighth approach, accepted by those who recognize the weakness of the seventh, involves unending court battles, legal struggles, constitutional decisions and popular pressures. Undoubtedly, if you can't change your opponents's mind or weaken his resolve, this is a viable alternative.
- A final strategem marks an attempt to solve the weakness in the sixth. If defenders of the Bible are not going to accept an alternative to the Bible until they first realize it's not inspired, then, logically, they must be shown its weaknesses. **Biblical Errancy** was created to fill this need, to reveal the nuts and bolts of biblical fallacies. It rarely goes outside the Bible for evidence; it doesn't make emotional appeals to the heart; it doesn't throw rocks at a distance; it doesn't propose an alternative; it doesn't laugh at or belittle the Bible and its defenders; it doesn't ignore the Bible's proponents or act as if they weren't a major force in society; it doesn't discount the opposition with pity and contempt; and lacking financial resources, it doesn't rely on the courts. Instead, BE goes within the Bible, makes comparisons, and draws conclusions. It seeks to know the Bible and work with apologists on their own turf. BE operates on the principle that more than enough information exists within the Book to undermine its foundation. The overriding problem with this approach, or any strategy appealing to rationality and common sense, however, is what do you do with those who say; "My mind is made up, don't confuse me with any facts"? What do you do with people who won't engage in any critical discussion of the Bible, whose minds are closed? When Jesus assumes control, many seem to enter another dimension, which is not so much a twilight zone as one of pure darkness.

Paul, the Deceptive Disciple--No discussion of devious activity with respect to biblical figures would be complete without an extensive analysis of Paul. If, in fact, Paul wrote the Epistles, then no individual, other than Jesus, has had greater influence on the development of Christianity. Yet, his tendency to operate on expediency was unexcelled. He often made false statements, misquoted, and proved himself unworthy of trust. The following examples are only a fraction of those available. In 1 Cor. 2:8 Paul said: "Which none of the princes of this world know; for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory." What princes crucified Jesus? He was killed by a mob and some soldiers. In Col. 1:23 Paul said: "...from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which has been preached to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister." Come now, Paul. At no time has every living person heard the gospel. Indeed, millions of people have come and gone without having had any contact whatever with the Bible. One of the great misquotes of Paul is found in Acts 20:35 where he says: "...ye ought to support the weak and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." Nowhere in the New Testament did Jesus make such a statement. Paul's oratory apparently got away from him.

Paul, like Jesus, often ignored his own advice. For example, in Rom. 12:14 he said: "Bless them which persecute you: bless and curse not." Yet, in Acts 23:3 he denounced someone by saying: "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall." In 1 Thess. 2:3 Paul says: "For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives,

nor are we trying to trick you." Yet, in 2 Cor. 12:16 he said: "Yet, crafty fellow that I am, I caught you by trickery. In 1 Cor. 6:12 and 10:23 Paul says: "All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient." The allegedly moral Paul views himself as being a law unto himself. A different kind of problem is found in 1 Cor. 15:5, where Paul says: "And that he (Jesus-ed) was seen of Cephas (Peter-ed), then of the twelve." If true, this would mean there were 13 apostles, unless Peter was not an apostle. In 1 Cor. 10:8 Paul referred to a plague described in the Book of Numbers. He Stated: "...and fell in one day three and twenty thousand." Yet, Num. 25:9 clearly says the number was 24,000. "And those that died in the plague were twenty and four thousand (Numbers 25:9)." More will be said later about Paul's shortcomings.

REVIEWS

In *The Bible Has the Answer*, apologist Henry Morris of the Creation Research Society in San Diego, California, attempted to justify the role assigned to women by the Bible. Never one to mince words, he confronted the issue head-on, by stating at the outset: "Some go so far as accusing the Bible of perpetuating female bondage through its archaic teachings. This unfortunate charge is ironic, for the Bible alone offers the only true freedom for women or men. While pagan cultures contemporary with Old Testament Israel treated women as the lowest form of chattel property, the Bible exalts women who found fulfillment in many ways. For instance, Hannah's life centered on her family (1 Sam. 1-2); Miriam excelled as a prophetess (Ex. 15:20); Deborah achieved greatness as a judge, military leader and poet (Judges 5); Esther successfully led her people through intriguing political conspiracies (Esther 4-7); and Naomi and Ruth sold real estate (Ruth4:3-9). Women aided in the defence of Thebez, an unnamed woman turned the tide of that battle against the wicked aggressor, Abimelech (Judges 9:50-55)." (*The Bible has the Answer*, Henry Morris, p. 239-240). The weakness of Morris's position lies in the fact that the individuals selected not only have minor roles in the overall biblical scheme of things, but have been inaccurately portrayed. The biblical descriptions associated with each of those cited don't exalt women as much as they describe their actions. Hannah was a maid. She wasn't exalted but merely wanted to become pregnant. Miriam didn't prophesy anything; she merely played a timbrel and sang (RSV). Deborah was a judge, but nowhere does it say she was out of the ordinary. She wasn't a military leader either; she merely gave some advice to one. Esther's role resembled that of a soap-opera heroine rather than a leader of her people. Naomi not only sold real estate, but sold Ruth as well! (This was an exceptionally poor example for Morris to chose). And the unnamed woman merely killed the attacking general; she didn't turn the tide of battle, like Samson with a jawbone. The groping-for-straws aspect of Morris's examples only highlights the rather pathetic portrayal of women by the Bible. Two of the most famous biblical women, Eve and Mary, are assigned less than commanding roles. Eve is given the distinction of having brought sin into the world, hardly a worthy role-model, while Mary was little more than a conduit for Jesus' entry. As this month's Commentary showed, there is no basis whatever for Morris's contention that "the Bible alone offers the only true freedom for women." Indeed, the evidence clearly proves the contrary. Can he produce one biblical verse that exalts or elevates womanhood per se, that is, without making the elevation dependent upon the performance of an act of

subservience? Morris continues: "Furthermore, there are no distinctions of sex regarding salvation by faith in Christ or one's position before God (Ibid. p. 240)". Although the Bible doesn't appear to make a distinction between males and females with regard to who is "saved," it clearly makes a distinction with regard to one's gender before God. Morris attempts to downplay the force of Paul's admonitions by quoting 1 Cor. 11:3, which states: "Within the Christian home, the man is the head of the woman (Ibid. p. 240)." But 1 Cor. 11:3 says nothing about a home, Christian or otherwise. Male superiority is not restricted to home; males are superior as shown by: "But I would have you know that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God (1 Cor. 11:3)." Morris continues with: "Yet, the husband violates the Bible's instruction if he treats his wife as an inferior (Ibid. p.240)" and states this is found in 1 Cor. 11:11-12. In truth, the latter merely states man is born from a woman; nowhere is the husband told not to treat his wife as inferior. Morris's apologetic continues with an eye opener: "The wife has no less important or exalted a position than the husband, but hers is not as head of the home. Subjection, in Scripture, does not carry the connotation of inferiority (Ibid. p. 240)." How could subjection not mean inferiority? To prove this point, Morris quotes Eph. 5:22-25, which proves precisely the opposite! Wives are to be subject to their husbands: "the husband is head of his wife (Eph. 5:23)" clearly putting her in an inferior position. Morris then moves his apologetic to another defense with: "As in the home, so in the local church, women have a definable role (Ibid. p. 240)." It certainly couldn't amount to much in light of 1 Cor. 14:34, which says: "Let your women keep silence in the churches; for it is not permitted unto them to speak." Morris attributes their demotion to Eve's duplicity. "The prohibition against women in church leadership seems to come as a judicial result from Eve's complicity in the first sin in Eden (Ibid. p. 241)." In other words, women are being denied leadership roles today because of what Eve did years ago. The innocent are being punished for what an ancestor did long ago. Again shifting the focus, Morris states: "Some have even called Paul an antiquated sexist, and have implied that his teachings on women's roles reflect his own sexual insecurity and misinformation. Obviously, those making such charges have a very low view of Scripture (Ibid. p. 241)." Regardless of what view critics may have of Scripture, where are they wrong in this analysis? Unless Morris has evidence to the contrary, he should not laugh off this view. It could be correct. Morris concludes his apologetic with a comment that merits little serious consideration: "The Bible does not prohibit women from enjoying equal opportunity legally, socially, or economically, nor does the Bible require Christian women to be submissive to all men (Ibid. p. 242)." To this, one can only say, Don't be absurd, of course it does. "...women should feel perfect liberty to take positions of authority over men in professional, business, or social contexts (Ibid.)." Before making this statement Morris should have read 1 Tim. 2:12, which says: " permit no woman to teach or have authority over men; she is to keep silent (RSV)." Virtually every aspect of Morris's apologetic is in direct opposition to biblical teachings.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

A couple of readers questioned the use of "apologists," "apologetics." and "errancy." They should rest assured, however, that these are well-known terms

in the realm of biblical analysis, and have not been manufactured by BE for pejorative purposes. Webster defines "apologetics" as: "the branch of theology having to do with the defense and proofs of Christianity", while an "apologist" is defined as "a person who writes or speaks in defense or justification of a doctrine." Both terms are appropriately followed by the word "apologize", which means to express regret for a fault, wrong, etc." Webster defines "errancy" as "the state or instance of erring, a tendency to err" while "inerrant" is defined as "making no mistakes; infallible." All three terms have been used for years. Indeed, Christian bookstores often have a section entitled "Apologetics" and a group of conservative biblical scholars calls their organization The International Council on Biblical Inerrancy.

Issue No. 9

September 1983

COMMENTARY

Biblical "Science"--The question of whether or not the Bible is scientifically valid has been debated for hundreds of years by critics and supporters alike. Biblicists have contended the book not only supports science but contains many statements that are ahead of their time. The Bible supposedly has great scientific wisdom and only now are we beginning to realize as much. Critics, such as myself, believe the Bible is its own worst enemy. From our perspective there are more than enough statements contained therein to forestall any claims to scientific precision. Indeed, many statements clearly belong in the realm of mythology and folklore, while others are simply false. Some are so vague it's difficult to know what is meant, so naturally, biblicists choose the more scientifically oriented interpretation. Those believing the Bible to be scientifically precise and wise beyond its years should read, digest, and remember the following assertions contained within its covers:

- (a) the bat is a bird (Lev. 11:19, Deut. 14:11, 18);
- (b) Some fowls are four-footed (Lev. 11:20-21);
- (c) Some creeping insects have four legs. (Lev. 11:22-23);
- (d) Hares chew the cud (Lev. 11:6);
- (e) Conies chew the cud (Lev. 11:5);
- (f) Camels don't divide the hoof (Lev. 11:4);
- (g) The earth was formed out of and by means of water (2 Peter 3:5 RSV);
- (h) The earth rest on pillars (1 Sam. 2:8);
- (i) The earth won't be moved (1Chron. 16:30);
- (j) A hare does not divide the hoof (Deut. 14:7);
- (k) The rainbow is not as old as rain and sunshine (Gen. 9:13);
- (l) A mustard seed is the smallest of all seeds and grows into the greatest of all shrubs (Matt. 13:31-32 RSV);
- (m) Turtles have voices (Song of Sol. 2:12);
- (n) The earth has ends or edges (Job 37:3);
- (o) The earth has four corners (Isa. 11:12, Rev. 7:1);
- (p) Some 4-legged animals fly (Lev. 11:21);
- (q) The world's language didn't evolve but appeared suddenly (Gen. 11:6-9; and
- (r) A fetus can understand speech (Luke 1:44).

Some statements are so vague that apologists can often evade dilemmas by creative rationalizations. As Ingersoll said: "If the holy writer uses general terms, an ingenious theologian can harmonize a seemingly preposterous statement with the most obdurate fact. (*Ingersoll's Works*, Vol. 5, p. 37). For instance, Gen. 1:7-8 says: "And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament;... And god called the firmament Heaven."

Realizing the scientific implausibility inherent in this narration, some apologists attempt to portray the firmament as nothing more than the atmosphere separating the moist clouds above from the oceans below. Some biblical allegations are not only erroneous but have been fatal to their adherents. For instance, Mark 16:17-18 says: "And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils;.... They shall take up serpents and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them." Not many believing Christians are willing to drink poisons or handle rattlesnakes to prove the Bible's accuracy, although some have tried. Many individuals have died because they put their trust in the Biblical injunction to pray ("And the prayer of faith shall save the sick," James 5:13-15) and, not wanting to make Asa's mistake (2 Chron. 16:12), shunned physicians.

The unscientific aspect of biblical teachings is also shown in the fact that many mythological creatures are spoken of as if they were, in fact, real. The manner in which they are described and the context within which this occurs show biblical writers felt they actually existed. Some of the prominent examples are:

- cockatrices (Jer. 8:17, Isa. 11:8 59:5),
- unicorns (Deut. 33:17, Psalms 22:21. 29:6, Job 39:9-10),
- satyrs (Isa. 34:14, 13:21)
- fiery serpents (Num. 21:6),
- and flying serpents (Isa. 14:29, 30:6).

Last, but not least, one should note the hundreds of miracles contained within the Bible. Perhaps more than anything else they prove the Book lacks scientific validity. Miracles, by definition, have supernatural causes, and science, by definition, doesn't work with the supernatural. In order to avoid an extended discussion as to the existence of miracles, I will simply say that nearly all reputable scientists deny their existence and feel all events have a natural, material cause. Believers in miracles can never produce a supernatural event when asked to do so. Challenges are invariably left unanswered. Any book claiming a woman turned into a pillar of salt (Gen. 19:26), the sun went backward 10 degrees on the sundial (2 Kings 20:11), and quails came from the sea (Num. 11:31) is going to have great difficulty demonstrating its scientific precision to any reasonably scientific mind. One can't help but recall the humorous instance in which an eight year old lad was asked by his mother what he had learned at Sunday school. "Well," he said, "our teacher told us about when God sent Moses behind enemy lines to rescue the Israelites from the Egyptians. When they came to the Red Sea, Moses called for engineers to build a pontoon bridge. After they had all crossed, they all looked back and saw the Egyptian tanks coming. Moses radioed headquarters on his walkie-talkie to send bombers to blow up the bridge and save the Israelites."

"Bobby," exclaimed his mother, "is that really the way your teacher told you that story?"

"Not exactly, Mom, but if I told it her way you'd never believe it."

Virtually every child has heard about the parting of the Red Sea, the whale swallowing Jonah, the stick turning into a snake, and Jesus' walking on water. In fact, many people begin their critical analysis of the Bible by doubting the authenticity of

these stories. Logic, reason, and skepticism accompany a scientific mentality; not one of faith and uncritical belief.

In recent years the conflict between science and the Bible has become especially pronounced with respect to the struggle between evolution and Creationism. The battle has been, and is being, fought in many forms--e.g. the schools, libraries, and courts. BE will not enter the fray because the subject matter not only lies outside the Bible per se, but is highly technical and of little interest to many people. Few scientists and even fewer laymen really understand the intricacies of all the sciences that are involved in a really thorough discussion of evolution. Paleontology, geology, biology, astronomy, archeology, chemistry, and anthropology are some of the disciplines one must comprehend in order to proceed wisely. However, it is interesting to note how the struggle between science and the Bible has evolved. Originally, scientific findings were denounced as blasphemous lies. But as science has expanded and the evidence has mounted, many apologists have adopted a more realistic stance. They have increasingly rewritten the Bible by either changing literal statements to figurative meanings or alleging, "What the Bible really meant was..." For example, they assert the seven days of Creation weren't really days; they were eras or epochs. When the Bible describes miracles it doesn't mean to imply they exist. It is merely relating instances in which naive people were fooled by trickery and other mechanisms. With characteristic wisdom, Ingersoll took note of this slow evolutionary change: "The church disputed every step, denied every fact, resorted to every device that cunning could suggest or ingenuity execute, but the conflict could not be maintained. The Bible, so far as geology was concerned, was in danger of being driven from the earth. Beaten in the open field, the church began to equivocate, to evade, and to give new meanings to inspired words. Finally, falsehood having failed to harmonize the guesses of barbarians with the discoveries of genius, the leading churchmen suggested that the Bible was not written to teach astronomy, was not written to teach geology, and that it was not a scientific book,...(*Ingersoll's Works*, Vol. 11, p.220)." "In matters of fact, the Bible has ceased to be regarded as a standard. Science has succeeded in breaking the chains of theology. A few years ago, Science endeavored to show that it was not inconsistent with the Bible. The tables have been turned, now, Religion is endeavoring to prove that the Bible is not inconsistent with science. The standard has been changed." (Ibid. Vol. 2, p. 242). "In other words, the standard has been changed; the ancient is measured by the modern, where the literal statement in the Bible does not agree with modern discoveries, they do not change the discoveries, but give new meanings to the old account. We are not now endeavoring to reconcile science with the Bible, but to reconcile the Bible with science. (Ibid. Vol. 8, p. 151). Only staunch fundamentalists continue trying to erase the handwriting on the wall. In the 5th chapter of Daniel, Belshazzar didn't try to erase the unpleasant handwriting on the wall. He listened and acted accordingly. One would think believers in the Bible would learn from his experience. In summary, the Bible is not inerrant with respect to science. Many statements reflect the era in which they were written and assertions to the contrary are weak at best.

Jesus, the False Messiah--As stated in prior issues of BE, Jesus often made statements and committed acts which invalidate any claims he made to the Messiahship. Additional examples, such as the following, are worthy of note. Mark 9:25-26 says: "...he (Jesus-ed) rebuked the foul spirit, saying into him, Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I charge thee, come out of him, and enter no more into him. And the spirit cried, and rent him sore, and came out of him;..." Jesus' statement is false, because if the spirit was deaf, how could he have heard Jesus and come out? If he was dumb, how could he have cried out?. In Mark 10:19 Jesus said: "Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, do not steal, do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honour thy father and mother." Jesus needs to re-read the Ten Commandments. There is no Old Testament commandment against defrauding. The only relevant statement about defrauding is in Lev. 19:13, which says: "Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbor." This is an OT law, but is not listed with the Ten Commandments. In Mark 8:35 Jesus said: "...but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's the same shall save it." How could Jesus have said this when there was no gospel when he live? The gospel did not appear until after his death.

REVIEWS

In some of their apologetic works, Josh McDowell and Don Stewart provide common responses to those who question the Bible's scientific qualifications: "The Bible is not a textbook on science. Its purpose is not to explain in technical terms the technical data of the natural world, but to explain God's purpose and relation to man, to deal with spiritual things. It is definitely not a technical textbook for scientists. The descriptions which the Bible gives concerning nature are neither scientific nor unscientific, but phrased in words that are non-technical and often general, so that even the common reader can follow the thought. This does not at all mean the statements are incorrect." (*Answers to Tough Questions*, P. 104) The problem with this explanation is that it's irrelevant. Whether or not the Bible is a scientific textbook or whether it's intended to be a technical work doesn't matter. The fact is, scientific statements contained therein are either true or false. They are either correct or they aren't. That's all that matters. And any book alleging a bat is a bird and some fowl are four-footed is incorrect. The assertion that "The descriptions which the Bible gives concerning nature are neither scientific nor unscientific" has no truth whatever. They definitely lie within the scientific sphere, and are false. McDowell and Stewart continue: "The Scriptures entertain no fanciful ideas of science and of the natural world,... It was Ptolemy who suggested that the earth was flat. We read statements such as these and laugh, but there are no absurd statements in the Bible similar to these." (Ibid. P. 105). Such comments hardly merit a response. The Bible is permeated with miracles and erroneous scientific comments, as this month's Commentary shows.

In *The Bible is a Scientific Book* apologist Gordon Lindsey not only defended the Bible, but asserted: "The Bible foresaw the great inventions of our day" (p. 8). He contends many biblical statements are nothing more than prophecies of scientific developments in the 19th and 20th centuries. For instance, Lindsey claims that Isa. 31:5 predicts Jerusalem would be defended by airplanes, as occurred in 1917 and during the Arab-Israeli War of 1967. Isaiah 31:5 says: "As birds flying, so will the

Lord of hosts defend Jerusalem; defending also he will deliver it, and passing over he will preserve it." Yet several parts of the verse show the Lord is the "Airplane" referred to, The "as birds flying" phrase applies to God himself. He will hover over and defend Jerusalem. There is no justification for assuming airplanes are intended. The phrase "And passing over head he will..." makes the same point. God is doing the flying and protecting. On page 16 Lindsey says: "Peter, quoting from Joel 2:30, apparently refers to atomic warfare: 'And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke' (Acts 2:19). It requires no imagination to see that this is an apt allusion to nuclear war." On the contrary, it requires great imagination to relate this verse to nuclear war, since any war has blood, fire and smoke. Lindsey contends the advent of radio is predicted in Job 38:35, which says: "Canst thou send lightnings, that they may go, and say unto thee, Here we are?" But lightnings or electricity are not sent through the air by radio. Radio waves are sent, and they aren't electricity or lightnings. Lindsey refers to Psalm 90:10 as evidence the Bible foresaw a life expectancy of 70 years. The verse says: "The days of our years are three score and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off and we fly away." Lindsey concludes: "Some 3,500 years ago Moses,...said that a man's life would be 70 years.... It is amazing that Moses, living in a period when life expectancy had been rapidly dropping, should make this statement. For turn to your world almanac, and you will see that today, after every means of modern medical science has been exhausted, longevity is 70.2 years. Science, try as it may, is unable to break the barrier.... God has cut down the life expectancy of man to 70 years, and there it has stayed for 3,500 years. Another proof of the veracity of the Holy Scripture" (Ibid. p. 27-28). Anyone seeking evidence as to why the Bible and its evangelical proponents should not be allowed to dominate science in the classrooms need look no further than this line of thought. It's hopelessly inaccurate. In the first place, life expectancy in most countries of the world is far below 70 years. In India and Bangladesh, for example, people are considered old at 50. Only the more advanced countries have life expectancies approaching 70 years. Lindsey should realize most people don't live as long as his native Texans. Secondly, the life expectancy of the average American hasn't been as low as 70.2 years since 1965. So any assertion to the effect that science has reached an impassable barrier is false. Thirdly, the life expectancy of man has not stayed at 70 years for 3,500 years. Quite the opposite, constant improvements in medicine and nutrition have generated a steady lengthening of the life expectancy, and only recently has it attained an average of 70 years. Tendentious reasoning, such as that shown by Lindsey, can only lead to erroneous conclusions.

In *Biblical Difficulties* W. Arndt alleges the Bible does not say the earth is flat in Psalm 136:6 and Isaiah 11:12, or rests on pillars in 1 Sam. 2:8. After contending these are merely figures of speech in poetic jargon, Arndt says: "If no better arguments against the world view of the Bible can be presented than those looked at, the Bible has little to fear on this score." (Ibid. p. 165). To begin with, 1 Sam. 2:8 (RSV) does say the earth rest on four pillars, and Isaiah 11:12 does say the earth has four corners. It's difficult to see how anything could have corners without having flat sides. But if Arndt insists on giving a figurative interpretation to these imprecise statements, so be

it. They are not definite enough for either side to make a conclusive argument. But what about comments that are definite? The Book of Leviticus, for example, has probably more inaccurate scientific comments than any other book in the Bible, but is ignored entirely by Lindsey and only lightly touched by Arndt. In response to the comment in Lev. 11:6 that hares chew the cud Arndt says: "It is true that modern naturalists affirm that the two latter--the hare and the hyrax--do not ruminate at all,...but they move the jaw sometimes in a manner which looks like ruminating.... The statement that it cheweth the cud is to be taken phenomenally, not scientifically.... Moses speaks of animals according to appearance, and not with the precision of a comparative anatomist...." (Ibid. p. 119-120). The fact is the statement is false. Lev. 11:6 says hares chew the cud. In truth, they don't. That's the bottom line. Rationalizing just won't save the day.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter from J.S. of Dayton, Ohio

In compliance with my recent request for a free copy of *Biblical Errancy*, you promptly sent me the June edition. I was amazed. Never before had I seen anything like it; I knew, of course, that many people had written essays attacking belief in the literal verity of scripture, even in books, but I scarcely thought that there was a periodical dedicated to providing a forum that discussed the Bible's validity. Neither had I met or heard of any skeptic (with few exceptions) who demonstrated such a thorough knowledge of the book itself. I was a sophomore at...University, and have waited for many years to find someone who understands my religious position. Most of the people I know, whether they are theists, agnostics, or atheists, all seem to share a common trait: dogmatism. With biblical apologists, of course, it is obvious. Most of the agnostics and atheists are as bad, despite the fact that they say they reject dogma. However, their agnosticism is, for the most part, a rebellion against parental religious indoctrination, not the result of critical thinking. In the case of both believer and unbeliever, a position is taken and then arguments are constructed to support the position. The critical thinker must follow where the arguments leads; the dogmatic thinker already knows where he wants to go, even if he has to go through the most elaborate verbal and intellectual gymnastics to get there. As Bertrand Russell points out in his *History of Western Philosophy* "The finding of arguments for a conclusion given in advance is not philosophy but special pleading."

No clearer has the attitude which Russell criticizes shown itself than in the orgy of book burning and censorship that is sweeping the country and fast becoming an American pastime. The awesome threat of the Religious Right is usually well publicized; nearly every day there is an article in the newspaper about a school in Oklahoma which threw thirty-two copies of *Slaughterhouse Five* into the furnace, or a revival which boasted a bonfire, fueled with the writings of Satan's ministers (e.g. Voltaire, Russell, Satre, etc.). What is rarely reported are the infractions of the Left, as in the case of the Unitarian Church service in which various parts of the Bible, Koran, and other works that were described as sexist or racist were ceremonially burned on the altar; the congregation was much edified. (For further examples read, "When Nice

People Burn Books" in the February edition of *The Progressive*). This is the real lesson these people are teaching their congregations (whether rightist or leftist): the way you deal with ideas you don't like is to burn them.

I am glad that Biblical Errancy provides a sane alternative to this madness: open rational debate. I only wish that some of your more zealous subscribers would be a little less emotional and dogmatic, and a little more like you. I refer specifically to the person from Richmond, Indiana (See: Letter #3 in June, 1983 issue) who calls the bible "a horrible book" (a somewhat surprising reference in view of the occasional biblical statements on the importance of loving one another), and who acknowledges that he or she has never read it, while maintaining its falsehood. In fact, he or she is overjoyed to have found rational arguments for a position taken long ago, without the use of reason: "I'll let you do all the work and I'll have all the discussions with my Christian friends. This is just the fuel I've needed." And another person from my home town writes, "I can go to the Christian bookstore and obtain all of the tracts I could care to burn..." (See: Letter #16 in the June, 1983 issue). I guess all you can do is be a good example and avoid invective yourself. I think a great many of your readers respect you very highly, and would become more interested in truth than in "proving a point." So far it seems you have done a fine job in this respect.

Editor's response to Letter #20

Dear J.S. You demonstrate wisdom beyond your years. Although much of your commentary lies outside the Bible, per se, and, not within the normal scope of BE, I'd like to respond to some of your more salient points. First, your distain for book-burning is well-founded. As part of its response to such activity, BE not only doesn't burn writings of the opposition, but prints them. Secondly, your description of BE as a forum for open, rational debate is right on target. It's a forum for both sides, not a podium or pulpit for one. Thirdly, BE doesn't always agree with views expressed in letters-to-the-editor. They are printed to provide food for thought, not holy writ. And lastly, although BE avoids invective and pejoratives, they are by no means absent in letters BE receives. If and when such letters are published, BE will not join in with the language being used. Far too much needs to be said about the Bible to devote oneself to anything other than objective, dispassionate analysis. However, if some readers wish to express themselves more graphically, that's their prerogative.

Letter #21 from BLC of Green Bay, Wisconsin

Dennis. After careful reading of the free copy of your June issue I can say that I find your work fascinating and provocative. I would like to know if you would or have ever extended your publication to include debate about the authenticity of the Shroud of Turin. From what I have read, the Shroud appears to be proof positive that (a) Jesus Christ did live, (b) he was crucified in the manner stated in the N.T., and (c) most importantly, it appears that the only way the image could have been projected onto the cloth was by an instantaneous burst of radiation, emanating from the body. It appears that many scientists who examined the Shroud in 1978 are reluctant to admit this, because they cannot duplicate this feat in a lab, and because the scientific method precludes the possibility of a supernatural being. (BLC concluded by saying he feels the scientific evidence supports the Resurrection and quoted from *Verdict on the*

Shroud, in which two scientists claim the odds "that the man on the shroud is not Jesus Christ are one in 82,944,000"-ed).

Editor's Response to Letter #21

Dear BLC. After an extensive and involved scientific analysis of this issue, two staunch defenders of the Bible concluded: "The evidence so far in no way supports the Shroud's authenticity as the burial cloth of Christ." (*Answers to Tough Questions*, by McDowell and Stewart, p. 169). I, too, find it difficult to believe this cloth could be traced back 2,000 years to a particular person. I can't help but feel the odds are one in 82,944,000 that it is the shroud of Jesus Christ. In any event, the subject lies outside the Bible and, thus, outside the purview of BE. The latter does not discuss extra-biblical subjects with any depth, unless they are unavoidable. The Bible can't be approached effectively by relying on subjects of this nature. One must go within. Extra-biblical discussions often become more entertaining than revealing or persuasive.

Issue No. 10

October 1983

COMMENTARY

Prophecy--Biblicists place great reliance upon the alleged accuracy of biblical prophecy to justify their position, and for this reason, several issues of BE will be devoted to this topic. In continuing the discussion begun in March, 1983 additional prophecies such as the following are worthy of note:

- In Jonah 3:4 (RSV) Jonah cried, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!" But Jonah 3:10 shows that the prophecy materialized in a manner precisely opposite to that which was predicted. It states: When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God repented of the evil which he said he would do them, and he did not do it." It is no defense to say that they turned from their evil ways and, therefore, God was justified in changing his mind, i.e., the conditions under which Jonah had made his prophecy had changed. If he had been a true prophet, he would have seen this change coming. Even more important, the prophecy was not conditional. He flatly stated Nineveh would be overthrown in 40 days, which didn't occur.
- Isaiah says: "...put on thy garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city: for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean." Yet, the uncircumcised have never stopped traveling through Jerusalem.
- In John 14:12 Jesus says: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth in me, the works that I do shall he also; and greater works than these shall he do;

because I go unto my Father." But what believer has ever done a miracle greater than those performed by Jesus?

- In John 14:13-14 Jesus stated: "And whatsoever ye ask in my name I do, that the Father may be glorified in the son. If ye ask any thing in my name, I will do it." In reality, millions of people have made millions of requests in Jesus' name and failed to receive satisfaction. This promise or prophecy has failed completely.
- In 2 Chron. 1:7, 12 God said the following to Solomon: "Wisdom and knowledge is granted unto thee: and I will give thee riches, and wealth, and honour, such as none of the kings have had that have been before thee, neither shall there any after thee have the like." This prophecy has also proved to be erroneous. There were several kings in his day, and thousands since, that could have thrown away the value of Palestine without missing the amount. The wealth of Solomon has been exceeded by many, and is small by today's standards.
- In 1 Thess. 4:16-17 Paul stated: "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: And the dead Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: And so shall we ever be with the Lord." Paul shared the delusion, taught by Jesus, in that he expected to be snatched up bodily into heaven with other saints then living, who would, thus, never taste death. The use of "we" clearly proves as much. It is difficult to deny that Paul was certain that the end of the world was coming in the lifetime of his contemporaries.
- First Samuel 27:1 says: "And David said in his heart, I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul:..." Whether stated in or out of his heart David erred decisively. He did not die by the hand of Saul as he predicted, but appears to have died of old age, according to 1 Kings 2:10, which says: "So David slept with his fathers and was buried in the city of David." Having died before David, Saul couldn't have been responsible.
- Gen. 15:16 predicted that: "In the fourth generation they (Abraham's descendants-ed) shall come hither again..." God told Abraham that his descendants would return in the fourth generation. Yet, if Abraham is excluded, it actually occurred during the sixth generation. The generations were
 - (1) Abraham,
 - (2) Issac,
 - (3) Levi-Ex. 1:3,
 - (4) Kohath-Ex. 6:16,
 - (5) Amram-Ex. 6:18, and
 - (6) Moses-Ex. 6:20.
- Jer. 34:4-5 predicted that Zedekiah would experience a peaceful death: "Yet hear the word of the Lord, O Zedekiah king of Judah; Thus saith the Lord of thee, Thou shalt not die by the sword: But thou shalt die in peace...." Yet Jer. 52:10-11 shows that he died in something less than a peaceful manner: "And the king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes: he slew also the princes of Judah in Riblah. Then he put out the eyes of Zedekiah; and the king

of Babylon bound him in chains, and carried him to Babylon, and put him in prison till the day of his death."

- John 7:52 says: "They answered and said unto him, Art thou also of Galilee? Search, and look: for out of Galilee ariseth no prophet." The inaccuracy of this prophecy lies in the fact that several of the most distinguished Jewish prophets--Jonah, Nahum, Hosea, Elijah--were from Galilee.
- The final prophecy that will be noted in this month's commentary is found in Gen. 49:13, which predicted that "Zebulun shall dwell at the shore of the sea; he shall become a haven for ships, and his border shall be at Sidon." Two aspects of this prophecy clearly failed. The borders of Zebulun never extended to the sea, and they never encompassed Sidon. In the *Encyclopedia of Biblical Difficulties* Gleason Archer attempted on page 104 to remedy this problem:

Gen. 49:1 foretells the location of this tribe (Zebulun-ed) near the shore, affording a convenient passage for the cargoes of ships unloading at the docks of the Mediterranean coast for transport to the Sea of Galilee and transshipment up to Damascus and beyond. While Zebulun was located on neither coast, the Valley of Jezreel afforded an excellent highway for imported goods to be conveyed to the most important inland markets. Its northern border would point in the direction of the great commercial cities of Phoenicia, of which Sidon was then the leading emporium.

In effect, Archer admits that Zebulun was on neither coast and never encompassed Sidon. The connecting link afforded by the Valley of Jezreel is irrelevant. The fact remains, Zebulun did not touch either sea. The fact that Zebulun's northern border "pointed" in the direction of Sidon is also immaterial. The prophecy clearly states Zebulun's border shall be at Sidon on the sea.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #22 From SBJ of Albany, New York (Part a)

Dear Mr. McKinsey,

Thank you for your prompt reply to my request for a copy of your latest "Biblical Errancy" publication (Issue #8, Aug. 1983). Let me make my position clear to you at the outset: I am a Christian. I requested your material, because I always am interested to see what critics of the Bible have to say. What I have discovered is that, invariably, the arguments used by biblical critics reinforce, and strengthen, my Christian faith because these arguments are themselves easily proved to be erroneous. Your publication was no exception. My purpose in writing to you is not to gain one-upmanship in an intellectual debate, or game. I will explain my purpose later. But first I shall address your arguments. To begin with, I was quite surprised to discover such a large portion of your literature addressed to the issue of slavery and women. These issues have nothing to do with errancy, in the strict sense of the term. One may not agree with the biblical teaching on these topics, but such disagreement is simply an opinion and is unrelated to the validity of the Bible.

Editor's response to Letter #22 (Part a)

Dear SBJ,

I appreciate your lengthy letter and commend the relevance of your presentation. Your commentary stayed on the topic--the Bible--and for this reason will be discussed in subsequent issues of BE as well. Having read all 12 pages of your handwritten letter, one overriding conclusion is quite obvious. You have a strong urge to leap to conclusions after a rather perfunctory analysis of the facts, a tendency no doubt arising from your exuberance for a cause. You lectured and admonished a great deal and tended to switch from "prover" to "preacher" as you proceeded. Your propensity for immediate conclusions is readily apparent in your second paragraph. You stated a large portion of my literature is addressed to the issue of slavery and women. Quite the contrary, these issues were brought up only in the August issue and compose only a fraction of my literature. You have made a broad generalization based upon an analysis of only one issue. I suggest you might want to read issues to get a much better idea of what BE entails. Secondly, you alleged the issue of slavery and women have nothing to do with errancy. Apparently you missed the point of the commentary. Second Cor. 3:17 says: "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." (Also note Isa. 58:6, Ex. 22:21, 1 Cor. 7:23, Gal. 3:28, 5:11,13). Other verses also link the spirit of God with liberty. Yet, the Bible shows God's spirit to be one of fostering and promoting slavery and sexual subservience in scores of situations. According to the Bible, the Lord's Spirit is often one of enslavement and oppression, diametrically opposed to liberty. "Simply an opinion" is an inaccurate description of the situation.

Letter #22 continues (Part b)

Your section on "Paul, the Deceptive Disciple" is more what I expected to find throughout your publication. In this section, you cite 8 "errors" or misquotations in Paul's sayings, citing 12 specific biblical references in the process. In all 8 cases, you are wrong. Let me show you: (1) You quote 1 Cor. 2:8 as, "which none of the princes of this world know; for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory." Then you claim that the statement is wrong, because Jesus was not crucified by any princes but by a mob and some soldiers. The translation which you used is the KJV. The problems which you fail to recognize is that the Greek word translated as "princes" in the KJV is from (a Greek word-ed) which means "ruler, official, authority" etc. Reliable modern Bible translations, such as the NASB and RSV translate this same word as "rulers." The very simple fact concerning Jesus' crucifixion is that it resulted from the authoritative judgment of the Jewish and Roman rulers. For example, Matthew 27:1 states, "Now when morning had come, all the chief priests and elders of the people (i.e., the rulers) took counsel against Jesus to put Him to death;" In John 19:16, speaking about Pilate, John writes, "So then he (Pilate) delivered Him (Jesus) to be crucified." In other words, the mob and soldiers executed the crucifixion, but their authority to do so came from their rulers.

Letter's Response to Letter #22 (Part b)

According to *Strong's Concordance* either "prince" or "ruler" is a correct translation. It means "the highest authority." Regardless of whether "ruler" or "prince" is used, your problem remains. Name one Roman ruler that initiated the Crucifixion. The elders or local leaders of the people were not the rulers. The entire region was under a

Roman dictatorship, and only Romans were rulers. What biblical verse justifies equating the people's elders with their rulers? Pilate was the ruler and, not wanting to be involved, washed his hands of the entire matter. He only turned Jesus over to the mob when their clamor became strident. Pilate wanted to release Jesus, as John 19:12 shows: "And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him" and even said he wanted to wash his hands of the entire affair: "When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but rather a tumult was made, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, I am innocent of the blood of this just person." Pilate turned Jesus over to them in John 19:16, but he did not approve their subsequent acts, nor does any verse show he granted them any authority to act. Even if Pilate had instigated the Crucifixion, Paul's statement is still inaccurate because he said "rulers" not "a ruler" killed Jesus. So, again, I ask what rulers killed Jesus?

Letter #22 continues (Part c)

You quote Col. 1:23 as "...from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which has been preached to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister." You then make the condensing remark, "come now, Paul. At no time..." etc. Your translation is the same as the RSV. The NASB translates the Greek a bit differently: "...which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven..." Again, one must return to the original language (Greek) to get true meaning here. The Greek reads... "proclaimed in all creatures" is an accurate translation. As such, it is a term that is difficult to understand precisely, but by no means erroneous. Perhaps it is poetic, perhaps literal.

Editor's Response to Letter #22 (Part c)

The KJV, the RSV, the New International and Modern Language versions all say "proclaimed to every creature." Your NASB version appears to be expedient to escape from the dilemma. But even if your version is correct, you have merely leaped from one problem to another. If you are going to keep going back to the Greek, SBJ, you'd do well to first make sure you're going to gain thereby. When was the gospel "proclaimed in all creation"? Even today, much less in Paul's time, many areas do not have preachers of the gospel. The gospel was a relatively recent introduction to the Western Hemisphere, and is virtually non-existent in China. You state that "proclaimed in all creation" is "difficult to understand precisely, but by no means erroneous." If you don't understand it, how do you know it is not erroneous? Incidentally, in Part B you said the RSV was a reliable modern Bible translation."

Letter #22 continues (Part D)

(After noting the fact that one must realize the Bible often uses poetry and metaphors that should not be taken literally, SBJ says-ed) Next, you quote Acts 20:35 and victoriously claim that "Nowhere in the NT did Jesus make such a statement." Where does the Bible ever state that the only words which Jesus ever spoke are those recorded in the NT? To claim that Paul is in error here because these words of Jesus are not in the NT is the height of irony: your whole point is to prove the Bible's lack of validity, yet you then claim that only the statements of Jesus contained in this invalid source can be used by Paul! In your desperate effort to prove the Bible erroneous, you have truly taken flight from reason.

Editor's Response to Letter #22 (Part D)

I have no objection to this comment as long as you agree to the following. First, all who hear this verse are told that nowhere in the Bible did Jesus make this statement. Deception is quite common with this verse. Secondly, Paul could not have heard this statement himself, since he circulated when Jesus was no longer present. At best, Paul is quoting hearsay. Thirdly, there is no evidence, whatever, that Jesus ever made the statement. All we have is Paul's word. Where did I claim that "only statements of Jesus contained in this invalid source can be used by Paul"? Paul can quote Jesus anytime he desires. As long as he or his followers don't attempt to give people the impression that alleged quotes from Jesus, such as that found in Acts 20:35, are supported by Scripture, there is no problem. "Desperate effort" is a judgmental comment. Let's allow outside observers to determine whose position is becoming progressively more desperate with greater analysis. Letter #22 continues (Part E) You claim a contradiction between Rom. 12:14 and Acts 23:3, saying that the latter reveals that Paul is ignoring his own advice (in the former). In the latter, Paul is not "cursing" Ananias; he is simply presenting the facts. Ananias is unjustly condemning Paul, and if he doesn't straighten up fast, God will strike him at some point.

Editor's Response to Letter #22 (Part E)

What did Paul say, SBJ? He said: "Bless them which persecute you: bless and curse not." He didn't say it's permissible when the denunciation is justified. He said don't curse, period. Paul called a man "a whitewashed wall" (RSV) and you would have us believe that this is not cursing, just "simply presenting the facts." Surely you don't mean the man really is a whitewashed wall. You were the one who used the phrase "flight from reason."

Letter #22 continues (Part F)

You claim another contradiction between 1 Thess. 2:3 and 2 Cor. 12:16. You fail to recognize that Paul is speaking sarcastically in the latter. Amazing though you may find this to be, but it is also a superb piece of literature and employs poetry and subtle literary tones (sarcasm, anger, humor, irony) throughout.

Editor's Response to Letter #22 (Part F)

There is no reason whatever to assume that Paul is speaking sarcastically in 2 Cor. 12:16, other than to extract one from the dilemma. You are fond of the NASB version, SBJ. Read 2 Cor. 12:16, which says: "crafty fellow that I am, I took you in by deceit." The statement is either true or false. If it's true, then Paul condemned himself and contradicted what he said in 1 Thess. 2:3. If it is false, then he lied and stands condemned. Poetry and subtle literary tones aren't the problem. A crafty religious figure changing according to expediency is the difficulty.

Letter #22 continues (Part G)

In 1 Cor. 6:12 and 10:23 Paul is not viewing himself as a law unto himself. He is trying to explain that our decisions about what to do in various situations should always be based upon what is best for the other people involved. To a non Christian (such as yourself), this would require a lengthy explanation--and even then he (or

you) may either reject or not understand it. Consequently, I won't bother offering this explanation here.

Editor's Response to Letter #22 (Part G)

How can you say that "Paul is not viewing himself as a law unto himself"? In 1 Cor. 6:12 he twice states: "All things are lawful for me." If that doesn't mean he is a law unto himself, what does? There is nothing in that verse or the surrounding information that would lead one to conclude that Paul means decisions "should always be based upon what is best for the other people involved." The welfare of others isn't even mentioned, either explicitly or implicitly. You need to read more and interpret less. Weren't you the one who also used the phrase "desperate effort to prove"? You are correct in saying I may reject your interpretation. There is nothing in the verse or its context that would justify your rationalization.

(Letter #22 will be Concluded in next month's issue)

Letter #23 from KEH of Sacramento, California (Part A)

Dear Dennis. Thank you for another provocative issue of BE.... You made some good points in the Sept. '83 "Commentary," but several of your other statements were rather weak. Refer to item (a) of the first paragraph. In the King James translation, I believe that "bird" was a more generic term than it is today, an idiom referring to almost any variety of flying creature. And in the original cited passages of the Pentateuch, I suspect that the Hebrew word used had the same general application.

Editor's Response to Letter #23 (Part A)

Dear KEH. I always appreciate constructive criticism, even though it's sometimes inaccurate. Item (a) of the first paragraph of the Sept. '83 commentary rightly alleged the Bible considers the bat to be a bird. The evidence is clear. Lev. 11:13 says: "And these are they which ye shall have in abomination among the fowls." The text then list nineteen animals, all of which are clearly birds. So there is no doubt that birds and only birds are being referred to. The problem arises from the fact that the twentieth, and only the twentieth in the list, is not a bird. The bat is a mammal. You used two qualifiers-"I believe" and "I suspect"--which aren't justified by anything in the text. Is there any reliable evidence to justify your suspicions, or does it just seem that this could be a reasonable explanation? Do you know of any version that has a significantly different translation? We have to go by what the text says, not by what it seems reasonable to assume it could have meant.

Letter #23 continues (Part B)

Referring to item (k), fundamentalist apologists have often stressed--and the Bible quite clearly states (Gen. 2:5-6)--that the phenomenon of rain did not occur prior to the Flood. Hence, no rainbows. I'm surprised if you were not already aware of this argument. Item (m) has the same weakness as item (a). In the English prose of the King James era, a "turtle" was a kind of dove or pigeon. In point of fact the usage is still with us, as "turtle-dove." You might check the equivalent passage in the New American Bible to see a more accurate translation.

Editor's Response to Letter #23 (Part B)

With respect to item (k), let me repeat what I said: "The rainbow is not as old as rain and sunshine." Gen. 9:13 shows as much. It says: "I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth." This statement was made after the Flood, and after the rains associated with same. Clearly, rain and sunshine existed before the first rainbow. Gen. 2:5-6 isn't really relevant. All it is stating is that it hadn't rained yet. I never said it rained prior to the Flood. At the time the statement in Gen. 2:5-6 was made, it could have been true. But that has no bearing on what we are discussing. The statement in Gen. 9:13 was made after the Flood, after it had rained for 40 days, after rain and sunshine had appeared. Your point with respect to "turtles" and "turtle-doves" is well taken. The King James Version could have been mistakenly translated, although, it is difficult to believe its translators incorrectly used the word "turtle" when "dove" or "turtle-dove" should have been employed. The animals are just too dissimilar.

Letter 23 continues (Part C) Finally, in response to the first item about Jesus in paragraph 5 of your "commentary," I can easily imagine an apologist suggesting that a "dumb and deaf" spirit is a spirit that causes dumbness and deafness, in the same way that an influenza virus causes the flu.

Editor's response to Letter #23 (Part c)

With all due respect, KEH, I think the text itself shows your interpretation is inaccurate. I don't think there is much doubt that Mark 9:25-26 shows Jesus is calling the spirit deaf and dumb. It isn't causing deafness or dumbness; it is deaf & dumb.

Letter #23 concludes (Part d)

BLC of Green Bay might benefit from reading a few more books about the Shroud of Turin. Ample evidence exists, in fact, that the Shroud is a forgery. The linen cloth is in much too good a condition to have the reputed age; it is of a complex, three-to-one herringbone twill weave, foreign to the first century; the "dried blood" is suspiciously picturelike and the wrong color--red, not brown; pollen particles found impregnated in the cloth, despite popular reports, are not particular to first century Palestine; and chemical tests of the bloodstains have revealed no signs of hemoglobin but a considerable amount of iron oxide, a common ingredient of earth pigments. Other evidence exists, much of which has been downplayed or misreported by some of the partisan scientists who have examined the Shroud. I refer BLC to the excellent Shroud issue of *Skeptical Inquirer* (Spring, 1982), and to *Inquest on the Shroud of Turin* by Joe Nichell, an excellent analysis of this muddy topic.

Issue No. 11

November 1983

COMMENTARY

The Flood (Part One of a Two Part Series)--A topic that has always been of great interest to students of the Bible is the Flood, an alleged event more cataclysmic than any other natural disaster in history. BE will not discuss the scientific data used by proponents to support their beliefs. Instead, two kinds of information will be used to show the Flood Theory lacks credibility. The Commentary in next month's issue will discuss the large number of contradictions between verses with respect to what occurred; while this month's Commentary will concentrate on the great number of difficulties, impossibilities, and unanswered questions accompanying the Biblical account. Anyone believing in the Flood must provide rational answers to the following questions:

- (a) Gen. 6:16 says, "A window shalt thou make to the ark, and in a cubit shalt thou finish it above;...." How could so many creatures breathe with only one small opening which was closed for at least 190 days--150 days plus an additional 40 days (Gen. 8:3-6)?
- (b) Gen. 6:15 says, "The length of the ark shall be 300 cubits(450 feet-ed), the breadth of it 50 cubits (75 feet-ed.), and the height of it 30 cubits (45 feet-ed.)." How could two of every animal survive for approximately 10 months on a boat encompassing 1,518,750 cubic feet? The food alone would absorb tremendous space.
- (c) Gen. 6:17 says, "I do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and everything that is in the earth shall die." Gen. 7:4 reinforces this point, "...and every substance that I have made will I destroy from off the face of the earth." Yet, how would a flood destroy sea animals, such as whales, porpoises, sea snakes, dolphins, amphibians, and all animals entirely underwater?
- (d) Gen. 7:8-9 says, "Of clean beasts, and of beast that are not clean, and fowls of every thing that creepeth upon the earth, There went in two and two unto Noah into the ark, the male and female, as God had commanded Noah." The problems associated with this account of the creatures entering the Ark are particularly interesting. How did animals that are restricted to certain parts of the earth get to the Ark? Penguins, kangaroos, polar bears, koala bears, and many others would have to have crossed vast oceans. How animals from other continents managed to cross the seas can only be surmised. How did many of the animals withstand climatic changes? Many of those from polar regions could not have withstood the heat of the Middle East. How were animals prevented from killing their natural prey? Slow animals from other continents--snails, sloths, turtles, and so forth--must have started their journey to the Ark before the earth was created! How did only 8 people feed and water the world's greatest zoo for many months? How was the Ark kept sanitary, since there was only one window and one door? How did the animals know where to go when the time arrived to enter the Ark? After being released, how did they return to their respective regions of the world? The vegetation which many animals eat only grows in certain parts of the world. How was it brought to the Ark for storage? Are we to believe that two of every species--two dogs, two cats, two

elephants, two snakes, and so forth--entered the Ark? If so, then are we to also believe, for example, that the tremendous variety of dogs in the world today, from the great dane to the chihuahua, descended from two of the species? This would mark a tremendous evolutionary change in only a few thousand years. Yet, biblicists are the ones who denounce the theory of evolution. And how did the animals know when to seek the Ark? The text implies they just came voluntarily.

- (e) Gen. 7:15 says, "And they went in unto Noah into the Ark, two and two of all flesh, wherein is the breath of life." How did water creatures such as whales, porpises, sea snakes, dolphins, and so forth enter the Ark? Moreover, since millions of species of animal exist throughout the world, how could a pair have been taken from each? There are over 500,000 separate species of insects alone.
- (f) Gen. 8:4 states, "And the ark rested in the 7th month on the 17th day of the month, upon the mountains of Ararat." How could the Ark have rested upon several mountains at once?
- (g) "Also he sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters were abated from off the face of the ground (Gen. 8:8)." Why did Noah send a bird to learn what was clearly evident?
- (h) Gen. 8:11 says, "And the dove came in to him in the evening; and lo, in her mouth was an olive leaf plucked off." It's difficult to believe a dove could have found an olive leaf to freshly pluck in a world that had been submerged for nearly a year.
- (i) Gen. 8:20 states, "And Noah builded an alter unto the Lord; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the alter." Killing animals of which only two remain after the Flood seems absurd.
- (j) Gen. 7:13 states, "In the selfsame day entered Noah, and Sham, and Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons with them, into the ark." If the human race began anew from Noah and his sons, are we supposed to believe the wide variations among the earth's people developed in short period since the Flood? Are we supposed to believe that the fair-haired Swede, the brown-skinned, dark-haired Indian, and the black-skinned native came from the same ancestors?
- (k) Gen. 7:4 says, "For yet seven days, and I will cause it to rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights; and every living substance that I have made will I destroy from the face of the earth." But what had the beast and the creeping things done to excite God's anger? They had committed no sin; they had eaten no forbidden fruit, and they had not tried to reach the tree of life.
- (l) Gen. 8:5 and 8:13 state the Flood covered the earth and its mountains. If so, where did all the water go?
- (m) Lastly, the questions raised by Gen. 8:19 must be answered. The verse says, "Every beast, every creeping thing, and every fowl, and whatsoever creepth upon the earth, after their kinds, went forth out of the ark." How were the animals preserved after leaving the Ark? There was no grass except such as had been submerged for a year. How were the herbivores taken care of until the earth was again clothed with vegetation? There were no animals to be devoured

by the carnivores, except those which were on the Ark. From whence came their food? Apologists will be asked in next month's issue to address an equally large number of contradictions between the verses themselves.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #22 continues from Issue #10, page 5 (Part H)

You claim that Paul's statement in 1 Cor. 15:5 can only be interpreted to mean that either there were 13 apostles or Peter was not an apostle. In fact, the explanation for this verse is childishly simple: the Lord appeared first to Peter alone (See: Luke 24:34) and then to the full group of apostles, including Peter.

Editor's Response to Letter #22 (Part H)

In 1 Cor. 15:5 Paul stated: "And that he was seen of Cephas (Peter-ed.), then of the twelve." You claim that Peter was in the group of twelve and quote Luke 24:34 to prove your point. You should have read Luke 24:33-34 which says: "And they (two men on the road to Emmaus-ed.) rose up the same hours, and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them, Saying, The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared to Simon." Verse 34 strongly implies that Peter was not present, because he was the subject of the conversation. But even more importantly, the inaccuracy of Paul's "twelve" in 1 Cor. 15:5 is shown in the fact that Luke 24:33 says eleven, not twelve, apostles were present when Jesus appeared in Luke 24:36. Incidentally, it should be noted that if there were, in fact, twelve apostles as Paul alleged, then Judas must have come back to life. He died before Jesus appeared to the Apostles, and his replacement, Matthias, was not elected to the Apostles until after the Ascension.

Letter #22 Continues (Part I)

Finally, you say that Paul's statement in 1 Cor. 10:8 contradicts Num. 25:9. In fact, however, it doesn't. Paul states that 23,000 fell in one day; Numbers 25:9 states that "those who died by the plague were 24,000. It does not state that all of the 24,000 died in one day, as Paul does. Technically, therefore, there is no contradiction. But beyond this, even if Paul had used the number 23,000 to refer to an event in the O.T., specifying 24,000, there would still not really be an error. Paul was simply making a point--whether he recalled the number of people that died perfectly accurately is not really important.

Editor's Response to Letter #22 (Part i)

You have given the common response to this problem, but have failed to note that Numbers 25:5-9 is referring to what occurred in a single day. The narrative of events is quick, brief, and consecutive. Moses gave an order to slay the offenders. Immediately thereafter an Israelite took a Midianite woman into his tent and was slain by Phineas for doing so. Immediately following this the plague was stopped, but only after 24,000 had died. The actual verses in Numbers 25:5-9 show the plague was confined to one day: "And Moses said to the judges of Israel, 'Every one of you slay his men who have yoked themselves to Baal of Peor.' And behold, one of the people

of Israel came and brought a Midianite woman to his family in sight of all the congregation.... And when Phineas...saw it, he rose up from among the congregation, and took a javelin in his hand. And he went after the man of Israel into the tent, and thrust both of them through.... So the plague was stayed from the children of Israel. And those that died in the plague were twenty-four thousand.

Your final statement is little short of amazing, in light of the fact that it's diametrically opposed to the very premise upon which inerrancy is based. In effect, you are stating that if Paul's figure is incorrect, so what. One might just as well say: if Jesus is not God, so what; if salvation does not exist, so what; if Jesus is not the Messiah, so what; if Adam and Eve did not sin, so what. All of these concepts, including the number that died during the plague, came from the same book--the Bible. And if it can be mistaken with respect to one belief, it can be false with respect to all. How do you know what is true when you admit certain parts are false? Surely you must realize that if it's God's book it can't have one scintilla of imperfection. A perfect being can't produce a book with even a minor error. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, said it well: "If there be any mistake in the Bible, there may well be a thousand. If there be one falsehood in that book, it did not come from the God of truth." (*Journal*, Wed., July 24, 1776). It becomes nothing more than another book on the shelf.

Letter #22 concludes (Part J)

So, Mr. McKinsey, in one section of your publication that really deals specifically with biblical "inerrancy" your "score" was 0 for 8. Perhaps you will not agree with my position on these issues. I really wouldn't expect you to. But I hope that you have some faint recognition of the fact that I do know whereof I speak on these matters, that I have investigated them more thoroughly than you have, and that your arguments remain completely unconvincing to me. I now have arrived at the purpose of my matter. The section of your publication just prior to "Paul, the Deceptive Disciple" is "Coping with Apologists". It closes with the remarkable statement: What do you do with people who won't engage in any critical discussion of the Bible, whose minds are closed? When Jesus assumes control many seem to enter another dimension, which is not so much a twilight zone as one of pure darkness." I have only been a Christian for less than five years, but I have read through the entire Bible at least three times, and spent countless hours studying it and reading other books about it. I attended seminary at the graduate level for a year, after being out of college for almost 12 years (I received my B.A. from Williams College in 1967), achieving a 4.0 average in the process. The deeper I become involved in Christianity, the clearer it becomes to me that, just as you say, Christians do live in a world that is in many ways radically different from non-Christians. The problem with your perception of this fact is that it is non-Christians that live in the world of darkness. (SBJ then quoted John 3:19-21 - ed). I am confused by people such as yourself, Mr. McKinsey. Do you actually know that the so-called "errors" which you point out are actually not errors at all (as I have demonstrated)? (Are you, in other words, simply trying to turn people against the Bible using whatever means are necessary?) Or, do you actually believe that these things which you have alluded to are errors?....

Editor's response to Letter #22 (Part J)

You have made several points, SBJ. Let's take them one at a time. In the first place, BE works with biblical errancy, not inerrancy. Whether the latter even exists is a matter of dispute. Second, you said my score was 0 for 8, which reminds me of the polling booth official who told his leading political opponent: "It isn't who has the votes my friend, it's who counts them." Third, you stated you know whereof you speak and have investigated these matters more thoroughly than I. I suggest we leave this determination to the readers. Fourth, it would be difficult to convince someone of anything if he insisted upon leaping to premature conclusions and engaging in braggadocio. You ignored the advice of the book which you defend with such conviction. Proverbs 27:2 says, "Let another praise thee, and not thine own mouth." I suggest you hear-out your opposition before drawing conclusions. Fifth, the relationship between your educational background and the Bible's "validity" is difficult to fathom. Higher institutions have hundreds of biblicists with innumerable degrees. Many have devoted not 5 but 50 years to scripture. Yet, I doubt if many would claim their assertions are true because of the years involved. Sixth, I take exception to the comment that I use "whatever means are necessary." You are impugning the integrity of someone about whom you know little. I have not questioned your character and would ask that you respond in kind. Let's restrict ourselves to the issue and let others render the verdicts. Seventh, I don't have to "turn people against the Bible." Many make that choice themselves once they have the data and have heard the arguments. At this point in your letter, SBJ, you proceeded to describe the errors of my ways and urge repentance. You switched from "prover" to "preacher". I only wish you had other issues for BE instead of writing four final pages permeated with premature judgmental comments and a patronizing attitude based on Issue #8 alone. Criticizing points with BE is quite acceptable, but any attempt to summarize to the jury before the opening remarks have been concluded is quite unwise, if not juvenile. Remember your phrase "childishly simple".

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #24 from FM of Novato, Claifornia

Dear Dennis I've enclosed a page of our local newspaper with your ad. (FM kindly bought an ad for BE in his local town paper-ed). The ad ran twice, but it's a small ad in a small weekly, so you may not get any responses. The city council recently approved having a prayer before council meetings, which I argued against to no avail, so your ad is a last gesture of defiance. Being a 63-year-old printer...I do believe in the value of advertizing. However, as much as I would like to do more, I am still waiting for my ship to come in . When and if she ever does, you can be assured you will get more publicity. I am also enclosing an issue of Basis containing the story on how to make a Shroud of Turin, which may be an answer to letter 21 from BLC in BE issue #9.

Editor's Response to Letter #24

Dear FM,

Any advertising you can render BE is certainly appreciated. I have many 3"x3" fliers that can be posted on bulletin boards. Each card says:

BIBLICAL ERRANCY
ONE FREE COPY
23 FAY DRIVE
ENON, OHIO 45323

. If you would like to aid the effort by posting some around your area, please let me know how many you want and I'll mail them. Anyone who would be willing to assist BE in this manner need only write. Advertizing: if you know of any publications in which I could advertize effectively, but inexpensively, please let me know. So far I've relied mostly on the *Humanist*, the *Progressive*, the *Guardian*, the *Churchman*, *Free Inquiry* and *In These Times*.

Letter #25 from JLC of Madison, Wisconsin

Dear Dennis,

Sample copy of BE received and much appreciated. I would like to know if the following subjects are within your range of consideration--The bullet stopping power of the Bible. I have read much of the WWI literature and have found repeated instances where a bible in a soldier's breast pocket saved his life by stopping a bullet or shell fragment. I have not read the literature of WWII and so do not know if this useful effect has been the same as in the first biggest war, or even if Bibles were carried in WWII. But surely this is a subject of great interest.... And of course there are Bibles and Bibles. I have one published by the U.S. Gov't in 1904--Jefferson Bible and then there is the Koran. Do you limit yourself to one certain edition?

Editor's Response to Letter #25

Dear JLC,

Bibles stopping bullets are not within the normal scope of BE, although I've occasionally fired a volley that has penetrated the Book and struck the heart of the matter. Seriously, I wouldn't put too much credence in the implication of these stories. They rank right up there with witches, visions of God, and bouts with the Devil. A Bible may have stopped a bullet, but why would that be of significance? Did they tell you about other books that did the same? Did they tell you about the instance in which a bullet went through a Bible and caused a death? Did they tell you about the instance in which the bullet completely missed a Bible in a man's breast pocket and he died? Did they tell you about the man who died in a trench because he was reading a Bible rather than staying alert? And did they tell you about the wounded who died because they sought relief in biblical verses rather than adequate medical attention? Bibles were carried in breast pockets during WWII, and no doubt similar results ensued. I didn't know the US Gov't published a Bible in 1904. Are you sure? This would create a church-state issue. I don't restrict myself to any edition or version of the Bible, although the KJV is, paramount.

Letter #26 from JRS of Ambler, Pennsylvania

Dear Dennis,

I've come to the conclusion that many, if not most, Christians preachers structure

sermons around specific opinions that they hold in any given week. They then search their bibles for "scripture" that supports those opinions and which provides convincing sermon material. I know that you could produce splendid "sermons" based on any given bible. Would you consider including in your periodical a column devoted to a selected current topic of controversy (such a parents against medical treatment for their children) and supply references to "scripture" in defense, or offence to, those who use "scripture" in support of their actions? I know you are very busy as it is, so you couldn't be expected to give much detail, but just a few sentences would be appreciated. One effective neutralizer of scripture quoters is the counter-quote, even if it is equally out of context. I can't think of anyone as qualified as you to offer such a needed education in the name of objectivity. Here are a few month's supply of topics for your consideration: abortion, euthansia, life support means (or their withdrwal), in vitro conception, genetic engineering, political sermons, prayer in public schools, co-habitation, and creation "science" findings. Perhaps, if you find such material unprofessional or inappropriate for your publication, you might rather not entertain such thoughts. I would understand your reluctance if that be so. Incidentally, I demolished a Jehovah's Witness at my doorstep by recalling several of your back issues. She was so anxious to leave, she didn't wait for a contribution for the magazine. She left.

(In an earlier letter JRS stated-ed.) BLC of Wisconsin (See:Letter #21 in the Sept. issue) will find a relevant report on the Shroud mystery in the Summer, 1981 issue of *Free Inquiry*, Box 5, Central Park Station, New York, New York 14215.

Editor's response to Letter #26

Dear JRS. Your suggestion merits thoughtful consideration; however, I've avoided this approach because of the risks you mentioned. Taking verses out of context and searching scripture for words that buttress a particular opinion or philosophy have been the hallmark of most apologists throughout history. It's a fate I've sought to avoid. However, some verses seem to so clearly bear on current social issues that offering an occasional opinion isn't out of place. For this reason a new heading entitled "The Bible's Influence" could very well appear in some future issues and discuss topics such as the following.

The national news media is currently reporting a case in which a fundamentalist minister will not allow his daughter to receive medical treatment for her cancerous condition because of his interpretation of the Bible. It would be difficult to imagine a more clear-cut example of the deleterious effects which can easily accompany adherence to biblical teachings. A child's life is being threatened because of her father's beliefs. Many Christians taking a more liberal, more flexible approach to biblical interpretation, tend to view the child's father as narrow, dogmatic, childish, and inaccurate. From their perspective, he has misread and misapplied the Bible. In reality, he had done neither, but they have. One need only read James 5:13-15 to see scripture supports his position. The "Commentary" in Issue #9 stated, "Many individuals have died because they put their trust in the biblical injunction to pray (And the prayer of faith shall save the sick-James 5:13-15)." It's interesting to note that CNN news reported this was precisely the verse used by the child's father to

justify his position. His belief is thoroughly in line with biblical teaching, and in opposition to his child's continued existence. Depending on the capabilities of medical personnel, a child could very well die because someone got hold of a Bible. Just imagine! Fate could have dealt us such a father. My heart goes out to the child, although I fear the worst.

EDITOR'S NOTE

- (a) Efficient utilization of space is always a concern of this publication. For this reason, abbreviations and contractions are employed and paragraphs are combined, even though grammarians frown on these practices. We apologize for any inconvenience this may cause.
- (b) We are often required to shorten letters to the editor when they are published. Only the essence of many letters can be inserted. Moreover, it just isn't practical to publish every letter sent to BE or send replies to those letters that aren't published. Please don't feel ignored if we don't print or respond to your comments. Rest assured, however, that every letter or piece of literature bearing on the Bible's accuracy is read completely.
- (c) From now on readers will be able to subscribe to BE for a year as well as six months. Many readers seem to prefer this approach.

Issue No. 12

December 1983

COMMENTARY

The Flood (Part Two of a Two-Part series)--Last month's commentary stressed the problems which must be addressed by anyone contending a Flood occurred. Still to be analyzed are those contradictions within Genesis with respect to what allegedly happened. The following are prime examples:

- (a) Gen. 6:19 says, "And of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort shalt thou bring into the ark,...." (Also note Gen. 7:8-9, 14-15). Yet, Gen. 7:2 says, "Of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee by sevens, the male and his female: and of beasts that are not clean by twos, the male and his female." Are clean beasts to enter by 2's or by 7's?
- (b) Gen. 6:20 says, "Of fowls after their kind...two of every sort shall come unto thee,...." Yet, Gen. 7:3 says, "Of fowls also of the air by sevens, the male and the female;...."
- (c) Gen. 7:2 says "Of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee by sevens, male and his female;...." Yet, clean and unclean animals were not delineated until the

eleventh chapter of Leviticus. The Mosaic law arose 600 years after the Flood. There were no Jews, Israelites, or clean vs. unclean animals in Noah's time.

- (d) Gen. 7:7 says, "And Noah went in, and his sons, and his wife, and his son's wives with him, into the ark, because of the waters of the Flood...." Later, Gen. 7:13 says, "In the same day entered Noah, and Shem, and Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah's wife, and the three wives of his sons with them, into the ark...." In other words, Gen. 7:13-17 recapitulates Gen 7:7-12. Apparently they entered two times for the "take-off."
- (e) Gen. 6:17 says, "all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and everything that is in the earth shall die." Yet, Gen. 7:21-22 says, "And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of beast, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth, and every man. All in whose nostrils was the breath of life, of all that was in the dry land, died." Did every living thing die or just those that creepeth on the land?
- (f) Gen. 8:3 says, "And the waters returned from off the earth continually: and after the end of the 150 days the waters were abated." Yet, two verses later the text says, "And the waters decreased continually until the tenth month." According to the third verse the waters had already disappeared after 150 days (5 months-ed.).
- (g) Gen. 8:9 says, "...for the waters were on the face of the whole earth:...." Yet, 8:3 already said, "And the waters returned off the earth continually: and after the end of the 150 days the waters were abated." According to the third verse the waters had already vanished. (It should be noted that if "abated" means lessened rather than vanished, then why would the text say, "after the end of 150 days the waters were abated"? In reality, this interpretation would mean the waters were abated the moment they began to recede. They would have been abated at the beginning of the 150 days, not at the end.)
- (h) Gen 8:5 says, "And the waters decreased continually until the tenth month: in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, were the tops of the mountains seen." Yet, verse 4 just finished saying, "And the ark rested in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, upon the mountains of Ararat." Why would the tops of the mountains not be visible until the tenth month when the ark had already come to rest on the mountains of Ararat in the seventh month?
- (i) Gen. 8:13 says, "And it came to pass in the 601st year, in the first month, the first day of the month, the waters were dried up from off the earth... and behold, the face of the ground was dry." Yet the next verse says, "And in the second month, on the 27th day of the month, was the earth dried." Was the earth dried on Jan. 1st or Feb. 27th? If it was dry on Jan 1st, then they stayed in the ark 58 days longer than needed. (j) The Lord promised Noah in Gen. 8:20, "While the earth remaineth, seed time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease." This promise is contradicted by three subsequent verses: "and the seven years of dearth began to come,... and the dearth was in all lands; but in all the land of Egypt there was bread (Gen. 41:54)." "And the famine was over all the face of the earth...(Gen. 41:56)." "For these two years hath the famine been in the land..."

- (k) Gen. 9:3 says, "Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you (Noah-ed.)." Yet Deut. 14:7-19 lists many animals that are not to be eaten. Either God changed his mind (contra. Mal. 3:6), a new code of morality was instituted, or the verses are contradictory.
- (l) In Gen. 9:6 God told Noah, "whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed for in the image of God made he man." Yet, God broke his own rule by releasing Cain and providing him protection after he killed Abel. As Gen. 4:15 says, "And the Lord said unto him (Cain-ed.). Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him seven-fold. And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him."
- (m) Gen. 6:7-9 says, "And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth;.... But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.... Noah was a just man and perfect in his generation, and Noah walked with God." But according to Gen. 7:7, others joined Noah on the Ark. "And Noah went in, and his sons and his wife, and his son's wives with him, into the ark,...." Noah was the only perfect person, yet other people were also spared. If seven imperfect people received special treatment, then why didn't thousands of others?
- (n) And lastly, God made a decidedly inconsistent statement in Gen. 8:21. "...and the Lord said in his heart, 'I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done.'" God said he would not any more curse the ground for man's sake. His reason is not that man is, or will be good, but because the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth. God destroyed man because of his wickedness. Now he promises not to destroy him again for the same reason, his wickedness.

REVIEWS

In *Answers to Tough Questions* (p.92) McDowell and Steward address the problems associated with the number of animals entering the Ark.

At first reading, the statements appear to be contradictory. First (Gen. 6:19-20) Noah is commanded to bring two of every kind into the ark, then in Gen. 7:2-3 seven of some animals and birds, and later in Gen. 7:8-9, the Scriptures speak of animals going in by two's. However, Gen. 7:8-9 does not speak of the numbers of animals going in, but the manner. Seven of each clean animal (three pairs, with another animal to be used for sacrifice) marched into the ark by two's, and the other animals also went in by pairs.

Several difficulties accompany this explanation. First, Gen. 7:8-9 clearly stated the number of animals entering the ark. They went in by pairs. The manner in which they entered is not discussed, the number seven is not mentioned in either verse, and nothing is said about animals to be used for sacrifice. Second, Gen. 7:2-3 (RSV) says, "Take with you seven pairs of all clean animals, the male and his mate; and a pair of the animals that are not clean, the male and his mate." Seven pairs of clean animals,

not merely seven clean animals, were to enter the Ark. And lastly, regardless of whether the number should be seven or seven pairs, Gen. 7:2-3 still contradicts Gen.6:19-20. The latter says, "And of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort shalt thou bring into the ark... Two of every sort shall come unto thee,...." They are to enter by pairs with no distinction between clean and unclean. *All flesh* means *all flesh*.

In the *Encyclopedia of Biblical Difficulties* (p. 81) Gleason Archer attempted to reconcile Gen. 6:19 with Gen. 7:2. He stated,

Some have suggested that these diverse numbers, two and seven, involve some sort of contradiction and indicate conflicting traditions later combined by some redactor (an editor or reviser-ed.) who didn't notice the difference between the two. It seems strange that this point should ever have been raised, since the reason for having seven of the clean species is perfectly evident: they were to be used for sacrificial worship after the Flood had receded (as indeed they were, according to Gen. 8:20)... Obviously if there had not been more than two of each of these clean species, they would have been rendered extinct by their being sacrificed on the altar.

The fallacy in this explanation lies in its avoidance of textual precision. Gen. 6:19 says, "...every living thing of all flesh, two of each sort shalt thou bring into the ark..." The words "all" and "every" are absolutes, allowing no exceptions. If some animals went in by seven's then they didn't go in by twos's. They were an exception, and violated Gen. 6:19.

In the same book Archer attempted to answer another unrelated question on the book of Genesis. On page 77 he turned his attention toward the following query:

Gen.5:4 tells us that during Adam's long lifetime of 930 years (800 after the birth of Seth), he had other sons and daughters...as for Cain and Seth and all the other sons of Adam who married, they must have chosen their sisters as wives.

The problem is that Archer started talking about Gen. 5:4 in order to bring in the subject of daughters and, yet, Cain got his wife in Gen. 4:17 when only he and Abel had been mentioned. There is nothing in Genesis showing Cain married his sister or, indeed, that he even had a sister at the time of his marriage.

One of the most controversial verses in the Bible is Ex. 20:13--Thou shalt not kill. In *Answers to Questions About the Bible* Robert Mounce attempted to answer the question: "Does the commandment, 'You shall not kill' mean that Christians are not to go to war?" His response was:

That the sixth commandment is to be understood as a prohibition against murder and is not a blanket condemnation of taking life under any circumstances is seen by the fact that God not only authorized capital punishment (Gen. 6:9)...but also sent his people into war (1 Sam. 15:3)...that armed resistance is a permissible ingredient in the unhappy history of man is acknowledged by Scripture.

But the verse said nothing about murder. It said, Thou shalt not kill. Killing is a broader term, encompassing murder. The fact that the biblical God killed and ordered killing only highlights the inconsistency of God ordering man not to do that which he,

himself, commits. The societal difficulties that have risen over this verse, especially during wartime, have caused proponents such as Mounce to change the word "kill" to "murder" in many versions. Although the KJV, the RSV, and the Catholic New American Bible use "kill," translators of such versions as the NASB, the NWT, the NIV and the Masoretic text opted for the more expedient term "murder". It would be rather difficult for military and law enforcement agencies to function if their members really believed the KJ maxim, Thou shalt not kill.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #27 from SBJ of Albany, New York (Part A)

Dear Dennis,

I appreciate the time you took to write me in early September. (SBJ was sent a personal letter-ed.). I have hesitated to respond, because, unfortunately, I suspect that the gulf which separates our perspectives on the Bible is, perhaps, too great to allow for any reasonable dialogue. For example, in your latest issue (#10, Oct. 1983), you counter several of the arguments I presented regarding your earlier arguments for the "deceitfulness" of Paul. Apparently, you were not swayed in the least by anything I said. Similarly I am not swayed by any of your counter-responses. Aware of the probable futility of my effort, I will, however, briefly address your counter-responses... The simple fact is that a great many of the greatest minds in history of mankind were either devoted Christians or avowed theists: Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, Hershel, Newton, Plank, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, Schweitzer--all of these and countless others fall into this category. The claim that a belief in the Bible, or a creator in the universe, is only for the ignorant or unreasonable is a foundless myth-but one that, due to efforts by people such as yourself, will not die.

Editor's response to Letter #27 (Part a)

Dear SBJ,

I appreciate your letter but take issue with several points. First, you forgot to put Mussolini, Franco, Hitler, Al Capone, George Lincoln Rockwell, KKK leaders, and other great minds in your list of devoted Christians. Secondly, you forgot to mention the many great minds who were eliminated because they refused to bow to the biblically-based beliefs of others. Thirdly, when did BE take a position on God's existence or refer to theists as ignorant? Abstract theological discussions should be left to theologians and philosophers. Fourthly, thousands of people have viewed the evidence and accepted the conclusions you denounce. The "effort" of people such as myself weren't the prime factor.

Letter #27 continues (Part B)

In regards to 1 Cor. 2:8 and the issue of who was responsible for Jesus' death, you point to John 19:16 as proof that Pilate did not ever grant his authority for the crucifixion. Actually, this very verse demonstrates exactly what you claim that it doesn't. It reveals that Pilate did, indeed, grant his authority for Jesus' death. Matt. 27:26, Mark 15:15 and Luke 23:24-25 corroborate this detail. The Luke passage is particularly clear: "And Pilate pronounced sentence that their demand should be

granted. And he released the man they were asking for who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, but he delivered Jesus to their will." Furthermore, it was very clearly not the unruly mob that nailed Jesus to the Cross, but the Roman soldiers acting under the authority of Pilate (See Matt 27, Mark 15, etc.). Finally, it was the rulers of the Jews (the Sanhedrin, made up of the "chief priests and elders of the people") that pressed Pilate to sentence Jesus to death: "Now, when morning had come, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put Him to death; and they bound Him, and led Him away, and delivered Him up to Pilate the governor." (Matt. 27:1-2). That the rulers of the day, both Jewish and Roman, were responsible for Jesus' death is simply and perfectly clear....

Editor's response to Letter #27 (Part B)

You discussed three points, SBJ--Did Pilate grant authority; who killed Jesus, a mob or some soldiers; and did some rulers kill Jesus. In regard to the first, you stated I erred by quoting John 19:16 because it shows "Pilate did, indeed, grant his authority for Jesus' death." But, John 19:16, Matt. 27:26 and Mark 15:15 do not say Pilate granted his authority. They merely say he delivered Jesus to them to be crucified. We don't know if Pilate granted authority. That can only be inferred. Remember, Pilate had just washed his hands of the affair and said, "I, having examined him before you, have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him."

According to your interpretation, SBJ, Pilate pronounced a death sentence after just declaring the man innocent. If Pilate did grant authority for an execution, then he did not wash his hands of the affair. You referred to Matt. 27:26, but ignored the prior two verses, which show Pilate felt he was innocent. You quoted Mark 15:15, but ignored the 14th verse, which shows Pilate wasn't convinced Jesus was a wrongdoer. You referred to Luke 23:24-25, which says, "pronounced sentence". If Pilate did sentence Jesus to death, then he acted in opposition to his will and beliefs. He merely yielded to the mob's demands. Consequently, it's misleading to give people the impression, as Paul does in 1 Cor. 2:8, that Jesus was persecuted by the government, and princes of this world crucified him.

Your second point, SBJ, is that Roman soldiers, not an unruly mob, nailed Jesus to the cross. But that's not what I said in the August, 1983 issue on page 4. My words were, "He was killed by a mob and some soldiers." They all participated in the execution. As far as who actually did the nailing, that's immaterial. It probably was done by some soldiers. But everyone in the crowd was an accomplice. Mark 15:11-15, Matt. 27:20-26, and Luke 23:13-25 show the chief priests, rulers, the people, and some soldiers contributed to the execution.

Your third point hinges upon the word "rulers." What does one normally mean by the word "rulers"? Most people think of a king, a queen, a governor, a pharaoh, a province chief, or a figure of comparable stature when they hear the word "ruler". And that's precisely the sense given in nearly all the O.T. and such N.T. verses as Mark 13:9 and Luke 21:12 where Jesus says, "...being brought before kings and rulers for my name's sake." Here rulers and kings are comparable. However, additional research shows there are other verses which Paul could say he is referring to if he wished to escape his dilemma. Luke 23:13, 24:20 and Acts 4:5 equate rulers with lesser officials

such as chief priests, elders, and scribes. If this interpretation is used, then Jesus was indeed, killed by the "rulers" of his day. But, again, Paul is deceiving his readers. Governmental officials such as kings, princes, and rulers weren't really responsible. Biblicists have often exaggerated the extent to which they have been oppressed. You stated that, "it was the rulers of the Jews (the Sanhedrin, made up of the chief priests and the elders of the people) that pressed Pilate...." The word "Sanhedrin" never appears in the Bible. How do you know it was responsible? Moreover, you said the rulers of the Jews were made up of "chief priest and elders of the people." But Luke 23:13 and Acts 4:5 show the "rulers" are separate from the chief priests and elders. They may be equal, but they are not identical, as you claim.

Letter #27 continues (Part C)

(After some additional preaching, SBJ said -ed.) One thing I wonder about: if you are so convinced that the Bible is essentially an overblown book, full of contradictions, half truths, and lies, why in the world do you expend so much energy on it? If I felt the way you do about it, I wouldn't waste my time on it. History is full of people who have been devoted to it, and our present age is no different. You aren't going to change history in any significant way, so why do you bother? Do you believe that the "untruths" of the Bible--or at least people's belief in them--are an obstacle in the way of progress? That the world would be far better off if it was rid of this book once and for all?

Editor's Response to Letter #27

You ask why I spend so much time reading literature I find erroneous. Why do American and Soviet scholars spend so much time reading each others' literature? Is it because they believe the others' writings are truthful and convey the answers to mankind's problems? No, it's because one must understand in order to cope effectively. You falsely stated you wouldn't waste your time. If that were true, why are you writing BE? History has had many people devoted to oppression and tyranny, too. Surely you aren't saying that makes it right. You allege I am not going to change history in any significant way, which is probably correct. But to do nothing is to leave the biblicists without meaningful opposition. Do I believe the Bible is an obstacle to progress? It's difficult to see how any book as flawed as the Bible could promote the advancement of man.

Letter #27 concludes (Part D)

Sadly, I'm well aware that you will probably go to your grave firmly committed to your crusade against the Bible. In the course of your effort, however, I'm sure that you will be confronted with many Christians who try to convince you of the folly of your ways (as I'm sure you already have been)....

Editor's Response to the Conclusion of Letter #27 (Part D)

Unfortunately, SBJ, you will probably go to your grave believing the Bible is the word of God. If I were on a crusade, do you think I would give opponents, such as yourself, a hearing? How many crusaders allow opposing voices a major role in their publications?

Letter #28 from EEB of Amarillo, Texas

I have enjoyed every issue of BE and was especially interested in the latest issue (Aug. 1983-ed.) in which you take the apostle Paul to task. It hardly seems fair to hold him responsible for what the author of Acts makes him say. When that "book" was written Paul was long dead. Now concerning who Paul believed crucified Jesus: Paul's epistles do not show any way that he ever heard of Jesus, the star of Bethlehem, the wise men, the slaughter of innocents, the flight into Egypt...or any other things in the gospels.... It seems that Jesus of the gospels was created to combat the belief that the savior was a phantom. The early church saw to it that all "scripture" contrary to the church's doctrine was destroyed.... Paul never heard of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John (they may not have heard of each other) or of the things they relate.... Keep up the good work, but please be careful about equating what the gospels and Acts say with what we know Paul wrote.

Editor's Response to Letter #28

Dear EEB,

Your compliments and observations are appreciated. However, I have a couple of problems with your letter. You stated: "It hardly seems fair to...." I don't see how I'm being unfair. Either Paul did or did not say which is attributed to him by the author of Acts. If he did, there is no problem. If he didn't, then the author of Acts is a deceiver; he is being unfair, not I. I have no idea what Paul said and can only report what the author of Acts attributed to him. If you can prove the author of Acts quoted him incorrectly, then you should rightly hold him responsible. Second, I don't understand why you feel the author of Acts could not have quoted Paul accurately because Paul died years earlier.

Letter #29 from GM of Asheboro, North Carolina

Dear Dennis,

Your emphasis on the errancy of the Bible is interesting and convincing. But let me ask you this. With what would you replace the Christian beliefs of so many people? The ten commandments and golden rule seem like a noble creed. While the abuses, even with noble creeds, seem inherent. While the "errancy" of the Bible is significant, why throw the "baby out with the bathwater?" A replacement not likely any better may be difficult to determine. Enough time is not available to experiment with all the possibilities--one must pick and forge ahead--keeping your eyes wide open. Errors seem to be there--but where do you go from there?

Editor's response to Letter #29

Dear GM,

Your meaningful question merits a thoughtful response. You implied the Bible is the fountain from which morality flows. Yet, I know of no evidence showing those adhering closest to this book are more moral, more decent, more concerned about the welfare of others than those who don't. Nor am I aware of any information proving those attending biblically-oriented schools become better, more honest individuals than those who don't. My experience has been to the contrary. Second, which position is the result of moral teachings--doing that which is right because it's the decent thing to do, or doing that which is right because one expects a reward, a kickback, a payoff,

someday? Third, if you are going to teach morality via the Bible, then a substantial portion of the entire book will have to be ignored or soft-peddled. (See next month's issue on the patriarchs and the April 1983 commentary, for example). Fourth, not only are many biblical heroes and role-models disreputable characters at best, but many biblical teachings are certainly not in the tradition of the Ten Commandments and the golden rule. The Bible's support of slavery and denunciation of all opposition to oppressive rule are notable examples. Fifth, many books contain moral teachings. Why adopt the Bible instead of the Koran, for instance? Sixth, do you really need a book to tell you right from wrong, to tell you lying, stealing, and cheating are abhorrent? Contrary to apologetic teachings, the Bible is not holding the immoralists at bay. A book to replace the Bible isn't needed. And lastly, you ask if I have a replacement for Christian beliefs. Are you saying it's better to believe that which is erroneous than to have no position? It's better to believe Jesus is God and the door to salvation, for example, than believe otherwise? As I recently told a caller on a radio station: You don't really care whether the Bible is true or not. As long as it looks good, feels good, and seems to make sense, that's all that matters. Remember, a wide variety of chemicals will provide a comparable euphoria.

Issue No. 13

January 1983

COMMENTARY

The Patriarchs--Millions of people throughout the world, especially children, often adopt certain figures as role models to idolize and emulate. This is true not only in sports, politics, and acting, but also in religion and the arena of ideas. And nowhere in religion are role-models more numerous than in the Bible. From Genesis to Revelation, prominent individuals abound. But are they really worthy of respect and admiration? Was their behavior such that you would want to awaken your children on Sunday morning to read about their exploits? What better way to answer this question than by describing the activities of each. First are those figures whose machinations are somewhat limited in scope:

- ABSALOM--ordered killings (2 Sam. 13:28-29 RSV) and had sex in the open (2 Sam. 16:22 RSV);
- AMON--raped his sister, Tamar (2 Sam. 13:11-14 RSV);
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- ABIMELECH--killed a city's inhabitants (Jud. 9:45 RSV); and murdered wantonly (Jud. 9:5);
- EHUD--murdered king Eglon (Jud. 3:21-22 RSV);
- ELIJAH--committed murder (1 Kings 18:40);
- ELISHA--lied (2 Kings 6:19), told a man a lie (2 Kings 8:10 RSV), cursed 42 small boys to be torn apart for mocking his bald head (2 Kings 2:23-24 RSV);
- GIDEON--killed (Jud. 8:16:17 the Living Bible), murdered prisoners (Jud. 8:21 RSV), engaged in polygamy (Jud. 8:30);
- ISSAC--lied (Gen. 26:6-7 and attempted to sacrifice his wife to save himself (Gen. 26:9);
- JACOB--swindled Esau out of his birthright (Gen. 25:31-33 RSV), cheated and lied (Gen. 27:19, 30:40-43 RSV) and lied to Rachel (Gen. 29:12);
- JEHOIDA--ordered a murder (2 Kings 11:15-16 RSV);
- JEHU--killed (Kings 9:24, 27, 10:11, 17), ordered killings (2 Kings 10:6-7, 14, 25 RSV), and deceptively lied (2 Kings 10:18-19);
- JEPHTHAH--slaughtered people (Jud. 11:33), and killed his own daughter (Jud. 11:39 RSV);
- JEREMIAH--lied (Jer. 38:24-27 NIV);
- JOAB--killed (2 Sam. 3:27, 18:14, 20:10);
- JONATHAN--killed (1 Sam. 14:13-14 NASB), and lied (1 Sam. 20:28);
- JOSEPH--deceived his brothers (Gen. 42:7 NASB) and committed nepotism (Gen. 47:11 RSV);
- JOSHUA--killed and slaughtered without letup (Joshua 6:21, 8:25-28, 10:1, 20, 26-28, 30, 32-33, 35, 37, 39-41, 17-18, 21, 12:7), murdered prisoners (Josh. 8:29), and hamstringed horses, (Josh. 11:9 RSV);

- LABAN--lied (Gen. 29:15) and deceived (Gen. 29:20-25);
- LOT--offered his virgin daughters to a crowd (Gen. 19:8);
- SAMSON--killed (Jud. 14:19, 15:8, 15), and had sex with a harlot (Jud. 16:1) and lied to Delilah (Jud. 16:10, 13), and
- SAMUEL--murdered (1 Sam. 15:33).

Second are those individuals who are not only well known but committed a wider assortment of nefarious activities:

- ABRAHAM--told his wife to lie (Gen. 12:13), debauched Hagar, his maidservant (Gen. 16:4), sent his maidservant and her child into the wilderness (Gen. 21:14), lied (Gen. 20:2), and married his half-sister (Gen. 20:11-12);
- SAUL--used his daughters as a snare (1 Sam. 8:20-21 NIV), ordered gambling (1 Sam. 14:42), killed (1 Sam. 15:7-8, 20, 22:18-21), stripped himself and acted unstable (1 Sam. 19:24), admitted he sinned, played the fool and erred (1 Sam. 26:21), gave David's wife to another man (1 Sam. 25:44), and transgressed God by consulting a medium and being unfaithful (1 Chron. 10:13-14 RSV),
- and SOLOMON--ordered murders (1 Kings 2:25 RSV, 2:34, 46), tried to kill Jeroboam (1 Kings 11:40), enslaved people (1 Kings 9:21 RSV), did not keep God's statutes or covenant (1 Kings 11:11 RSV), did evil (1 Kings 11:6), and lied to his mother (1 Kings 2:20-21 RSV, 2:25).

Lastly, are two famous or infamous individuals--Moses and David--who occupy special places among Old Testament leaders. According to 2 Chron. 30:16 Moses was the Man of God; yet, he...

- murdered an Egyptian (Ex. 2:12),
- ordered an armed attack (Num. 31:3, 6),
- ordered the murder of prisoners (Num. 31:17),
- ordered the keeping of young female prisoners for several reasons (Num. 31:17),
- led mass killings of women and children (Deut. 2:34, 3:3, 6),
- ordered killings (Deut. 13:15, 20:13),
- blasphemously wrote he was a greater prophet than Jesus (Deut. 34:10 NASB),
- had a son out of wedlock (Ex. 2:21-22),
- and was excluded by God from Canaan for four different reasons:
 - unbelief (Num 20:12),
 - rebellion (Num. 27:12-14 RSV),
 - trespassing (Deut. 13:51-52),
 - and rash words (Psalm 106:32-33 NIV).

And, finally, there is David. Despite all of the above, no individual in the Bible had a more disreputable, more scandalous career. Although the recipient of numerous accolades--never doing evil (1 Sam. 25:28), following God fully (1 Kings 11:6), being an angel of God (2 Sam. 19:27), keeping his commandments of God (1 Kings 3:14), and having a perfect heart with the Lord (1 Kings 15:3)--David exhibited exceptionally corrupt behavior.

- He killed (1 Sam. 17:50-51 RSV, 18:7, 27, 19:8, 23:5, 30:17, 2 Sam. 8:1, 2, 5, 13),
- ordered murders (2 Sam. 1:15, 4:5-12),
- ordered prisoners to be killed (2 Sam. 12:29-31, 1 Chron. 20:3, 2 Sam. 8:1-2),
- committed unprovoked aggression and mass killing (1 Sam. 27:8-11, 2 Sam. 5:20, 25),
- gave up seven of Saul's descendants to be killed (2 Sam. 21:1-6, 9),
- requested that Joab be killed (1 Kings 2:5-6),
- intentionally arranged for Uriah to be killed in order to seize his wife (2 Sam. 11:14-17),
- displeased the Lord (2 Sam. 11:26-27),
- impregnated another man's wife, committing adultery in the process (2 Sam. 11:2-5),
- wasn't allowed to build God's house because he was a man of war and bloodshed (1 Chron. 22:7-8),
- lied (1 Sam. 21:1-2, 27:8-10),
- told Jonathan to lie (1 Sam. 20:5-6),
- admitted he sinned by taking a census (2 Sam. 24:10, 17, 1 Chron. 21: 8, 17)
- committed extortion (1 Sam. 25:2-8),
- prophesied incorrectly in his heart (1 Sam. 27:1),
- sent out a spy (2 Sam. 16:36),
- hamstrung horses (2 Sam. 8:4),
- locked up 10 concubines for life for no apparent reason (2 Sam. 20:3),
- committed bigamy (2 Sam. 3:2-3),
- committed polygamy (2 Sam. 5:12),
- despised the word of the Lord (2 Sam. 12: 9-11),
- admitted he sinned by causing Uriah's death and taking his wife (2 Sam. 12:13-14),
- and exposed himself like a pervert (2 Sam. 6:20).

Yet, despite all of this we are supposed to believe this is a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22). Anyone approaching the Bible for goodness, decency, role models, and morality, enters at his own peril.

Radio Appearances--On Sunday, July 20, 1983, the editor of BE appeared on radio station WING in Dayton, Ohio, for 2 1/2 hours. The call-in format provided an excellent forum by which the Bible's fallacies could be revealed and discussed before a large audience. Although I don't have space to present everything discussed, one point dominated all others, i.e., the Christian interpretation of the Bible has major philosophical difficulties. To show an apologist the error of his or her ways one need only ask questions such as:

- (a) If God is just and fair, why is humanity being punished for what one man, Adam, did thousands of years ago?
- (b) If God is perfect and everything he does or creates is perfect, then Adam must have been perfect. How, then, could Adam, a perfect being, have committed sin? Whether or not he had free will is irrelevant. It's impossible for

him to have committed an imperfect act. Perfect beings can't commit imperfect acts;

- (c) And if one must have Jesus to be "saved," what about the millions of people who have come and gone and never had any contact whatever with Jesus, the Bible, or Christianity? How could God be just, since they are condemned simply because of where they are born? They were provided no opportunity to obtain "salvation". Missionaries have missed millions. Indeed, millions of people died before Jesus was ever born.

These are only some of the questions that generate intense, yet productive, dialogue. Try as they may, biblicists can't cope with these problems. All of my radio appearances have been taped, and I've considered making them available. Unfortunately, the time needed to adequately record and edit would probably be prohibitive.

REVIEWS

Biblical Errancy recently received a leaflet entitled, Science, The Bible and God from M.B. of Ohio. The author contends the Bible is not only scientific but "far ahead of its time". The verses employed to prove as much are weak at best. For instance, Job 38:33: "Knowest thou the ordinances of heaven." The author concludes from this: "God asked Job if he knew the numerous laws of nature. Think of it--more than three thousand years ago the inspired Word was telling man that the universe is operated on natural law. And science today is still investigating the 'ordinance of heaven' or natural law." By what rationale the author reached this conclusion one can only surmise. The O.T. is replete with the ordinances of heaven or God, and almost nothing would lead one to believe they are synonymous with natural law. Most are moral, social, religious, and ceremonial in tone, and of little scientific value. To further make his point, the author related the following biblical verses and the "scientific" facts proven by each. Psalm 19:6 says: "His (the sun-ed.) going forth is from the end of the heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it" which allegedly echoes the scientific fact that the sun has its circuit with a circumference of about 338,000 light-years. In the first place, the heaven has no ends from which the sun emerges or to which it is approaching. Secondly, the author, in Paulinist tradition, conveniently omitted the rest of the verse, which says: "and there is nothing hid from the heat thereof." How the sun's heat could be reaching every object in an infinite universe is difficult to fathom. Job 26:7 says: "He stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing." If this is scientifically precise and proves the earth is floating freely in space, then how could the earth also have foundations, as alleged in Psalm 104:5, which says: "Who laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be removed for ever"? Ecclesiastes 1:6 says the winds flow in a circular world pattern which is scientifically correct, although not particularly profound. Why doesn't the author quote the next verse, which says: "All of the rivers run into the sea...." Perhaps because hundreds of the world's rivers flow into lakes and other inland bodies of water. It's important to note that the author, also, relies upon verses that are so nebulous as to allow any interpretation expediency dictates. For example, he contends that Job 38:14 states the earth rotates upon its axis; Job 38:31 teaches the laws of

planetary attraction; and Job 28:25 says air has weight. These parts of scripture are just too vague to know what was intended.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #30 from DRM of Wilberforce, Ohio

Dear Dennis,

In a response to a letter you stated that the Bible is claiming perfection. Could you document your claim? It would be helpful if you first define "perfection" and then support your statement. Also, I would debate the claim that "two diametrically opposed and mutually exclusive versions of the same event cannot be simultaneously accurate." (See: Feb. 1983, p.2). If the event is a ball following the laws of gravity and one person on top of a ten story building claims "I have dropped the ball," and another person on ground level claims "The ball will hit me" one could argue that you have two diametrically opposed, mutually exclusive and simultaneously accurate versions of the same event. These are opposed, "dropped" versus "will hit", since one is past and the other is future. They are mutually exclusive. Try to drop and hit at the same time! They are both accurate descriptions of the event.

Finally, I would speculate that you are asking the wrong questions of scripture. Scripture is a recorded meaning system for a people over a long period of time. For people who find themselves with that tradition of meaning, Scripture continues to be a source of inspiration and truth. Inspiration in terms of what is meaningful in life. Truth in terms of the ultimate questions in life. If we reduce truth to be only verifiable claims advocated by logical positivists, then the Declaration of Independence has lied when it claimed "All men are created equal" and the husband lies to his wife when he says "I love you." Thank you for the free copy of BE.

Editor's response to Letter #30

Dear DRM.

Three of your comments need to be addressed. To begin with, your initial question is directed towards the wrong party. Apologists for the Bible, not I, allege the Book claims perfections. They employ 2 Peter 1:21, 2 Tim. 3:16 and other verses to prove as much. Your quarrel is with them, not me. I merely provide evidence the Bible is not inerrant, as they allege. They define "perfection" as without error or flawless. Secondly, your second comment is permeated with poor logic. After relating two observations about a ball falling you stated: "one could argue...." To begin with, they are neither diametrically opposed nor mutually exclusive. The person on top of the building is not making two statements simultaneously which are in opposition. Any comment by the person on the ground is irrelevant, since his perspective is quite different. He is referring to what will happen while the individual dropping the ball is stating what has happened. In no way are the comments mutually exclusive, Both are correct because the passage of time changed conditions, and two different perspective are involved. The statements are complementary, not opposed. Thirdly, I am not asking any questions of Scripture other than its basis for claiming inerrancy. It may be a source of inspiration for many, but it is by no means a fountain of truth for all. You assert the Bible provides "truth in terms of the ultimate questions of life." If the Bible

is really a source of truth, then how do you account for the tremendous number of problems contained therein? Glittering generalities, such as yours, aren't proof; they are merely assertions. The Declaration of Independence would be inaccurate if it contended all men are physically equal. But we both know "equality before the law" is intended.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #31 from FM of Novato, California

Dear Mr. McKinsey,

Please send six back issues. We have number 7.... In issue #7, Letter 19, the writer (SS-ed.) Mentions human sacrifices in Leviticus, Judges and 2 Samuel. So far, in a hurried reading of the first two books I have not been able to find what SS refers to. Is it possible you could quote chapter and verse?

Editor's response to Letter #31

Dear FM,

References to human sacrifices may be in Judges and 2 Samuel, but I can only find them in Exodus, Leviticus, and Ezekiel. Perhaps SS will aid both of us. BE does not vouch for the accuracy of that which is contained in Letters to the Editor.

Letter #32 from BAY of Cincinnati, Ohio

Dear Mr. McKinsey,

I am finding your publication to be very educational, but I have one major complaint. Since the title is Biblical Errancy, I feel that topics discussed in your publication, whether your own writings or the letters you print should (only-ed.) deal with the Bible. Of course, related topics will naturally enter into discussions, and when this happens, I feel you have an editorial responsibility to identify non-Biblical concepts when it is not clear. The reason for this letter is Letter #19 from SS of Vienna, Virginia. In the second paragraph, SS talks about the New Testament as "a compendium of both historical and logical contradictions...filled with paganism and old-time superstition. Easter is named after the old goddess of spring. Christmas falls upon the winter solstice which is when Saturnalia was formally celebrated." You and SS are probably both aware that the words "Easter" and "Christmas" do not appear in the New Testament, nor does the date of Jesus' birth. Since the context of the letter strongly implies that these are problems with the Bible, you should have pointed out this false information....

Editor's Response to Letter #32

Dear BAY,

Your point is well taken. Material within BE should be confined to that which is contained within the Bible. But many letters discuss extra-Biblical subjects. They seem to be of great interest to many people and I don't want to exclude information of this nature if there is strong interest. Personally, I agree with you. Easter, Christmas, the Shroud of Turin, the winter solstice, the Saturnalia, and other topics that are not within the Bible are not germane to this publication. I often receive extensive letters on the history of early Christianity, the canon's formation, Free Masonry, the political machinations of popes, and so forth which, although informative and entertaining, are

not really relevant to the Bible's "inerrancy." We differ on a couple of points, however. I don't feel I have a responsibility to identify non-Biblical concepts, nor do I feel obligated to tell others these topics are not in the Bible, unless the Bible's inaccuracy would be further exposed. If information about extra-Biblical topics is inaccurate, then I am no better off than the readers of BE. I can't be all-knowing on all topics, and I, like you, read all letters to the editor with a critical eye. If someone feels a letter is inaccurate, I'll try to publish thoughtful rebuttals. As we both know, newspapers can't vouch for the accuracy of that which is contained in letters to the editors.

Letter #33 from RR of Murphy, North Carolina

Dear Mr. McKinsey,

Many thanks for the sample copy of BE you sent me so promptly. Obviously your heart is in the right place, but, if #8(slavery and the degradation of women-ed.) was fairly typical of your approach, then I fear you are intellectually barking up the wrong tree. If you wish to demonstrate the errancy of the Bible, merely pointing out that its doctrines and social customs are morally repugnant to modern Americans of enlarged views simply won't work. "Repugnant" does not prove "errant." On the contrary, the more repressive, neurotic, and anti-human these doctrines are, the more they appeal to those Moral Majority types whose basic motivation is hatred of human freedom and a ravaging desire to condemn, punish and control anyone who is not exactly like themselves.

Editor's Response to Letter #33

Dear RR,

We are in agreement. "Repugnant" does not mean or prove "errancy." That is why BE doesn't concentrate on sex, immorality, or blood and gore in the Bible, as do many critiques. The latter appeal more to the heart than the head. After years of experience, apologists have been able to develop a wide assortment of responses to the "repugnancy approach". Primary reliance on this method is doomed to failure, and that's why BE encompasses a wider variety of problems. You've made an astute observation which merits a thoughtful reply. Issue #8 dwelt on slavery and subservience of women, not out of concern for the deplorable aspects of oppression, but because they are sanctioned by the Bible, in clear violation of such verses as 2 Cor. 3:17. The general tenor of the discussion was based on logic, reason, and evidence, not on emotion or morality. You might want to read other issues, especially numbers 1, 2, 3, 6, and 7, as they are decidedly lacking in moral or emotional appeals. It's difficult to form an accurate opinion after having read only one issue.

Letter #34 from AIC of San Francisco, California (Part a)

Dear Mr. McKinsey,

I have very much appreciated the 5 issues of BE you have sent me.... May I make some comments on this issue received so far? In the first page of Issue #6 you write: "An egg can easily be taken from a virgin, united with a sperm in a test-tube, and reinserted into the uterus without any physical contact being involved." This a very recent technique and couldn't have been considered in Biblical times....

Editor's Response to Letter #34 (Part a)

Dear AIC,

I appreciate your scientific approach, but you missed my point. The question is: Is a virgin birth a miracle? Is it an event contrary to natural law, i.e., supernatural and worthy of awe? Science has shown that it's not a miracle. And if it isn't a miracle now, it wasn't a miracle then. Women can have children without ever having had contact with a male. Sticks turning into snakes and women turning into salt are miracles because they can't occur at any time. But if a woman can have children now, without contact, then they could have done so then. The mechanics by which it occurred are quite secondary. The fact is it could have happened. It is possible.

Letter #34 concludes (Part b)

(After an extensive analysis of pregnancy and reproduction AIC continued-ed.). On page 4 of issue # 7 you write: "If they believe this (the 4 versions of the Resurrection agree-ed.), then I challenge them to write one consistent narrative incorporating all four gospel accounts." This has been done. It is a big book called "The Nazarene Gospel" by Robert Groves and Joshua Podro.... It is a work of scholarship and not just a wild theory. Look it up and get a copy for your library if you can. But the challenge you flung out in the sentence quoted at the beginning of this paragraph was met before you made it. Other than this I have no criticism of the 5 issues I have seen.... All in all, I must say that you have produced an ACHIEVEMENT. You are entitled to feel very proud of "Biblical Errancy".... I have never heard of Enon, Ohio. What part of the state is it in?

Editor's Response to Letter #34 (Part b)

Dear AIC. Defenders of the Bible often recommend books I should read, and I've never found one that lived up to its billing. I thank you for your compliments and realize you are trying to be of assistance, but no book can reconcile the gospel accounts. The chronologies, the prophecies with respect to when the cock should crow, and the time the women arrived at the tomb are only some of the problems that no amount of rationalization and justification can reconcile. Thomas Paine said it well: "...it is, I believe, impossible to find in any story upon record with so many and glaring absurdities, contradictions and falsehoods, as are in those books (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John). They are more numerous and striking than I had any expectation of finding, when I began this examination,...." (*The Age of Reason* by Thomas Paine, p. 67). If you will send me some specific reconciliations of gospel contradiction that BE has mentioned, I will gladly discuss them in future issues. Biblicists never cease assuring their critics that all problems have been resolved and future assaults on Biblical inerrancy are futile. It's a common ploy and only deceives those who aren't sufficiently versed in scripture. Anyone who does not know the Book is obviously not going to know its weaknesses. Enon, Ohio is northeast of Dayton near Wright-Patterson Air Force Base.

Letter #35 from MJG of Ottawa, Canada

Dear Dennis.

Thanks for the sample copy. I enjoyed reading it, though it did not shake my faith in the Scripture. You seem to be quite level-headed, unlike some agnostic/atheists,

whose material I have read. Therefore, I would be interested in a subscription; enclosed is my money order. I feel one should not be afraid of the truth, even if it is not what you would like it to be. I hope you feel the same way. We have all got a lot to learn and understand.

Editor's Response to Letter #35

Dear MJG.

If only all believers in scriptures were as open-minded as you! All BE asks is a fair hearing in an open form. I couldn't agree with you more. We all make mistakes; we all have a lot to learn, and I am no exception. But what better way to proceed than through an open dialog, encompassing all points of view. Preaching to the converted--witness most religious meetings, from fundamentalist to atheist--may "soothe," but it doesn't "solve." One doesn't convert people from the Bible overnight. A long, slow, methodical process of re-education is required. People accept the Bible as God's word after months, even years, of teaching; and equally long period is required to reverse the process.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

If your comments on BE have not been addressed, we apologize. The volume of mail--pro and con--far exceed what can be published. Many people have a lot to say.

Issue No. 14

Feburary 1983

COMMENTARY

This month's BE marks the beginning of a policy of devoting one issue every year or so to answering letters and commentaries submitted by readers.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #36 from REH of Hubbard, OH Dear Mr. McKensey.

I studied under, perhaps, the greatest N.T. scholar in the past several decades, Prof. M.S. Enslin. I remember one remark he made in his course in "Christian Beginnings." "There isn't enough about Jesus of Nazareth to write a decent obituary." No question that Paul is the founder of Christianity. But he also said, "The more you understand the Bible, the more you love it." I think both statesments are true. Knowledge is key to freedom. I think Socrates would attest to that.

Editor's Response to Letter #36

Dear REH.

Although unaquainted with Prof. Enslin, I agree with his obituary comment. However, I assure him that the greater knowledge of the Bible on my part has not created greater love. Indeed, precisely the opposite has occurred and, undoubtedly, countless others

have experienced the same feeling. Perhaps someday people will stop making exaggerated claims of this nature.

Letter #37 from KEN of Sacramento, California

Dear Dennis.

I've been meaning to comment on the last few issues of BE and respond a bit to your interesting reply to my other letter (Letter #23, Issue #10). Vagaries of life being what they are however, I simply didn't have the time until now. I read with interest the excerpts from SBJ's long letter (Letter #22, Issues 10 and 11) in defense of the inerrancy of the Bible. I'm not sure what to think of SBJ. He says some intelligent things and makes some monstrous blunders. I was particularly surprised by his claim that any disagreement with the Biblical attitudes toward slavery represent an "opinion" and has no bearing on the Bible's validity (Part a). Would SBJ please elaborate on this? It seems to me that if Biblical inerrancy means anything at all, it means that doctrinal and moral statements in the Bible are just as valid as its factual statements. Now clearly, the Bible explicitly and implicitly endorses the institution of slavery; SBJ made no attempt even to dispute this. So let us ask: How does SBJ regard slavery? If he opposes it, he effectively admits the Bible is wrong. If he straddles the issue, claiming that slavery was moral in Biblical times but immoral in post-Biblical times, he is effectively saying that the moral teachings of the Bible are not absolute, that "right" and "wrong" may change over time. This is pure moral relativism, a doctrine that Christians have regarded as repugnant for centuries. Finally, if SBJ actually supports slavery, let him have the courage to say so--let him justify it, if he can, in the face of history,...

Editor's Response To Letter #37 (Part a)

Dear KEN.

SBJ has not responded to my comments; perhaps he will reply to yours.

Letter #37 continues (Part b)

(After discussing the degree of governmental responsibility for Jesus' death which was covered in the Dec. 1983, issue, KEN stated--). I had other comments on SBJ's letter of the same ilk, but I'll pass over them. Basically I found myself agreeing somewhat with both of you. You were both honest, but you both tended to obfuscate a little, and to try to win points by redefining terms. Your reply to my own letter #23 (In letter #23, Issue 10, KEN stated BE erred in Sept. 1983 commentary by claiming the Bible asserts turtles have voices--ed.) in the tenth issue was enlightening in many respects, but I must take issue with parts of it. In Part (b) response, for example, you at first seemed to understand my contention that in the parlance of the King James era, *turtle* was an acceptable idiom for turtle-dove.... Remember, the translators of the KJ Bible were translating, not for the 20th century American readers, but for the folk of 16th century England, who used the word turtle in just that way (i.e., a "turtle" was a bird--ed.). Please reference, for example, Shakespeare's "Winter's Tale," IV. 4. It seems that I'm quibbling, but this point is important because it keys with an error you often make in Biblical criticism: you have a tendency to impose modern definitions on archaic words in archaic contexts. Another example will be evident in just a bit. I hope you will accept my comments in the spirit they are intended. I am basically on your side

and have a high opinion of Biblical Errancy, but sometimes you seem to try awfully hard to wring inappropriate meanings out of certain passages of the Bible, and this convinces no one. In fact it leaves you wide open to contempt and ridicule from Fundamentalist circles.

Editor's Response to Letter #37 (Part b)

You might be interested in knowing,, KEN that no statement has generated more criticisms than my assertion on page one of Issue #9 that turtles have voices according to Song of Solomon 2:12. "Turtles" in this context, according to many, means a "turtle-dove," not a reptile. I don't mind specific and detailed corrections such as this, but I do take exception to broad, vague generalizations such as: "you have a tendency to...." and "sometimes you seem to try to awfully hard to wring...." Please be specific. If you feel I've erred, cite chapter and verse. Generalizations are like phantoms; you can't address what you can't see.

Letter #38 from WTF of Spanaway, Washington

Dear Mr. Mckinsey. I am certainly no Christian, and do in fact enjoy your publication. Although it is beyond me as to how I might get a Christian to read it. Your part (a) discussion in letter #22 is founded on essentially wrong premises. A full discussion of the subject of liberty, in the Bible, can only be broached if one wants to open a Pandora's box. Since I am reckless then let me do so. In defense of SBJ (and to his undoubted amazement) 2 Cor. 3:17 (Where the spirit of the Lord is there is liberty--ed) does not contradict references to slaves and the subservience of women IF ONE CONSIDERS IN TOTAL CONTEXT TOTAL JUDAIC TEACHINGS. The case has been made to my satisfaction that the Bible (O.T.) is a hodgepodge of compilations and modified borrowings of the more appealing myths, fables, and teachings of various peoples and nations by a nomadic, rootless tribe. The code of Hammurabi becomes the ten commandments, the Epic of Gilgamesh becomes the Flood et al, ad nauseum. One cannot understand the most Holy Bible unless one has also read the Talmud. According to Rabbinical authorities the Torah (Pentateuch or first five books of the bible) is water, but the Talmud, ah, that is the wine. The Talmud clearly states that the gentile or goyim is a beast, a non human, and that woman does not exist outside her husband. Both the Jewish woman and the gentile exist only to serve the male Jew. According to the Talmud, it is not a crime or sin to murder, rob, betray, or harm a gentile (we are merely beasts). A jew could not enslave another Jew, hence only gentiles were slaves.... If one considers Judaism in its totality and realizes that the Bible is derived from the Talmud, then there is no contradiction, only a lack of proper definition. Christ stated that he did not come to overthrow the law (tradition), but to fulfill it. He did not repudiate the Talmud, but acted according to its precepts when he spurned the Samaritan women. One must take everything in context.

Editor's response to Letter #38 (Part a)

Dear WTF. You stated, "2 Cor. 3:17 does not contradict references to slaves....," but proves the opposite. Remember, we aren't discussing the Talmud, which is little more than a compilation of Jewish writings and commentaries on the Pentateuch. The Talmud is not scriptural, is not alleged to be the word of God, and can't be used to rewrite the Bible. What is water and what is wine doesn't matter. It's what is allegedly

inspired that counts. But even if it were "divinely inspired", you have only shown that the Talmud also supports slavery and subservience of women. Not only many biblical verses, but the Talmud as well, contradicts 2 Cor. 3:17. You don't really support SBJ's position; you have only broadened the context and provided additional evidence to corroborate the Aug. 1983 commentary. The spirit of God in the Talmud, if indeed, the Talmud represents God's spirit, is certainly not one of liberty. Secondly, could you tell me where Jesus spurned some Samaritan women? Doesn't the fourth chapter of John show the opposite? And finally, I noticed you put the word "most" in front of "Holy Bible" when it wasn't needed. Am I wrong in detecting Christian proclivities?

Letter #38 concludes (Part b)

The rulers that killed Jesus were the Sanhedrin (Seventy), which were rulers over the Jews. Pilate recognized their authority and acceded to it for fear of a revolt.

Editor's Response to Letter #38 (Part b)

I hope you accept my comments in the spirit intended, but could you cite chapter and verse for the following. What verses say: (a) the Sanhedrin killed Jesus, (b) the Sanhedrin ruled the Jews, (c) and Pilate recognized its authority? The Sanhedrin receives a lot of attention in literature. But why? The word "Sanhedrin" never appears once in the KJ Bible. The word "seventy" only appears three times in the N.T. and none has anything to do with rulers. One pertains to the number of times a person should forgive others, and the remainder pertain to some disciples being sent out. Perhaps the Sanhedrin was responsible, but the Bible is silent.

Letter from MJ of Ferndale, Washington (Part a)

Dennis

. I wish to make a few comments on the Nov. issue dealing with the Flood. First you quoted Gen. 8:4 and then commented, "How could the ark have rested upon several mountains at once?" I personally had no problem with that verse--as many elements of our modern language use identical usage. If you interpret many of our statements today, literally, word for word, you would have a difficulty functioning normally. As children, we would often interpret our brothers' and sisters' comments and/or commands literally-- word for word--to render their statements useless, or create nonsense out of commonly used phrases. Please let's leave that method to pranksters and comedians.

Editor's Response to Letter #39 (part a)

Dear MJ. Gen. 8:4 says "mountains", plural, not "mountain", singular. Translators should have left off the "s" if only one mountain was intended. You're speaking as if the "s" didn't exist. Apologists repeatedly say one should read the Bible as one reads a newspaper, which is what I'm doing. I assume the book says what it means and means what it says. If you are going to change a plural to a singular because it sounds absurd, are you going to deny the miracles of the Bible because they are absurd also? The Bible says a woman turned into a pillar of salt, for example. Is that any more or less incredible than a ship landing on several mountains at once? If you are going to rewrite an incident because it makes no sense, then you might as well rewrite others. And, of course, if you rewrite the Bible's miracles in such a manner as to make them

appear natural, then you will "gut" the Book in the process. The Resurrection will vanish; Jesus will no longer be God and man; Peter and Paul will not have resurrected anyone; God will not have carved the Ten Commandments in stone, and Jesus will not have had miraculous powers. In essence, if you are going to start rewriting the text because verses don't make sense, you face the problem of deciding where this will end, and what's left when you are through.

Letter #39 continues (Part b)

I wish also to respond to another comment you made. You stated, "Killing animals of which only two remain after the Flood seems absurd." Note, they only sacrificed "clean creatures," and in Gen. 7:2, God instructed Noah to take seven each of the "Clean beasts," and two each of unclean beasts.... Also I'd like to point out that within a year's time many animals could have been actively reproducing within the ark during the flood.

Editor's Response to Letter #39 (Part b)

I received your letter on November 8th, MJ. The December commentary addressed the first part of your question, i.e., the Bible can't agree on how many animals entered the Ark, and no law delineating clean from unclean animals existed at the time. Your second point is vitiated by the fact that in Gen. 8:17 God told Noah to take the animals off the Ark so that, "they may breed abundantly in the earth and be fruitful and multiply upon the earth." Why make this statement if they were already doing so on the Ark?

Letter #39 concludes (Part c)

I have a few other things to point out from past issues, but I am so busy.... Apparently I see a perspective you do not, as I was a devout and serious christian in my early childhood, but now a devout agnostic. It appears you never were a christian in the past (am I wrong?), and that puts you at a slight disadvantage. Keep up the good work though! We need more of you! I've underlined many of your statements with laughter; some of them are real killers! I just wish my christian relatives and friends would let me show them. I really thought by using their medium (the Bible) that there would be an open line of communication, but I was dead wrong! I nearly got thrown out on my ear! When they caught the drift of my intentions, they refused to read any more of the scriptures I had opened to and told me to close the book! I'm afraid many (a majority) of christians are like that, and it's a battle we can hardly win! Are you the only one working on this periodical? What is your circulation up to now? I have a lot more to say, but I must stop rattling on, as both our time is extremely limited. Again I wish to praise you for your efforts, and hopefully we can tie your achievements with others in related areas into one powerful light beacon, and alter the course of humanity from the gloomy prophecies of christianity....

Editor's concluding response to Letter #39 (Part c)

You are a thoughtful individual, MJ. Let me respond to your comments one at a time. You are correct. I never was a Christian in that I never accepted Jesus as a savior, but that's a decided advantage. I by-passed all the subtle inculcation that an outside observer notices more easily. In regard to your expectations about using "their

medium," I've often had the same experience. I've been told to leave Bible study sessions on several occasions. Biblicists not only want to close the Book, but close me out as well. We will win the struggle, however; don't worry. It will just take time. My wife handles the more mundane affairs of BE, such as record-keeping. Scores of people have subscribed so far.

Letter #40 MA of Tulsa, Oklahoma
See Acts 12:4 for the word Easter.

Editor's Response to Letter #40

In letter #32, December, 1983 issue, BAY stated the word "Easter" did not appear in the New Testament, and I agreed. I was using the NASB. I'm not sure what version BAY used. In any event, there really is no problem. Not one version in my library--the RSV, NASB, NIV, Modern Language, Living Bible, NAB, and the NWT--uses "Easter" in Acts 12:4. Only the KJV does.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Letter #41 from SS of Vienna, Virginia

(In Letter #19, Issue #7 SS stated there were human sacrifices in Leviticus, Judges, and 2 Samuel. The author of Letter #31, Issue #13 asked him to quote chapter and verse. The following is the reply of Ss--ed.) In Judges 11:29-40 Jephthah is forced to burn his daughter only as a sacrifice to God "according to his vow which he had vowed." (Judges 11:39). See also *Bible Handbook*, pp. 109-110 by G.W. Foote and W.P. Ball; *Asimov's Guide to the Bible*, Vol. I, pp. 246-247 for instance. The Jewish historian, Josephus, also reports the girl as having been burnt and not merely condemned to perpetual virginity, as some modern Fundamentalists have tried to argue. In 2 Sam. 21:1-9, David sent seven innocent men to their deaths "whom the Lord did choose" (2 Sam. 21:6) in order to appease God and end a three-year famine. In Lev. 27:28-29 human sacrifice is condoned by God, "No human being thus devoted (as an offering to God-SS) may be redeemed, but he shall be put to death" (NEB). In Gen. 22:2, 9-10 God commands Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. Other instances referring to the practice of human sacrifice include Jer. 7:30-31, Ezek. 20:25-26, Micah 6:7. All of this would seem contrary to the injunction in Ex. 20:31, "Thou shalt not kill"; but how can this be if the Bible is truly inerrant?....

Letter #42 from Dr. TSC of Brockport, New York

...I have one comment to make concerning one of the points you raised on the first page of Issue #11. I refer to point (c) which raises a criticism of Gen. 6:17. There you ask, "Yet, how would a flood destroy sea animals such as...." The fact is, however, that if there had been such a flood--one supposedly involving enough water to cover all but the highest mountains--the amount of water required would greatly dilute the salinity of the seas. Sea animals are in isotonic balance with their saltwater environment. Hence, a greatly reduced salt concentration in the environment would, through osmosis, cause them to die. Which means, of course, that if the story of Noah and the ark were true, Noah's task would be even more impossible--since, in that case, he would have to take ocean animals (which are very numerous and diversified,

requiring extremely varied conditions such as tremendous or slight pressures and depths) aboard the ark, as well as the land animals. Keep up the good work.

Letter #43 from SK of Tucson, Arizona

Dear Dennis, I'm an atheist and I'd like to make a comment on a statement on page 3 of your Aug. 1983 issue. In the article "Coping with Apologists", the third approach listed was to mention the sick, perverted aspects of the bible, and you said that a logical response from apologist would be, "That's life, Friend. The Bible deals with the real world." Frankly, I think that this would be a logical response if all the rotten things in the bible were done by the "villians" of the bible, such as the Babylonians, the idol-worshippers, etc. But I think that what's so insidious about the bible isn't the fact that evil is mentioned and discussed, but that it's the heroes and role-models of the bible that do the evil! It wasn't one of the perverts of Sodom who had sex with his daughters, but Lot, who had just fled Sodom because he was the godly, upright antithesis of what went on in Sodom. It wasn't a leader of the Babylonian army who told his soldiers to kill everyone but the young virgins and to keep them for themselves, but it was the most exalted character of the O.T., Moses. These are just examples.... If all the bible did was "deal with" these things and call them "evil," that would be one thing. But to have the "good guys" of the bible do them, and usually not be punished or labeled "evil" for them...is quite different.

Editor's Response to Letter #43

The commentary in Jan. 1984 issue substantiates your position. This is the reason biblicists would rather concentrate on N.T. figures.

Letter #44 from VG of McCalla, Alabama

Almost seven years ago I was ordained as a deacon at a local Baptist church after "going through the motions". I found myself engaged in heated debate concerning and defending the inerrancy of the Bible. After coming to grips with the fact that I really wasn't sure the Bible was inerrant, I began a self-study of the subject. In one evening I found a dozen "problem passages" that troubled me at the time. Since my ordination, I have restructured my thinking and have come to the conclusions that are not popular with those here in the Bible-belt. Thanks for your efforts and research, it is greatly appreciated and needed.

Letter #45 from FAW of Eufala, Oklahoma

Dear Dennis

.... I might say I was raised as a missionary child in north India before independence. Have never been able to personalize Christianity tho have gone thru routine church membership. Any uplift I've needed has been thru church music in which I've been a lifelong active participant as choir member/director. For many years in San Diego in mainline churches I was able to sing without confrontation, but a recent 1980 move to this fundamentalist area has brought close beliefs in/with which I cannot agree and I'm examing things much more actively than ever before.

Letter #46 FS of San Rapael, California

Dear DM/BE

.... I appreciate receiving your free issue, and also your attempt to add some critical thinking to an uncritical field. It may be a contradiction in terms to bring rationality to bible study, but what you are doing may be helpful even if it proves that point. When you indicate biblical support for slavery and oppression of women, you help those who already have some critical sense to advance further in their knowledge; but when you try to use the bible in order to contradict the bible, I believe you are on shakier ground....

Editor's Response to Letter #46

Dear FS. Your letter is praiseworthy, although a couple of points should be addressed. First, I believe you can bring rationality to the study of any subject, including the Bible. Mythology, folklore, mysticism, superstition, and fairy tales can all be studied in a reasonable manner. The matter discussed need not be sensible in order for the analysis to be rational. Secondly, you doubt the Bible can be used to contradict itself. Quite the contrary, what source would you use to disprove the Bible? Would you marshal a mass of scientific data? Would you discount miracles as childish nonsense? Would you belittle the entire book as little more than a fairy tale worthy of immature minds? The problem with these is that most people who put credence in the Bible are going to respond, "I don't care what evidence, proofs, or logic you muster; if it contradicts the biblical teachings, then it's wrong." The best way to cope with such mentality is to show that not external evidence, but internal data as well, says the Bible is in error. When one part of the Book says another part is false, that's a problem even the staunchest defender finds unsettling. It's one thing for science to say the Bible is fallacious; it's quite another for the Bible, itself, to say so.

Letter #47 from JG of Cloverdale, New York

Dear Dennis

.... Keep punching. I have one question: In Jan. 1984 issue, you said Moses blasphemed by saying he was greater than Jesus. How could he say this since Jesus lived hundreds of years after Moses?

Editor's Response to Letter #47

Good question, JG. It's the kind of query we like--relevant, significant, material, and directly applicable to the Bible's validity. As you probably know, apologists allege Moses wrote the first five books of the O.T. The following statement is near the end of the fifth book: "There has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face." (Deut. 34:10 RSV).

Issue No. 15

March 1984

COMMENTARY

The Trinity--The Trinitarian belief that God is Unity, subsisting in three persons: The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost--all three are one God, equal in power and glory--represents one of the most incredible, albeit crucial conceptions in all of Christendom. Many observers throughout history have stressed the irrational involved.

- "One may say with one's lips: 'I believe that God is one, and also three'--but no one can believe it, because the words have no sense." (*What is Religion* by Leo Tolstoy).
- "When we shall have done away with the incomprehensible jargon of the Trinitarian arithmetic, that three are one, and one is three;...." (*Jefferson's Works*, Vol. 7, p. 210 by H.A. Washington).
- "It is too late in the day for men of sincerity to pretend they believe in the Platonic mysticism that three are one, and one is three; yet that the one is not three, and the three are not one;...." (*Jefferson's Works*, Vol. 6, p. 192 by H.A. Washington).

In discussions with biblicists I've often asked the question, "When Jesus said on the Cross, 'Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do' (Luke 23:34), to whom was he speaking?" To which they usually replied, "God." To this I responded, "But I thought he was God." To which they usually reply, "No, he is the son God." "In other words, we have two Gods," I said. "No," they replied, "just one God but three persons." Now let's pause and think, my friend, "I said, "we have one being, one source of intelligence--God--speaking to another being, another source of intelligence, which is also God; and yet, we are to believe there is only one God." This simple dialogue highlights quite well the incongruity of the problem. Clearly, logic and reason have nothing to do with understanding the Trinity. There is little rhyme or reason involved and, indeed many apologists will admit as much, since any other approach would border on naivete. Many don't even attempt a rational defense. They merely assert that, although opposed to sensible thought, it's true, nevertheless. "It's a mystery." That's the common refrain.

Apologetic beliefs that violate the rules on logic and common sense are often described as mysteries, unfathomable by the human mind. Faith, which H.L. Mencken defined as "an illogical belief in the occurrence of the improbable", is mandatory. As one defender candidly stated, "The Trinity, that is three persons in one, is a mystery which is revealed by Bible, but cannot be understood by the human mind....this is one of those things which must be accepted by faith, even though it cannot be reasoned out. The Trinity cannot be explained but it must be believed." (*508 Answers to Bible Questions*, p. 168 by M. R. DeHaan). Thomas Jefferson summarized the situation quite well by stating,

"No historical fact is better established, than that the doctrine of one God, pure and uncompounded, was that of the early ages of Christianity;.... The hocus-pocus phantasm of a God like another Cerberus, with one body and three heads, had its birth and growth in the blood of thousand and thousands of martyrs.... In fact, the Athanasian paradox that one is three, and three but one, is so incomprehensible to the human mind, that no candid man can say he has any idea of it, and how can he believe

what presents no idea? He who thinks he does, only deceives himself. He proves, also, that man, once surrendering his reason, has no remaining guard against absurdities the most monstrous,... With such persons, gullability, which they call faith, takes the helm from the hand of reason, and the mind becomes a wreck." (*Jefferson's Works*, Vol. 7, p. 269-70 by H.A. Washington).

NO doubt many apologists agreed with Ingersoll when he said, "In order to be saved it is necessary to believe this. What a blessing that we do not have to understand it. (*Ingersoll's Works*, Vol.1, p. 496) Or to quote Thomas Paine, "Where is the evidence that the person called Jesus Christ is the begotten Son of God? The case admits not of evidence either to our senses or our mental faculties; neither has God given to man any talent by which such a thing is comprehensible." (*The Life and Works of Thomas Paine*, Vol. 9, p. 294).

Opposition to the Trinity comes not only from outside the Bible but from within as well. One only need not rely upon external critics alone. The Bible is replete with statements to the effect that God is a Unity; he is one: there is none like him. The following are a few that could be mentioned: "...the Lord he is God; there is none else beside him" (Deut. 4:35); "...for there is none like thee, neither is there any god beside thee" (2 Sam. 7:22); "I am God and there is none like me" (Isa. 46:9). Apparently Jesus and the Holy Ghost are like him, since they are God also. (See also: Deut. 4:39, 6:4, Mark 12:29, Isa. 45:5-6, 1 Chron. 17:20, 1 Sam. 2:2 and Kings 8:60). Despite these verses and many others, apologists continue to rely upon four major verses to justify their beliefs in the Trinity: 1 Peter 1:2, the forged 1 John 5:7(...for there are three that bear record in heaven), 2 Cor.13:14, and Matt. 28:19 (baptising them in the name of the Father, Son, and of the Holy Ghost). If these four verses justify belief in the Trinity, then they contradict many other comments that do not. If they do not justify belief in the Trinity, then there is little else of real substance to rely upon, and the issue becomes moot. Incidentally, the word "Trinity" appears nowhere in the Bible.

Besides numerous statements asserting the unity, the indivisibility of God, the Bible also provides additional information in opposition to the Trinity. First, Gen. 6:3 states God would never become flesh. Jews interpret the verse as saying, "My spirit shall never more abide in man, since he too is flesh." But, if Jesus was God and man simultaneously, then divinity would have rested in a man, i.e., flesh. Second, 2 Chron. 6:18 and 1 Kings 8:27 state God (i.e. Jesus) would never dwell on earth. Third, although called God by others, Jesus never directly said he was God. According to one Christian denomination called a cult, Satan, too, was called God (2 Cor. 4:4). Fourth, if the Holy Ghost was a person, as Trinitarians allege, then how could he have filled 120 people simultaneously (acts 2)? Fifth, how could the Son, who is God eternal, be equal in age to the Father who is God Eternal? By definition, a son must be younger than the father; in which case they can't be equal. Sixth, how could Jesus be God, i.e. eternal, when several verses show he was created at a particular point in time: Rev. 3:14, Prov. 8:22-23 RSV, Col. 1:15 RSV. And lastly, if Jesus and the Holy Ghost are God, if the Trinity is valid, then Jesus' relationship to Mary is utterly paradoxical:

- (1) If he was born of Mary, she was his mother;
- (2) She "being with child by the Holy Ghost," and Father, Son and Holy Ghost being one, she was his wife;
- (3) God, being the Father of all mankind, and God and Christ being one, she was his daughter;
- (4) She, being the daughter of God, and Jesus being the Son of God, she was his sister.

Ingersoll probably summarized the Trinitarian enigma as well as anyone when he said,

Christ, according to the faith, is the second person in the Trinity, the Father being the first and the Holy Ghost third. Each of these persons is God. Christ is his own father and his own son. The Holy Ghost is neither father nor son, but both. The son was begotten by the father, but existed before he was begotten--just the same before as after. Christ is just as old as his father, and the father is just as young as his son. The Holy Ghost proceeded from the Father and Son, but was equal to the Father and Son before he proceeded, that is to say, before he existed, but he is of the same age as the other two. So it is declared that the Father is God, and the Son and the Holy Ghost God, and these three Gods make one God. According to the celestial multiplication table, once one is three, and three time one is one, and according to heavenly subtraction if we take two from three, three are left. The addition is equally peculiar: if we add two to one we have but one. Each one equal to himself and to the other two. Nothing ever was, nothing ever can be more perfectly idiotic and absurd than the dogma of the Trinity." (*Ingersoll's Works*, Vol. 4, p. 266-67).

Why, then, in light of the above, do biblicists cling so stubbornly to a belief that is so irrational as to all but destroy their intellectual credibility? Why do they insist that Jesus is both fully man in every sense of the word and fully God in every sense of the word? Why? Because the alternative is even worse. They are trapped between a wall and a cliff. Unless Jesus is God and man simultaneously, all of the following problems have no solutions. To begin with the Bible repeatedly says that only God can be mankind's savior: "I, even I, am the Lord; and besides me there is no savior" (Isa. 43:11). (Also Hosea 3:4, Psalm 3:8, and Isa. 43:3). Obviously Jesus must be God if he is to save mankind, since no mere mortal can fulfill that role. If Jesus is not God and man simultaneously, then he is no more divine than Mohammed or any other religious figure. His death could not be the stepping stone to salvation for everyone.

But even more importantly, the Trinity provides the only escape available for the tremendously large number of contradicting statements made by Jesus himself with respect to his nature and capabilities. The trinity is Christianity's "Great Backdoor". On several occasions Jesus equated himself with God, although he never directly said he was God:

- (a) "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30);
- (b) "...he that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 17:22);
- (c) "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the word was God" (John 1:1). (See also: John 10:38, 14:9-11, 17:11, 21-23, Col. 2:9)

Yet, a far larger number of statements clearly shows Jesus did not equate himself with God, in which case he couldn't be mankind's savior:

- (a) "Why callest me good? There is none good but one, that is God" Matt. 19:17);
- (b) "for my Father is greater than I" (John 14:28);
- (c) "My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me" (John 7:16);
- (d) "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46);
- (e) "Who has gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God" (1 Peter 3:22); (See also: Mark 13:32, 1 cor. 11:3, John 5:19, 20:17, Matt. 26:39 and many others).

Biblical supporters use the escape mechanism rather freely by alleging the former comments were made by Jesus-the-God; while the latter were made by Jesus-the-man. So, depending on the dictates of expediency, the inconsistent comments by Jesus can be reconciled. Without the Trinity, Jesus would appear to be a hopelessly confused young man, more sick than savior. The Trinity also provides the only means of escape from such imbroglios as Ingersoll's earlier comment on celestial arithmetic and Mary's confusing relationship to Jesus.

But even if the Trinity existed, and even if it provided a satisfactory resolution to a myriad of dilemmas, there are several problems that lie beyond even its purview. First, the question would remain of who or what died on the cross. Was it Jesus-the-man or Jesus-the-God? If Jesus-the-man died, then no one was saved, since the death of a man could not rescue anyone. If, on the other hand, Jesus-the-God died, then we have an impossibility. God can't die. He is eternal, as many verses show. So the question remains: Who died on the cross? Who or What made the sacrifice? As One Christian group correctly stated, "If Jesus were God, then during Jesus' death God was dead in the grave." But it had to be God or Jesus God that died, since only God can save mankind. Second, "Orthodoxy has always held that Jesus Christ was fully God and perfect man, and that these two natures were united in one person...." (*Answering Christianity's Most Puzzling Questions*, Vol. 2, p. 14 by Richard Sisson). But how could Jesus-the-man be sinless, since all men have sinned and come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23)? If Jesus is sinless, as many verses show (1 Peter 2:22, 1 John 3:3, 5, 7, 2 Cor. 5:12, Heb. 4:15, 7:26), then he wasn't human, for all have sinned; he was only God. And if he was only God, how could he say, "My Father is greater than I"? On the other hand, if these "sinless" verses only refer to Jesus-the-God, while Jesus-the-man did sin, then he needs salvation as much as anyone. Who died on the Cross to save him? And lastly, having an innocent individual suffer punishment on a cross in order to atone for acts of mankind makes no more sense than having all mankind suffer for the acts of one man--Adam. To use a simple example: If I robbed a bank and my father volunteered to serve my sentence, justice would not exist, even though he agreed. Punishing the innocent for the deeds of the guilty or accepting punishment of the innocent as atonement for the guilty's behavior, has nothing to do with justice, regardless of who agrees. It isn't even revenge, since the guilty are unscathed. It's wanting blood merely for the sake of blood. It's as if someone took my wife's life during the night and I immediately went out and shot the first passer-by.

"The absurdity of the doctrine known as 'The Fall of Man,' gave birth to that other absurdity known as 'The Atonement.' So that now it is insisted that, as we are rightfully charged with sin of someone else, we can rightfully be credited with the virtues of another." (*Ingersoll's Works*, Vol. 2, p. 370)

REVIEWS

Apologists often use verses other than those already discussed to substantiate biblical support for the Trinity. They are much weaker, however, due to the imprecision of that which is being discussed. For instance, writers McDowell and Steward use God's statements in Gen. 1:26 (Let us make in our image) and Gen. 3:22 (Behold, the man has become like one of us) to prove the Trinity. On page 71 in *Answers to Tough Questions* they state, "God's plural nature is alluded to here, for He could not be talking to angels in these instances, because angels could not help God create. The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ, not the angels, created all things (John 1:30, Col. 1:15)." Other apologists, however, reject this argument. For instance, in the *Encyclopedia of Biblical Difficulties* Gleason Archer states, "Who, then, constitutes the 'us' referred to in Gen. 3:22? Conceivably the three persons of the Trinity might be involved here, but more likely 'us' refers to the angels surrounding God's throne in heaven.... There are a few passages in the Old Testament where the angels are referred to as 'bene elohim' (sons of God), e.g. Job 1:6, 2:1, 38:7...." The Bible relates numerous instances in which angels assisted God and carried out assignments. God could have done the "making" while the angels merely assisted. The words are too vague, too nebulous, as are the phrases "our images" and "like one of us" to provide definite confirmation of the Trinity. One can only speculate as to whom "us" and "our" refer. The Bible provides no definite answer.

Turning from the Trinity, this month's review of books will conclude with an analysis of some interesting rationalization with respect to ethical dilemmas in the Bible. In the classic apologetic defense, *Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible*, John Haley constantly employed his favorite tactic--adding to the text--in clear violation of Rev. 22:18 ("If any man shall add unto these things, god shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book") to resolve problems. He freely used the very ploy which is repeatedly attributed to those exposing the Bible. His resolutions of several contradictions show as much.

- (1) Luke 6:37 says, "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged; condemn not, and you shall not be condemned," while John 7:24 says, "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgement." Are we or are we not to judge? Haley attempted to reconcile this contradiction by saying, "The text from Matthew forbids harsh, conscious judgement, but does not preclude the giving of judicial decisions, not the expression of our opinions in a proper manner (Ibid. page 284)." Yet, there is nothing whatever to prove only "harsh" punishment is forbidden. He made a distinction wholly unsupported by the text.
- (2) Prov. 22:15 says, "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him," while Prov. 27:27 says, "Though you pound a fool in a mortar with a pestle along with crushed grain, Yet his folly will not depart from him (NASB)." Are we or are we not to punish the foolish

child with a rod? Haley rationalized this dilemma by saying, " These passages refer to entirely different persons. 'foolishness,' in the first text, is the incipient waywardness which belongs, in a greater or lesser degree, to children, and may be corrected by suitable discipline. The 'fool' in the second text, is the grownup fool, whose folly is past cure (Ibid. p. 278)." Of course, nothing whatever justifies attributing the second text to adults only.

- (3) Exodus 20:17 says, "Thou shalt not covetanything that is thy neighbor's," while 1 Cor. 12:31 says, "Covet earnestly the best gifts." So, are we or are we not to covet? Haley "explains" this dilemma by saying, "covet" in the second text, "implies an earnest desire for that which is legitimately within our reach; in the first, it denotes an unlawful craving for that which properly belongs to another (Ibid. p. 249)." In truth, neither verses says anything about that which is "legitimately" within our reach. Exodus 20 says don't covet, period. It doesn't allow for exceptions. An "unlawful craving" isn't even mentioned. Haley adds to the text in violation of Rev. 22:18 by arbitrarily creating a wholly unjustified distinction. It would be nice from his perspective, and certainly a lot easier to defend, if the Bible did make such a distinction; but alas, it is nowhere to be found.

The Bible's propensity for absolutes is undoubtedly one of its greatest weaknesses. By not acknowledging exceptions, the Bible seriously undermines its credibility. "Black and white" describes far fewer situations than "shades of gray".

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #37 from KEN continues from Issue #14, Page 2 (Part c)

(In the Sept. 1983 commentary BE stated that the bat is a bird according to Lev. 11:13 & 19 and Deut. 14:11 and 18. In the following October issue KEN said he believed "bird" was a generic term in Leviticus and referred to any variety of flying creature. BE's response was that Lev. 11 listed 20 animals as fowls. "So there is no doubt that birds and only birds are being referred to." KEN continues--ed.) ...You insisted that because modern ornithology does not classify a bat as a "bird" or "fowl;" the classification in Lev. 11 is a clearcut error.... As far as I can tell, you based your conclusions on two assumptions. (1) In modern vernacular, a bird is a warm-blooded vertebrate having a body covered with feathers and forelimbs converted entirely to wings. (2) In the Leviticus passages, all the other examples of fowls cited were also birds in the modern sense. Thus, you conclude, a bat is not a bird in the Biblical sense either; the text is wrong. Both your assumptions are untenable. In the first case, authors and translators of the KJV had no conception of modern zoology and phylum classifications. Thus we cannot honestly assume they would use modern classification. Elementary logic will tell you that a set is not defined by a subset, even a majority subset. The fact that most of the "fowl" listed in Lev. 11 were birds in a modern ornithological sense does not imply they all must be. As an example, suppose you prepared a list of arachnids, and the list fell into the hands of someone who was not familiar with the term. This person examines the lists and notices that it contains 10 species of spider and a species of scorpion. May this person correctly assume you made a mistake, merely because most species on the list were web-builders, and one was not? No... The truth is, I simply don't know what the authors/translators of the

Pentateuch meant by "fowl." Any semanticists...will tell you that in cases of semantical uncertainty, the honest critic will give the text the benefit of the doubt. In effect, the text is innocent until proven guilty...

Editor's Response to Letter #37 (Part c)

All you have done, KEN, is repeated and refurbished the common apologetic defense that the Bible was not meant to be a scientific textbook, If so, then it should have avoided the subject. You made several noteworthy mistakes. First, whether or not they are operating by the rules of modern zoology is irrelevant. The fact is the Bible used the word "fowl" and listed 20 animals as members of this group. What does the last one listed--a bat--have in common with the other 19? The Bible must have had some meaning for the word "fowl"; otherwise, it wouldn't have used the term. And regardless of the meanings used, the bat could not have been included, unless many non-fowl were included and many birds were excluded. If the Bible defined a fowl as that which has the ability to fly, then millions of insects would have to be included, while the ostrich and kiwi would have to be excluded--highly inaccurate science. If the Bible defined a fowl or bird as that which has two legs, then many primates would have to be included--again, inaccurate science. The point is, regardless of the Bible's definition of fowl, the bat can't be listed with the other 19 in Leviticus 11. The first 19 only have characteristics which distinguish them from all other animals as long as the bat is omitted. The Bible must have had some kind of definition for the word "fowl", and no definition can have any scientific validity if the twenty listed in Lev. 11 are included together. Secondly, your analogy with respect to arachnids is inaccurate for several reasons:(1) A list of fowl, not arachnids, fell into our hands and we are familiar with the term "fowl." (2) Arachnids, are defined as 8-legged creatures, not web-builders; therefore scorpions can be correctly included. Fowl are defined as warm-blooded vertebrates with feathers and without mammary glands; therefore bats can't be included. To answer your question: If arachnids were defined as web-builders, one could assume you made a mistake. But they aren't. You admit that "most" (i.e. 19) of the fowl listed in Lev. 11 are birds in the modern ornithological sense.... Why try to rationalize the twentieth? (3) Your "elementary logic" with respect to subsets is inaccurate in that a set was not defined by a subset. Instead, a set, fowl, was employed to which all subsets had to conform. Although not directly defined by the Bible, the set had to have some kind of definition. And, as shown, there is no definition one could use that would make sense, if bats are included. Leviticus 11 is an example, not of poor science, but of **not** science. With hair, ears, fangs, and a preference for hanging upside-down, the bat doesn't even have the superficial appearance of a bird.

Letter #37 continues (Part d)

Why am I adamant about this? Because as I said earlier, I am basically on your side. I do not believe the Bible is an accurate historical, scientific or moral guide. I am evangelical about this and would like to convince others, particularly the fundamentalists, who have been the authors of insufferable intellectual and social damage. And I believe that one of the best ways to do this, as you point out in Issue #8 of BE, is to publicize the many errors, cruelties and contradictions in the Bible. But remember whom we are dealing with. The typical fundamentalist has his feet set in

concrete. Petty quibbles about the meanings of words like "fowl" or "turtle" will not impress him. Why waste your time? BE would be more effective if it avoided such picayune, equivocal issues--which fundamentalists and apologists simply regard as semantical gymnastics, and shrug off. BE should devote its pages to the more cutting contradictions, the major contradictions of doctrine and fact which fundamentalists cannot casually dismiss. There is no dearth of these, as you know.

Editor's response to Letter #37 (Part d)

The problem, KEN, lies with your phrase "petty quibbles". First, what is a petty quibble? One man's petty quibble is another man's major problem. Second, any investigation agency worth its name collects, stores, and uses every shred of evidence available. Watch lawyers in a courtroom, police on a case, or a forensic chemist in a lab and you'll learn what seeking after minutiae really involves. You can't ignore anything; it's all important. Imagine construction crews leaving out certain bricks in a building's wall because it seemed insignificant to the overall structure! If you want to fell a tree, you chop and chip, blow by blow. One powerful strike isn't enough. Third, who is going to separate the petty from the weighty? Not I. I'd rather present the data and let others decide. And lastly, the phrase "inerrant" means perfect. God's perfect Book can't have imperfections. How can a perfect being create an imperfect volume? Millions of people don't seem to understand the full import of this fact. If it isn't perfect, it isn't God's. And if it isn't God's, then it's man's. And if it's man's, it could easily have been written by people no better than our leaders of today.

Letter #37 concludes (Part e)

One of the first rules in psychology of debate is to court your opponents, to be as reasonable as you possibly can. Give them the benefit of the doubt at each turn, concede every questionable point on every questionable issue; don't split hairs, don't quibble over word meanings. And in spite of this, in the face of every concession, show them they are wrong. If BE used this approach, the effect could be devastating.

Editor's Response to the conclusion of Letter #37 (Part e)

Are you serious, KEN? Following your suggestion would bring devastation to the wrong party. Apologists have spent a great deal of time, money, and effort devising "plausible" answers to every point this publication has made. You don't concede anything out-of-hand. You make your opposition prove its case. I can see you have never been involved in labor negotiations, arms reductions talks, or writing draft resolutions at the United Nations. Participants often "quibble" for hours over one word. Remember the "shape-of-the-table" debate at the Paris Peace Talks on Vietnam.. If you are going to concede every questionable point, you might as well concede.

Issue No. 16

April, 1984

COMMENTARY

Ignored Teachings (Part One of a Three-Part Series)--For hundreds of years biblicists have been lecturing people on the importance of adhering to the Bible's teachings on ethics, manners, and morality. They quote Jesus and Paul profusely, with a liberal sprinkling of Old Testament moralisms. The problem with their approach lies not only in an oft-noted failure to practice what they preach, but an equally pronounced tendency to ignore what the Bible itself, preaches. Biblicists practice what can only be described as "selective morality". What they like, they expound; what they don't like, they ignore, even though the validity or strength of one is no less than that of the other. That which is palatable and acceptable is supposedly applicable to all; while that which is obnoxious, inconvenient, or self-denying is only applicable to those addressed 2,000 years ago. They enjoy quoting the Ten Commandments, the Sermon on the Mount, and some of Paul's preachings, for example, but don't pretend to heed other, equally valid, maxims. The following examples show the selectivity of apologetic morality.

First, a true follower of Jesus would have to be extremely poor--as poor as the proverbial churchmouse. The Bible makes this quite clear:

- (a) "...none of you can be my disciple unless he gives up everything he has" (Luke 14:33);
- (b) "If you want to be perfect, go and sell all you have and give the money to the poor and you will have riches in heaven" (Matt. 19:21);
- (c) "Sell your possessions and give alms" (Luke 12:33);
- (d) "But give what is in your cups and plates to the poor, and everything will be clean for you" (Luke 11:41);
- (e) "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt,... But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.... for where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Matt. 6:19-21);
- (f) "How hardly shall they that have riches enter to the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:23);
- (g) "Truly, I say to you, it will be hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Matt. 19:23-24);
- (h) A certain ruler told Jesus that he had obeyed all the commandments from his youth up. But, Jesus said, "Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me" (Luke 18:22, Mark 10:21),
- and (i) Paul said, "For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ" (Phil. 3:8 RSV)

Imagine Billy Graham, Oral Roberts, Jerry Falwell, Jimmy Swaggart, Rex Humbard, Robert Schuller, Herbert W. Armstrong and thousands of other wealthy religious leaders heeding such pronouncements! It's much easier, and far less painful, to rationalize away clear-cut statements than surrender great wealth because of Biblical injunctions. Paul said, "And having food and raiment let us be therewith content" (1 Tim. 6:8). The lavish personal wealth of these men and many others bears witness to

their avoidance of these teachings, as well as Luke 3:11, which says, "who has two coats, let him share with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise." One can only speculate as to the number of coats they have in their closets. Jesus said, "Give to him who asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away" (Matt. 5:42). Asking any of the previously-mentioned individuals or any Christian denomination for a sizable portion of his or its wealth would be an exercise in futility. How many biblicists attempt to obey the biblical precept which says, "and from him who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. Give to every one who begs from you; and of him who takes away your goods do not ask them again" (Luke 6:29-30 RSV)? They avoid Matt. 5:40, which says, "And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him also have thy cloak." Apologists don't mind quoting the prior verse (Matt. 5:39) about turning the other cheek, because it concerns attitudes and is not concrete; no direct physical denial is involved. Turning one's cheek is far less painful and tangible than turning in dollars. The former is more nebulous and subject to interpretation. Jesus commissioned his twelve disciples to, "provide neither gold nor silver, nor brass in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, not yet staves, for the workman is worthy of his meat" (Matt. 10:9-10). If these were the morally right procedures for the disciples of Christ 2,000 years ago, then they should have some relevance to his disciples of today. But the entourage and wealth accompanying any well-known evangelist on his periodic journeys highlights the inconsistency involved.

Early Christian groups even practiced a form of communal ownership of property. "And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods and parted them to all men, as every man had need" (Acts 2:44-45, also note Acts 4:34-37). Yet, except for a few isolated communities, today's biblicists preach the opposite.

In summary, it's not enough to avoid the accumulation of wealth; one must actively seek to eliminate whatever property may come into one's possession. (See also: Acts 20:35, Rom. 12:13, Col. 3:2, Matt. 6:24). In so far as wealth and property are concerned, Christian monks, ascetics, and some factions of the Amish, for example, are far closer to biblical teachings than any of the well-known clergymen or denominations of today. While engaged in dialogue with a minister several years ago, I noted that his Lincoln Continental parked nearby was wholly inconsistent with biblical tenets. After offering the usual apologetic rationalizations (e.g., I live a frugal life and the Bible does not require me to give away what I own), he denounced my motives and left. Neither of his excuses was accurate.

Second, a true follower of Jesus can neither divorce someone, (a) "So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder"(Matt. 19:6, Mark 10:9), nor marry someone who is divorced, (b) "whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery" (Matt. 5:32, 19:9, Luke 16:18). There is an exception to the former, however. If the spouse commits adultery, divorce is permissible: "Whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, causeth her to commit adultery" (Matt. 5:32). The Bible also says that anyone who obtains a divorce and marries another is an adulterer: "...whosoever shall

put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her" (Mark 10:11, Luke 16:18), which applies to women as well--Mark 10:12. In essence, according to Christ's teachings:

- (1) one can never obtain a divorce, except from an adulterous spouse;
- (2) one can never marry a divorced person, and
- (3) one who obtains a divorce and marries another is committing adultery.

One can only guess at the number of Christians who have ignored these maxims.

Third, current attempts to put prayer into schools run directly counter to biblical teachings. In one of his comments on the manner in which one should pray, Jesus said prayer should be a private affair devoid of public display: "And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by men. Truly, I say to you they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room (or closet-Ed.) and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret...." (Matt. 6:5-6 RSV). Biblicists violate this on a regular basis and have no intention of correcting their behavior.

It's interesting to note that Paul's maxim that men should pray with their heads uncovered is generally followed because removing one's hat isn't particularly inconvenient. It is easy to follow. "Any man who prays or prophecies with his head covered dishonors his head,...."(1 Cor. 11:4 RSV). On the other hand, Paul's tenet that women must keep their heads covered with a veil during prayer is quite inconvenient and, for this reason, has either been rationalized away or ignored, although it is no less binding than any other moral law in the New Testament: "...but any woman who prays or prophecies with her head unveiled dishonors her head.... For if a woman will not veil herself, then we should cut off her hair: but if it be disgraceful for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her wear a veil.... Judge for yourself; is it proper for a woman to pray to God with head uncovered?" (1 Cor. 11:5-13 RSV)?

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter # 38 from the American Atheist Center of Austin, Texas
(Near the end of Jan., 1984, BE was told by the American Atheist Center that it would be holding a convention in Lexington, Kentucky, in mid-April. We sent a letter to the AAC stating that we would not only like to attend but set up a booth to advertise and distribute BE. The following reply from Ms. O'Hair was received on February 15th--Ed.). Dennis McKinsey. Thank you for your inquiry. American Atheists feel it is reactionary to do battle on the grounds of the religious. The Bible needs to be thrown into the trash. Your continuing jousting with segments thereof gives authentication to that with which you do joust. One does NOT argue with one's nightmares. The exercise is as the French say, inutile. The Convention in Kentucky has no interest in this at all. Therefore, we will not authorize you to "set up a booth" to publicize and distribute copies of your publication, which drags Atheists back to the Bible--for no good reason. If you want to set up a booth, anywhere, you will need to pay your own

way. You will not be permitted to use the facilities for which we have paid. We will not distribute your literature, or give it a place on our book stands. There is no personal or other animosity in this position which we take with respect to your BIBLICAL ERRANCY. There are tactics one uses in a battle and we decline to use these tactics. They take away from the positive thrust of Atheism and the programs which we are trying to use to give Atheists a voice in the culture, on their own, with their own *weltanshaung*--not in a religious framework. We have instituted an extensive educational program to wean Atheists away, as fast as we can, from that which you promote: a return to the Bible. Enclosed is a \$6 check for a subscription to your letter, which will be filed in the American Atheist Library and Archives, Inc. here. Advise cost of back issues and if they have been bound. We keep all Atheist publications on file, no matter what the nature.

Editor's Response to Letter #38 which was mailed earlier to the AAC.

Madalyn Murray O'Hair,

We appreciate your prompt answer to our inquiry but are disappointed, indeed, surprised by the tenor of your response. BIBLICAL ERRANCY provides a reasoned, well-researched reply to claims of biblical infallibility and in no way could it be construed as "dragging Atheists back to the bible." This publication has been accused of many things, but no one has ever implied, much less stated, as much. You said the Bible "needs to be thrown in the trash." Unfortunately, something must first show people why this should be done. Merely asserting as much is not sufficient. BE provides an itemized refutation of the Bible's alleged "validity" and covers virtually every significant concept in the Book. Your belief that "continued jousting with segments thereof gives authentication to that with which you do joust" ignores the fact that there is little substance with which BE does not joust. Read all the back issues as well as those to come and you'll find little left worthy of authentication. Why would millions of people come to atheism when they feel they already have the truth? Before someone is going to adopt another philosophy, he must first be shown the falsity of that which he already possesses. You are saying "come to me or leave religion and the Bible" when those addressed have never been shown why their current beliefs are erroneous.

I've been to atheist meetings before and found that many of those attending are not really atheists in the true sense of the term. They aren't as radical as they think they are and have not left the Bible or religion to the degree they think they have. Their conversations reveal subtle indoctrinations from earlier years, and their attitudes toward biblical preaching represent a wide spectrum. I've learned from experience to be wary of any letter to BE that starts with, "I used to be a Bible-believing Christian, but I now reject the Book as nonsensical." Many are much more under the Book's influence than they realize, but support atheism for a wide variety of personal reasons. BE seeks to reach those with doubts, to reach those who feel the anti-religious viewpoint has noteworthy points, but the Bible, despite its faults, is still worthy of some credibility.

Our publications are not antithetical but complementary. BE provides a detailed explanation of why beliefs of the Bible's proponents are erroneous, and your

publication, as well as others of a rational perspective, provides a rational alternative. It's analogous to building a modern structure on a city street. Before the new building can be built, the old must be razed. You can't build until something destroys that which occupies the space desired. BE seeks a mutually agreeable relationship with all rational publications and organizations. For instance, we have been advertizing the Society of Evangelical Agnostics and Crusade Publications for several months because they have been kind enough to advertize BE.

To just ignore the Bible or act as if it did not exist, borders on the absurd. The Book and its followers exercise an enormously negative influence on society. I don't like a lot of governments and administrations in the world today, but I still have to deal with their nonsense. How are people going to combat a Book they know little about and are told to avoid at all costs, when its pernicious influence is everywhere? I don't fear the Book in the least, and am not reticent about confronting its supporters whenever possible. Indeed, I seek dialogue and debate. As long as Falwell's minions are given little reason to doubt that God and His word are on their side, the fierce battles over praying in the schools and the teaching of evolution, the legalizing of abortion, the taxing of church property, etc. will continue unabated. The Bible is the base from which all fundamentalist assaults upon social issues are launched.

As in World War II, bombing the opponents' home base, his source of strength and sustenance, is more effective than concentrating on his armies in the field. A BE booth at the Convention in Kentucky would aid both of us.

Letter #39 from ELR of Long Beach, California (Part a)

Dear Mr. McKinsey

....Enclosed find a check for \$14.25.... Obviously (by subscribing--ED.) I am not implying that I agree with everything in your publication. On the contrary, I find quite a few things in the issue I received that I would disagree with. From time to time I intend to comment on points I disagree with.... I think you are rendering a unique service; being unique, it should be as perfect as possible (if there were 20 or 30 publications of this kind, improving one of them would not be nearly as important.... On bottom of page 3 in the Dec. 1983 issue you say that the person who wrote to you about devoted Christians "forgot to put Mussolini, Franco, Hitler, Al Capone, George Lincoln Rockwell, KKK leaders, and other great minds on the list." To say the least, your comment is ludicrous and outrageous. Hitler was no Christian by any stretch of the imagination (let alone "a devoted" one).... If Mussolini was a Christian, he successfully kept it a secret.... He was utterly ignorant about religion...disdainful toward the humanizing influence of Christianity, a womanizer whose extramarital affairs.... I don't know too much about George Lincoln Rockwell, but it's hard to believe that he could have ignored Hitler's anti-Christian attitude.... Al Capone was a habitual criminal, an occupation hardly compatible with being a "devoted Christian." As to KKK leaders, they are semi-secret figures, so its hard to see why you assume that Christianity has some kind of meaningful influence on their lives.... So the only one on your list who can be proven to have been a Christian in any meaningful sense is Franco... but he was no monster. Whatever his faults were, he deserves credit for resisting Hitler's entreaties to join Germany in WWII.... It should not be forgotten that

Franco appointed a Prime Minister (Suarez) and provided for a successor to himself (King Jaun Carlos) who together led Spain back to democracy after the death of Franco....

Editor's Response to Letter #39 (Part a)

Dear ELR. Are you sure it's my views that are "ludicrous"? Let's see what Hitler, whom you deny is a Christian, said in this regard:

My feeling as a Christian points me to my Lord and Savior as a fighter. It points me to the man who, once lonely with only a few followers, recognized these Jews for what they were, and calling me to fight them, and who, so help me, was greatest not as a sufferer but as a fighter. With boundless love, as a Christian and as a man, I read the passages which relate how the Lord finally gathered His strength and made use of the whip in order to drive the usurers, the vipers, and cheats from the temple. Today 2,000 years later, I recognize with deep emotion Christ's tremendous fight for this world against the Jewish poison. I recognized this most profoundly by the fact that He had to shed his blood on the cross for his fight. As a Christian it is not my duty to permit myself to be cheated, but is my duty to be a champion of truth and of right.... As a Christian I owe something to my own people.... I am a veritable devil and not a Christian if I do not feel compassion and do not wage war, as our Lord did 2,000 years ago, against those who are pillaging and exploiting this poor people (the German people--Ed.).... Two thousand years ago a man was likewise denounced by this particular race which today is denouncing and blaspheming everywhere.... That man was dragged into court and they said then: He is arousing the people! So he also was "agitating." And against whom? Against "God," they cried. Yes indeed he was agitating against the "god" of the Jews, for that "god" is money. (Munich, April 12, 1922; *Voelkische Beobachter*, April 22, 1922).

The National Government will preserve and defend those basic principles on which our nation was built up. They regard Christianity as the foundation of our national morality and the family as a basis of national life. (Hitler to the German People: Feb. 1 1933).

I know that here and there the objection has been raised: Yes, but you have deserted Christianity. No, it is not we that have deserted Christianity, it is those who came before us who deserted Christianity.... National Socialism neither opposes the Church nor is it anti-religious, but on the contrary it stands on the ground of real Christianity. And we have no other desire than to be true to that position.... These are not anti-Christian, these are Christian principles. (Speech at Koblenz, Aug. 26, 1934).

Hitler was often asked why Nazis use the swastika and replied,

And when it is said to me as many have: How can you carry your heathenish symbol in the van of this struggle when the Christian Cross alone is called to lead it? To this I say: This symbol is not directed against the Christian Cross. On the contrary, it is the political manifestation of what the Christian Cross intends or must intend.... One should from the very beginnings preserve this Cross from any political contact until the structure of these political parties again becomes worthy of association with this symbol....(Munich, Oct. 25, 1930, *Voelkische Beobachter*, Oct. 28, 1930).

You stated Mussolini kept his Christian beliefs secret, was utterly ignorant about religion, and disdainful toward Christianity. Yet, at Ouchy he told the press:

My spirit is deeply religious. Religion is a formidable force which must be respected and defended. I am, therefore, against anti-clerical and atheistic democracy, which represents an old and useless toy. I maintain that Catholicism is a great spiritual power.... (*Mussolini As Revealed in his Political Speeches*, by Quaranta, p.XII). Moreover, how does being a womanizer prevent one from being a Christian? Beliefs, not deeds, make one a Christian.

As far as the Klan is concerned, their literature extols the Bible and Christ incessantly. Secrecy would no more prevent them from being Christians than it would exclude cardinals from being Christians because they choose the pope in secret.

You admit Franco was a Christian but deny he was a monster. You might want to tell that to the thousands of POW's who died before his firing squads and the thousands of political opponents and prisoners who resisted his dictatorship for nearly 40 years. Democracy returned to Spain despite Franco, not because of him. Those most conservative in matters of religion throughout the world are always the most conservative in matters of politics. And it would be difficult to find people more right-wing, more conservative, than Hitler, Mussolini, Franco and the Klan.

In any event, BE is not a political journal, and atrocious behavior does not prevent one from being a Christian. If bad behavior excluded people from being Christians, then no one would qualify. According to Paul we are all hopelessly corrupt: "For I know that in me dwelleth no good thing" (Rom. 7:18).

Letter #40 from DFS of Sandstone, Minnesota

Dear Mr. McKinsey.

I would like to thank you for all the back issues you sent me and for the current issue. BIBLICAL ERRANCY is one of the most interesting and informative publications I have ever read. I commend you for your excellent research and writing you have done. I am quite pleased with the modest investment I have made in your publication. Whatever it may lack in "slickness" it more than makes up in solid content....

Letter #41 from DFS of Sandstone, Minnesota

...a few days ago I got involved in a discussion with a few true-believers of the born again species, what I call Christfans. Your publication came in very handy.

Unfortunately, it seems that facts have no effect on them, not even from the Bible. The history of Christianity, which I am well researched in, they didn't believe either. They kept falling back on the same argument--which went something like this--The Bible has no contradictions, all secular material is wrong because its writers do not understand the Bible. You must believe in Jesus, and then the Holy Ghost will enter you and reveal all to you.... They said that one day the Holy Ghost would enter me and I'd understand and accept. How do you refute such nonsense? Arguing from the Bible does no good. I don't suppose you are out to convert true-believers, but in my position I need to come up with better arguments....

Editor's Response to Letter #41

Dear DFS. You have asked an important question. How do you reach fundamentalists, apologists, and biblicists? I've also experienced this impasse on numerous occasions. After many encounters I've decided to direct my energies, not toward fundamentalists and evangelicals alone, but toward any group of people who will listen. You must thrust your beliefs forward via the media and any other viable mechanism. People won't come to you; you must go to them. Apologists will, then, rise out of the audience to defend the Bible. That's one way to obtain dialogue and expose the Bible. I realized as much while appearing on the radio. When biblicists realize people are hearing about the weaknesses within the Bible, they no longer have the option of remaining silent or walking off. Some will feel compelled to respond.

In summary, one must first learn the Bible's fallacies and then speak to those who will listen. Combine with, or try to create, groups of like-minded individuals and seek to force your views into the limelight. Find a platform, get an audience, step before heterogeneous groups and you'll have an opportunity to debate, expose, and convert. Try to use group pressure rather than working alone. It's not easy to obtain return engagements on the radio, for example, when your host is sympathetic with the opposition. Group pressure and organization is the best answer. Critics must demand a hearing and speak out when denied a voice. A determined, well-researched, aggressive program is sorely needed. Relying upon anti-religious humor, punctuated with descriptions of nonsensical acts and beliefs of religious devotees, and concluding with a well-written lecture on the importance of tolerance and separating church from state is not sufficient.

Letter #42 from Novato, California

Dear Dennis. I am enclosing copies of two recent letters of mine which were printed in our local paper. I hope they meet with your approval, as they are based on your work.... I just finished phoning radio station KGO in San Francisco, which has a talk show host, Rev. Tom Hunter, paid by the station to talk about religion.... I was going to mention how the Bible also supported forced labor, but was cut short before I had a chance. It would certainly be great if KGO would give equal time to someone with your knowledge to counter what Rev. Hunter has to say....

Editor's Response to Letter #42

Dear FM. You are to be commended. You tried to go within the Bible and challenge an apologist on his own ground. You didn't abandon the airways to the opposition. My presence is not really needed. You are on the scene and can do a lot yourself. Gather your data, marshal your arguments, read BE, Joseph Wheless, John Remsburg, Thomas Paine, Robert Ingersoll and the Bible and demand equal time. If you feel uncomfortable in this role, then find someone you can get support, or devise an alternative. Biblicists must be challenged when they proselytize, and be denied a privileged sanctuary to which they can retreat with impunity. As things stand, the Bible is virtually unopposed throughout most of the country. Many people don't even know there is another side. You'd be surprised at the number of people who defend the Bible with vehemence but are amazingly lacking in knowledge of its contents, and this includes some ministers. "The clergy know that I know that they know that they

do not know." (*Ingersoll's Works*, Vol. 2 p. 348). A lot of time and effort is needed, because a lot is at stake. Biblicists have been working relentlessly for decades.

Issue No. 17

May, 1984

COMMENTARY

Ignored Teachings (Part Two of a Three Part Series)--Last Month's Commentary noted several biblical teachings that are often ignored by Bible proponents. Many others also exist and can be divided into those which liberals ignore, those which conservatives ignore and those which both avoid. Although that which follows is, like the titles *liberal* and *conservative*, generally broad and gray on the edges, the underlying principles are valid.

The first category involves those tenets which many liberals ignore. One forbids men to have long hair ("Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?"--1 Cor. 11:14). Long-haired individuals are usually of a more liberal persuasion, although exceptions exist. One can't but wonder at the pictures and statues depicting Jesus as long-haired. Another tenet clearly prohibits women from being ministers or otherwise speaking in church ("Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak"--1 Cor. 14:34). It's difficult to see how Paul could support the current movement to ordain women. And a third tenet prohibits men and women from wearing each other's clothing ("The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord thy God"--Deut. 22:5). Until recent years pants were generally viewed in this country as a man's garment. One can debate what is long hair or man's clothing, but every group of Christians has had a definition, and liberals have nearly always been the first to deviate.

A second category involves those maxims which conservatives and fundamentalists are often the first to shun. Rightists are usually stronger advocates of military involvement and capital punishment than liberals and, thus, the first to ignore 1 Cor. 3:16-17, which says, "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's spirit dwells in you? If any one destroys God's temple, God will destroy him." Conservatives also practice repetitious and monotonous praying in violation of Matt. 6:7, which says, "But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking."

A final category encompasses those instructions which are ignored by liberals and conservatives alike: (a) Christians are not supposed to take their disputes before non-Christian courts or judges ("If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgement instead of before the saints?"--1 Cor. 6:1 NIV); (b) Christian women are supposed to dress discreetly ("...that women should adorn themselves modestly and sensibly in seemly apparel, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly attire"--1 Tim. 2:9 RSV; and "Let not yours be the outward adorning of braiding of hair, decoration of gold, and wearing of fine clothing"--1 Peter 3:3).

Violations of these rules are too numerous to mention. Within the final category lie several teachings which are not routinely violated by all concerned but would be difficult to follow in any event.

- (a) Biblicists are not to judge others ("Judge not, that ye be not judged"--Matt. 7:1 and "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged, condemn not and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven"--Luke 6:37), despite the fact that judges, juries, voters, employers, teachers, etc. are constantly judging others.
- (b) Believers are supposed to hate their parents when they follow Jesus ("If any man come to me, and not hate his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sister, yet, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple"-- Luke 14:26).
- (c) They are not to oppose evil ("But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also"-- Matt. 5:39). If this were followed one might just as well abolish law enforcement.
- (d) Believers are not to use violence ("Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword"--Matt. 26:52). The degree to which Christians have ignored this maxim would fill volumes.
- (e) Biblicists are not allowed to call anyone "father" ("And call no man your father upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven"--Matt. 23:9). Not only is this rule ignored, but Catholicism uses "father" as a specific title.
- (f) Christians are not supposed to plan or prepare. God will provide ("Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or that ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on.... Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?"--Matt. 6:25-34 and Luke 12:22-31 inclusive).
- (g) Lastly, Jesus, who clearly is of greater importance than Paul, said the Old Law was to remain in force until heaven and earth passed away and all is accomplished ("For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven"--Matt. 5:18-19 RSV). Heaven and earth still exist and many prophecies are not yet fulfilled. Consequently, biblicists should still be following the Old Law. More will be said in next month's final comments on **Ignored Teachings**.

Testing the Bible--One of great weaknesses of the Bible lies in the fact that it contains tangible mechanisms by which to refute its truthfulness. Within its pages are verses which can be used to test the book's validity. They can be generally grouped under two broad headings--those involving tremendous powers given to believers and those involving powers attendant to prayer and requests. The most prominent verses within the first category are Mark 16:17-18, which says, "And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new

tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them: they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover." Many true believers have handled deadly snakes and drunk deadly poisons only to find the Bible is both erroneous and dangerous. Courts in Illinois, Tennessee, and elsewhere have repeatedly stopped practices of this nature because of the threat to life. Ask believers to drink poison or handle deadly snakes and one will quickly realize the extent to which even they do not take the book seriously. Mark 16:17-18 clearly states what they can do if they believe. Put them to the test, however, and you will witness a lot of rationalizing.

Other verses within the first category promise unbelievable powers to those with faith: "If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible to you"--Matt. 17:20 and "If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamore tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you"--Luke 17:6. Also note Matt. 21:21. Yet, despite promises of tremendous strength, those with the strongest faith are often the weakest, the most helpless individuals in society. They often resort to faith because all else has failed.

The second category involves verses which give unlimited powers to those who pray and ask God for assistance. Among these are comments as:

- (a) "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened"--Matt. 7:7-8, Luke 11:9-10;
- (b) "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you"--John 16:23;
- (c) "And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive"Matt. 21:22.

Additional verses are: John 14:12-14, John 3:22, Mark 11:23-24, and James 5:15. In order to counteract the patent inaccuracy of these premises, apologists seek modification through James 4:3 and 1 John 5:14. The former says, "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask remiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts." In other words, the reason the prayers of the sick, the old, the infirm, the afflicted, etc. have not been answered is because they were based on lust, greed and other selfish motives. It's hard to believe even hardened apologists really believe this. On the other hand, 1 John 5:14 ("...if we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us") represents a more subtle ploy. Prayers are not answered because they do not comply with God's will. The problems with this explanation are:

- (a) the earlier verses said nothing about God's will or the need to fulfill His desires, and
- (b) judging from many prayers which people feel were answered, one can't help but question God's morality. Praying, for example, that one's relative will die in

order to inherit his wealth and having your wish materialize, does not speak well for God.

REVIEWS

Apologist Gleason Archer alleges that the previously-mentioned verses in opposition to war and capital punishment--1 Cor. 3:16-17--and opposed to violence--Matt. 26:52--"...pertain to the personal conduct of the Christian...But they have very little bearing on the duty of the state to preserve law and order and to protect the rights of all its citizens." (*Encyclopedia of Biblical Difficulties*, p. 341). A number of problems are associated with this explanation. Where do those verses say or even imply that they do not pertain to the state? Secondly, what is the state but a composition of individuals? Individuals compose the military and law enforcement. Each soldier does his own killing or assists others. Someone has to pull the switch on the convict. Nowhere do these verses say they are exonerated because they acted for the government. Moreover, even if Archer's distinction were valid, separating personal conduct from that which arose out of service to the state would be arbitrary. What is a government? If, for example, a military clique seized control and ordered A to take B's life, could A ignore 1 Cor. 3:16-17 and Matt. 26:25? On page 341 Archer says, "If Matthew 5:39 (Don't oppose evil) applied to the state and to human government, then the principle of "Resist not evil" would mean the abolition of all law enforcement.... All society would immediately fall prey to the lawless and criminal elements in society, and the result would be anarchy. Nothing could have been further from Christ's mind...." How Archer knows the mind of Christ is never explained. But even more importantly, apologists should spend more time noting what a verse actually says, and less time devising an interpretation that fits what they feel it should say. Matt. 5:39 says, "resist not evil, but turn the other cheek." Where do the words reveal an intent other than that stated? Because verses aren't applicable to today's society does not mean they weren't relevant when made.

Apologist Carl Johnson also attempted to alter some previously-mentioned biblical commands that are regularly ignored by Christians. He reconciled the prohibition on judging others (Matt. 7:1) by saying, "the judging that is forbidden by Jesus is unlawful judging of others, which judges presumptuously, hypocritically, hastily, unjustly, unfairly, and unmercifully. We are not to pass judgment on the motives of others" (*So the Bible Is Full of Contradictions*, p. 62). In truth, the verse says nothing about "unlawful" judging or judging hastily, unjustly, unfairly, and unmercifully. By what rationale Johnson feels justified in adding these qualifiers, one can only surmise. The "motives of others" aren't even implied. And yet, apologists such as Johnson accuse critics of interpreting as they see fit. Johnson's explanation for Luke 14:26 (Hate thy father and mother, and wife and children) is that,

The word 'hate' is sometimes used in the Bible to mean to love less. In the Old Testament it was said of Jacob, 'he loved also Rachel more than Leah, and served with him (Laban--Ed.) yet seven other years (Gen. 29:30.' The next verse says, 'Leah was hated' which meant that Leah was loved less than Rachel. Christ certainly was not telling us to hate our families in the sense of detesting and loathing them (Ibid.p. 77).

The weakness in Johnson's analysis lies in the fact that when Gen. 29:30 says, "he loved also Rachel more than Leah," it does not necessarily mean he loved Leah at all. Nowhere does this verse say that he had any love whatever for Leah. Love less could easily mean no love whatever, in other words, hate. If I say I love Tom more than Ed, why must that I have some love for Ed? Even more importantly, if Leah was hated by Jacob, then how could he have had any degree of love for her? If he loved her at all, then he didn't really hate her. Johnson wants to have it both ways.

Apologists M.R. DeHaan's explanation for the prohibition in Matt. 23:9 (Call no man your father) is quite simple and direct. "In regard to Matt 23:9, the reference here is definitely to religious life, and I do not believe that applies to family life. To call anyone else father in the spiritual sense is to deny the spiritual Fatherhood of God. For this reason the Catholic Church is in error" (*508 Answers to Bible Questions*, p. 115). Where does the verse restrict itself to religious affairs? "I do not believe that it applies to family life" is no proof whatever. "I believe" is merely an opinion. One could just as easily say, "I believe it only applies to family life."

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #39 from ELF in Last Month's Issue #16 Continues (Part b)

Another rather important criticism I have to offer: you seem to be working with English translations of the Bible, without even trying to ascertain whether they are correct.... Your comments on "Thou shalt not kill" are a classic example. How can you make such a rash statement as "the verse said nothing about murder. It said, Thou shalt not kill"?...a thorough analysis of the known meanings of the word shows that the Hebrew verb used in "Thou shalt not kill" is a verb that would usually be best translated with "to murder," with secondary meaning "to massacre." On the other hand, the verb that was not used is the nearest Hebrew equivalent of "to kill." Of course, the authority of the KJV on scholarly issues like this is practically nil, and RSV frequently shows an extreme reluctance to depart from the KJV. Modern Bible translations discard the KJV reading of the verse not because doing so is expedient, but because not doing so would be supporting tradition against scholarship.

Editor's Response to Letter #39 (Part b)

Dear ELF.

Your disagreement is with Hebraic scholars who translated the KJV, the RSV, the Catholic New American Bible, the Jerusalem Bible, the Geneva Bible, and the Douay Version. They chose "kill" rather than "murder" and obviously did not agree with those who made your argument that "the Hebrew verb used in 'Thou shalt not kill' is a verb that would usually be best translated with 'to murder'." Your comment that "the RSV frequently shows an extreme reluctance to depart from the KJV" is heatedly denied by many fundamentalists. With a degree of truth, they have written extensively on the frequent willingness of RSV translators to depart from the KJV. Indeed, one would be hard-pressed to find a prominent translation more at odds with the KJV. To repeat what I said earlier, the use of "murder" rather than "kill" in newer versions such as the NASB and the NIV is based more on expediency than research. Translations of the Bible are not exempt from political considerations and current social conditions.

Letter #39 Continues (Part c)

Incidentally, if "kill" were the correct reading, your argument would still be a "non sequitur". Long before the times of Jesus, principles existed to resolve real or apparent conflicts of laws. One of these principles is "the more specific law overrides (i.e. provides an exception to) the more general." In this light, it becomes clear that war and the death penalty would be explicitly authorized exceptions to the rule "Thou shalt not kill." At risk of belaboring the obvious, I have to point out that Judeo-Christian tradition...was unanimous in interpreting this commandment in the same sense I explained above.

Editor's Response to Letter #39 (Part c)

You have gone outside the Bible for man-made rules to modify that which is contained within "God's Word." This is the kind of act fundamentalists attribute to liberals and modernists. Where does the Bible affirm the principle of modification you allege? Where does it state some of its specific laws override some which are more general? The Bible is renowned for dealing in absolutes. Secondly, what verses specifically state that war and the death penalty are to be viewed as valid exceptions to the commandment against killing? One might just as well say murder is also an exception because Moses killed an Egyptian and was later God's choice for leadership. Thirdly, you say that war and the death penalty are valid exceptions. Then, am I to assume under your hypothesis that unintentional killing and killings in self-defense are not valid exceptions? Why do you restrict it to just two? And lastly, how can you propound Judeo-Christian unanimity when so many scholars prefer "kill" to "murder"? Surely you aren't implying they don't know one from the other. Christian pacifists, Quakers, and other groups don't agree with your interpretation of Ex. 20:13, and certainly are not conducive to unanimity.

Letter #39 Continues (Part d)

I am very unhappy with your constantly calling the Bible a "book". The name "Bible" comes from the Greek "Biblia," which means "books" (in plural). Calling it a "book" is an invention of the biblicists who believe in the common divine authorship of all of these books.... I see no reason why people like you and I, who don't believe in the common divine ownership of the books, should follow the biblicists' terminology.

Editor's Response to Letter #39 (Part d)

Is this really significant, ELF? Most people know the Bible is a collection of books written over a 1,500 year period. What name do you prefer? What would you have me call the Bible? "The Books"? What should we call an anthology? I think you are reaching.

Letter #39 Concludes (Part e)

- (a) You say "if you are going to teach morality via the Bible, then a substantial portion of the entire book will have to be ignored or soft-pedalled." True, but not very meaningful. Whenever anybody teaches anything, some parts are emphasized, some are not.

- (b) You refer to the Bible's "denunciation of all opposition to oppressive rule". From this I imagine you must be working with a Protestant Bible. The two books of the Maccabees, found in the Catholic Bible, are certainly an epic of a freedom fight against oppressive power.
- (c) You ask, "Why adopt the Bible instead of the Koran, for instance".... I am afraid the question is rather meaningless. Well over one billion people have adopted the Bible as their guide, however much the degree of their loyalty to the Bible may vary.... The Bible is well established as a common source of beliefs, so we have to consider whether the enormous effort needed to change this fact appears warranted.
- (d) You ask, "do you really need a book to tell right from wrong?" You bet we do! Beginning with Plato and Aristotle, volumes have been written on ethics.... I have a Ph.D. with specialization in ethics....

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #39 (Part e)

- (a) When a "substantial portion" of an allegedly perfect book, indeed, "God's book," has to be ignored or soft-pedalled, my friend, that's meaningful. We aren't dealing with just another compilation. We are working with what millions believe is inspiration.
- (b) Yes, I'm working mostly with protestant versions of the Bible because those who believe in inerrancy and attempt to convince others of its validity are usually protestants. I'm aware of the Maccabean Revolt, but it's an isolated exception in a relatively secondary writings.
- (c) You are partial to the word "meaningless", ELF, which appropriately describes your answer to my query. Instead of answering my question by explaining why the Bible should be adopted instead of the Koran, you stated a billion people have adopted it and asked why we should go through the effort needed to change the situation. That's analogous to lynch-mob mentality. If the majority is for it, how can it be wrong?
- (d) Primitive peoples such as the American Indians have existed throughout the world for thousands of years without books on ethics and yet corrupt behavior--lying, stealing, cheating, raping, murdering, etc.--is all but unknown in their societies. The Indians' comment about invaders speaking with forked tongues was not without merit.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #43 from DB of Ontario, California

Dear Dennis.

BIBLICAL ERRANCY has been very helpful to me. I just subscribed last month, bought your back issues, and devoured them all. I find I don't tire of re-reading them either, especially when I need ammunition. I have passed your address on to many interested people.

Two observations. First, you mentioned that, never having been a Christian could be an advantage to your perspective. Perhaps you are right. Yet I feel that the fact that I was a good Christian for many years gives me a certain insight into how the religious

mind works. I am no longer a Christian. My conversion from faith was painful and slow, and I think I have learned some things about why religion is so powerful. Religious faith is an extremely powerful thing: It can dominate one's whole world view, one's total frame of mind, and one's ability to reason correctly. I was raised in a good Christian home. I had a positive and fulfilling Christian life. I felt fortunate to have been born into the truth. In fact, I decided it was worth a life commitment. I went to bible college, majored in Religion/Philosophy, became ordained to the ministry, spent two years in missionary work, a few more years in full-time evangelism, and went on to write Christian music which has been published by various Christian companies and is still reaching around the world. I used to be very proud of my work. I didn't feel oppressed or restricted. I felt a total freedom of life. I prayed daily, saw answers to prayer, saw people healed (once by my own pronouncement), was responsible for the conversion of literally hundreds of people to Jesus Christ, and motivated many young persons to consider full time Christian service. There is a large number of Christian workers who consider me largely instrumental in their encouragement to become ministers. I liked my Christian life. It had purpose, fun, travel, certain prestige, and most of all, the knowledge of being in the center of God's will, absolute truth.

But those days are gone. I have changed my mind. I can't tell the whole story here, but I can say that it was a difficult transformation. My whole frame of reality had to be restructured. The whole fabric of existence seemed to tear to shreds. Yet it was a very positive experience, motivated by reason and nothing else. I often grieve for my former life, for the comforts and reassurance of my prior beliefs. Most of my Christian friends and relatives (which are many) can't seem to grasp what has happened to me. They miss the point. They try to point their finger at some underlying reason why I should "stray". They suggest pride, disappointment, guilt, bitterness, attacks by Satan, and various other inventions. They never want to face the rational issues I raise, but instead want to find a way out through some "hidden" motivation on my part. I can't possibly be correct, they assume; so there must be some little sin hiding somewhere that, if we could find it, should be excised. But I understand them! I used to do the same thing! No amount of reasoning would have convinced me of the fallacy of Christianity, at the same time. Some people try to say I was never really a Christian or I would not have given up. If I had "really known God" personally, then it would be impossible to reject him. But I believe I did know him. And my life manifested the fruits of Christianity for 17 years. I wasn't the greatest Christian who ever lived, but I was no slouch. The Bible says by their fruits you shall know them. If I wasn't a Christian, then no one is.

One of the hardest things now is not to be taken seriously. Before, I was highly respected--now I am pitied. You would think that my experience would be central to the issues, yet I am not even put on trial--I am put on prayer lists. Well, not totally. There are a few Christian out there who are not afraid to face issues, but they are rare individuals. But my point is that I have put Christianity and Bible to the test, and they didn't hold up. Not without the props of blind faith.... I guess what I am trying to say that there is hope. If it happened to me, it can happen to others. It was hard, but I managed to reason my way up and out of a very strong faith, all the while resisting. If

I had been presented with your publication three years ago, I probably would not have read more than a couple of sentences before burning it. Now I keep them in a special file.

Issue No. 18

June, 1984

COMMENTARY

Ignored Teachings (Part Three of a Three Part Series)--One of the clearest expressions of selective morality by biblicists is shown in their approach to the Old Testament. They leap in and out of the Old Law like a porpoise in a ship's wake. If they like it, they quote it; if they don't, they won't. Among the scores of verses they enjoy and employ are those which teach the following:

- (a) Contact with mediums or wizards is forbidden ("Do not turn to mediums or wizards; do not seek them out to be defiled by them. I am the Lord your God"--Lev. 19:31 RSV, see also: Lev. 20:6, Deut. 18:10-12);
- (b) Infanticide is prohibited ("...for every abomination to the Lord, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods"--Deut. 12:31, see also: Lev. 18:21);
- (c) Neither sex should wear the other's clothing ("The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord thy God"--Deut. 22:5);
- (d) People are not to worship celestial bodies ("And beware lest you lift up your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, you be drawn away and worship them and serve them...."--Deut. 4:19 RSV);
- (e) People should give one-tenth of their income to the Lord, which biblicists equate with church ("And all the tithes of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's...And concerning the tithes of the herd, or of the flock, even of whatsoever passeth under the rod, the tenth shall be holy unto the Lord"--Lev. 27:30-32);
- (f) Homosexuality is corrupt ("Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with woman: it is abomination"--Lev. 18:22, see also Lev. 20:13 and Gen. 19:5);
- (g) Tattoos are anathema ("You shall not make any cuttings in your flesh on account of the dead or tattoo any marks upon you. I am the Lord"--Lev. 19:28);
- (h) Killers must be executed ("Who sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man"--Gen. 9:6, see also Num. 35:30-33, Ex. 21:12).

Biblicists also quote other parts of the Old Law, such as the Ten Commandments and scores of teachings outside the Pentateuch. They employ verses at will and even go so far as to twist some into saying that which is desired. For example, fundamentalists and evangelicals vigorously oppose abortion, but have been hard-pressed to find a biblical statement to corroborate their position. In their determination they have been forced to rely upon an exceedingly weak section stating that if two men are fighting and one injures a pregnant woman in the process, he shall repay her according to the degree of injury inflicted on her, not the fetus. "When men strive together, and hurt a woman with child, so that there is a miscarriage, and yet no harm follows, the one who hurt her shall be fined, according as the woman's husband shall lay upon; and he shall pay as the judges determine. If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth...."--Ex. 21:22-24

But despite all the above, the crucial question remains lingering in the background. What about the O.T. laws that are conveniently ignored, but of equal weight? Biblicists act as if many did not exist. The following examples are typical:

- (a) Money cannot be lent at interest to your brother, only to foreigners (Deut. 23:19-20);
- (b) Eating pork is forbidden (Deut. 14:8);
- (c) A man must marry and have relations with his dead brother's wife (Deut. 25:5-6);
- (d) A seducer must marry an unengaged virgin whom he seduces (Ex. 22:16-17);
- (e) A raped, unengaged virgin must marry her rapist and they can never divorce (Deut. 22:28-29);
- (f) Trials for adultery are to be by ordeal (Num. 5:28-29);
- (g) Eating rare meat with blood is forbidden (Lev. 19:26);
- (h) Beards can't be rounded (Lev. 19:27);
- (i) A newly married man can't go to war or be charged with business for one year (Deut. 24:5);
- (j) A guilty man can be beaten with as many as forty blows (Deut. 25:1-3);
- (k) A garment composed of wool and linen can't be worn (Deut. 22:11);
- (l) Punishment shall be administered on the basis of an eye for an eye (Deut. 19:21, Ex. 21:24);
- (m) One's nation can lend to other nations but not borrow from them (Deut. 15:6);
- (n) Bastards can't enter the Lord's congregation (Deut. 23:2);
- (o) First-born children should sometimes be sacrificed to the Lord (Ex. 22:29); and
- (p) Debtor brothers shall be released from their obligation every seven years (Deut. 15:1-3).

All of these rules are part of the Old Covenant and of equal import. Why quote the Ten Commandments and rules against infanticide, for example, while ignoring other tenets? A believer's obligations to one is no less than his obligation to all. In fact, if under the New Covenant Christians have stepped into the shoes of the Israelites and

become, in effect, the new Chosen People, then they should inherit all the privileges and duties of that office. They seem to want the former but not the latter. As was stated at the end of last month's Commentary on Ignored Teachings, Jesus said the Old Law would stand until heaven and earth passed away. Not one jot or tittle was to be changed until all was fulfilled (Matt. 5:18-19 RSV). Paul disagreed, but, then, this is not the only topic upon which they clashed.

Apologists have also tended to ignore or minimize the Old Law's support for slavery and the subordination of women (See: Aug. 1983 Commentary) and failed to follow the Sabbath. Except for some sabbatarian groups such as the Seventh-Day Adventists, biblicists don't go to church on the correct day. Saturday, not Sunday is the Sabbath. There is no substantive biblical support for calling Sunday--the first day of the week--the Sabbath. As the text says, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work...." (Ex. 20:8-10, Deut. 5:12-14). Moreover, the prohibition against labor on the Sabbath is regularly violated since work occurs on every day of the week. With respect to labor, it wouldn't matter what day was the Sabbath. Apologist Gleason Archer stated in *The Encyclopedia of Biblical Difficulties* (p. 116-121) that several facts seem to teach that Sunday replaced Saturday as the Sabbath. He sought to justify the change by alleging:

- (a) Jesus rose on Sunday;
- (b) Jesus' first appearance to his disciples after the Resurrection was on Sunday;
- (c) The outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Church first occurred on a Sunday Pentecost;
- (d) Paul told the Corinthian church to put aside money and save on the first day of the week so that no collection would be needed when he arrived (1 Cor. 16:20);
- (e) Paul spoke to a group of Christians until midnight on a Sunday (Acts 20:5-12); and
- (f) The Lord's Day in Rev. 1:10 ("I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet") referred to Sunday.

Problems accompany each explanation.

- (a) Jesus rose on Sunday, but died on a Friday. His death was certainly as important as his Resurrection, if not more so. So why wasn't the Sabbath transferred to Friday?;
- (b) and (c) Why would the fact that Jesus first appeared to his disciples on Sunday or the Holy Spirit first fell on the church on Sunday be of such significance as to overrule God's commandment that the seventh day was to be the Sabbath? They are rather weak reeds to lean on, especially when Archer admits that, "After Pentecost it seems that the Christian community continued to celebrate the seventh-day Sabbath as before, by gathering with other Jews (both converted and unconverted) for the reading of the Torah, for preaching, and for prayer" (Ibid. p. 117). He immediately tried to regain his loss by

stating, "But there is no demonstrable reference to Christians ever gathering on the Sunday Sabbath to celebrate the Lord's Supper or to hold a distinctively Christian assembly" (Ibid. p. 117). But, then, where is the evidence that they regularly gathered on Sunday to celebrate the Lord's Supper or hold distinctively Christian assemblies?;

- (d) and (e) 1 Cor. 16:2 and Acts 20:5-12, or delivering a sermon on Sunday evening hardly warrant changing the Sabbath; and
- (f) Archer's final contention that the Lord's Day in Rev. 1:10 is Sunday relies upon extra-biblical sources and is wholly unconvincing.

When all is said and done, the basic question remains. Where does the Bible specifically and clearly change the Sabbath to Sunday?

And finally, if biblicists are going to quote Old Law with respect to executing murderers, then why don't they quote verses which prescribe the death penalty for a wide variety of acts other than murder? All of the following warrant execution:

- (a) striking your father or mother (Ex.21:15);
- (b) kidnapping (Ex. 21:6 RSV);
- (c) cursing your father or mother (Ex. 21:17 RSV, Lev. 20:9);
- (d) touching a mountain (Ex. 19:12 RSV);
- (e) allowing your ox to gore someone (Ex. 21:29);
- (f) lying with a beast (Ex. 22:19) RSV, Lev. 20:15-16);
- (g) sacrificing to other gods (Ex. 22:20 RSV);
- (h) failing to observe the Sabbath (Ex. 31:14-15);
- (i) drinking strong drinks while in the tabernacle (Lev. 10:9);
- (j) committing adultery (Lev. 20:10 RSV, Deut. 22:22);
- (k) lying with your father's wife (Lev. 20:11 RSV);
- (l) lying with your daughter-in-law (Lev. 20:12 RSV);
- (m) committing homosexual acts (Lev. 20:13 RSV);
- (n) being a medium or a wizard (Lev. 20:27 RSV);
- (o) being a witch (Ex. 22:18);
- (p) being a priest's daughter and becoming a whore (Lev. 21:9 RSV);
- (q) Blaspheming the name of the Lord (Lev. 24:16);
- cursing (Lev. 24:14 RSV);
- (s) coming near the priesthood (Num. 3:10);
- (t) being a stranger who comes near the congregation's tabernacle (Num. 3:38);
- (u) gathering sticks on the Sabbath (Num. 15:32-35);
- (v) serving or worshipping other gods (Deut. 17:2-5 RSV);
- (w) showing contempt for the Lord's priest or judge (Deut. 17:12 NIV);
- (x) failing to obey one's parents (Deut. 21:18-21);
- (y) not being a virgin on your wedding day (Deut. 22:20-21 NIV);
- (z) being a betrothed virgin who did not cry out when seduced (Deut. 22:23-24);
- (aa) having relations with your wife and her mother (Lev. 20:14);
- (bb) telling people to seek other gods (Deut. 13:2,5); and
- (cc) being a false prophet (Deut. 18:20).

And these are God's rules. Imagine living in that era!

In summary, biblicists teach, preach, and attempt to reach others with many OT moralisms, but are not adverse to selectively using that which suits their interests. If they like an OT verse, they expound it; if they don't, they say that's from the Old Law and we aren't under the Old Law anymore. But aren't the Ten Commandments part of the Old Law? Yes, they say, but we are obligated to follow them because they are reported in the NT (Matt. 19:16-18, Mark 10:17-19, and Luke 18:18-22). People who assert as much should note that Jesus omitted half of the Ten Commandments. But even if they had been present, we would still be under all the Old Law, including the Decalogue, according to Christ ("And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of law to fail"--Luke 16:17, see also Matt. 5:18-19). If "sin is transgression of the law", as 1 John 3:4 says, then we should be following all of the Old Law.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #44 from ELF of Long Beach, California (Part a)

Dear Mr. McKinsey.

Apparently our strong disagreements have deep roots. You constantly quote Robert Ingersoll, whom on page 2 of Issue #2 you call "one of the greatest Biblical commentators in American history".... I personally try to follow the principle that the name of R.I. should not even be mentioned among decent people, especially thinking people (I make an exception only because you brought up his name). Since we are on page 2 of issue#2, let's quote him: "No man in the OT stands by the dead and says, 'We shall meet again'." Of course, this is utter nonsense. In 2 Sam. 12:23 David says of his dead son "I shall go to him" (clearly, he did not mean the same grave, since this was not the custom, and he did not know anyway where he would be buried). In Gen. 37:35, Jacob says of Joseph, whom he believed to be dead, "I will go down to my son into Sheol mourning." Of course the word "Sheol" occurs in the O.T. 65 times: notwithstanding some untenable dissenting opinions, Sheol meant a place where the dead were alive.... As for R.I.'s ludicrous claim that the Old Testament "does not say a word about another world", I wish to point out the clear testimony to the contrary in Job 19:26-27 (which says, "...and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then from my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold, and not another"--Ed.) The above are a few minor samples of the reasons while (why--Ed.) I always considered R.I. a man hardly worth bothering with: merely listing his blunders would fill books. Incidentally, he was a complete jerk in politics, philosophy and religion alike. To his substandard intellectual qualities he added a remarkably obnoxious boorishness. Take e.g. the passage that you quote on page 2 of issue #15 "Nothing ever was, nothing ever can be more perfectly idiotic and absurd than the dogma of the Trinity". Obviously, no self-respecting author would write such a thing in a book: if he lacks the decency to refrain from spewing venom like that, at least you should have the decency not to publish it.

Editor's response to Letter #44 (Part a)

Dear ELF.

Are you sure you are justified in accusing others of "spewing venom"? Don't you think it would be more profitable for all concerned to avoid invective and go to the merits of the case? First, you quote David's comment in 2 Sam. 12:23 that he would go to his dead son. But why do you assume that he was alive when he arrived? We are all going to join our dead relatives eventually. Your example is rather weak, as the text is unclear. Secondly, you chose the word "Sheol" in Gen. 37:35 instead of the word "grave." The difference is significant in that Sheol is supposedly occupied by the living who have died, while the grave is not. The RSV, the NWT, and the new NASB use "Sheol" and support your position, while the KJV, the NIV, the Modern Language, and the Jewish Masoretic text support Ingersoll. It appears to be a case of what you choose is what you prefer. Thirdly, ambiguity is also associated with Job 19:26-27. On page 426 the *Daily Bible Commentary* states that verses 23-27 "are notoriously difficult to translate in detail... Commentators disagree over whether Job...has the concept of the resurrection of the body." A footnote to the RSV says, "the meaning of this verse (26) is uncertain." Also, "mine eyes shall behold, and not another (KJV)" could mean only Job would see God and no one else. Frankly, ELF, I'd like to know what the original authors of many biblical verses meant, as would many biblicists who are candid enough to admit as much. Honest men can honestly disagree. The Bible is vague in many key areas.

Letter #44 Continues (Part b)

Before going into other matters of substance, I would like to raise some issues of spelling. On the first page of issue #15, you attribute to Jefferson the use of the word "gullability", to Menken the use of the word "occurrence", and throw in the word "unfathomable" as your own contribution. Jefferson may not have been much of a speller; it may well be his fault that the Declaration of Independence ended up with the word "unalienable" instead of "inalienable", but I doubt that he would have used "gullability". You probably spend quite a bit of time writing your publication; could you spend a little time proofreading it...? Your comments in the paragraph starting with "Besides" on page 2 of the March 1984 issue degenerate into utter silliness (you don't even keep track of the numbering, you have, "Six" (sic) after "Fourth"). (In a second letter dated April 24, 1984 ELF continued his technical criticisms--Ed.). When you attempted to answer my letter (See: Letter #39, Issue #16, p.4), my initials were given as ELR. I don't know whether this was done to further protect my anonymity... (Later ELF complained about "Voelkischer Beobachter" being misspelled twice and incorrect spelling of "Weltanschauung" in the Editor's Response to 38th letter in the 16th issue--Ed.).

Editor's Response to Letter #44 (Part b)

Ordinarily ELF, I don't comment on the technical aspects of letters and responses, but since it seems to be an area of considerable interest to you, an exception is in order. First, let me acknowledge the errors. "Unfathomable" was a misspelling; the "r" was left off "Voelkischer"; "Fifth" was left out on page 2 of the March 1984 issue, and your initials were incorrectly typed as ELR. Typing is not my strongest suit. For this, I apologize. The other inaccuracies, however, were intentional. "Gullability," "occurrence," and "Weltanschauung," were spelt as viewed. In order to provide readers with more accurate comprehension of these who are being quoted, statements are

usually copied with errors intact. What I see is what you get. It would be nice, ELF, if your comments on technical mistakes were offered in a spirit of friendly, constructive criticism instead of belittlement, especially in view of the fact that your own letters could be improved. For example, you ended several sentences with (..."), ("), ("), despite the fact that periods and commas are always placed inside end-quotation marks" according to the *Essentials of English* by Hopper and Gale. And (?") sure looks suspicious. Secondly, "could" is not spelt "c-o-l-d"; "teachings" is not spelt "t-e-a-c-h-i-g-s," and "why" is not spelt "w-h-i-l-e." Thirdly, "fascism," "humanist," and "polytheism" are not proper nouns and should not be capitalized. And lastly, all of the following words were incorrectly divided as follows at the end of sentences: Be-neath, auth-orites, resembl-ance, Christi-ans, Fath-er, critic-isms, e-ventually, co-pies, e-vidence, I-taly, ag-ree, Apost-les, and enfor-ced. Moreover, are you sure you can divide a word such that a single letter is left at the end of a sentence? In any event, don't you agree that it all seems rather secondary? Constructive technical comments on BE are welcome because they help to improve the format by eliminating problems which concern others. But is offering them in a destructive, demeaning atmosphere really necessary? I've always felt personal attacks build walls, not bridges.

Letter #44 Continues (Part c)

...In the second paragraph on page 2 you give a number of OT texts (Deut. 4:35, 39, 6:4, 2Sam. 2:2, 7:22, Isa. 45:5-6, 46:9, 1 Chron. 17:20, 1 Kings 8:60--Ed.) allegedly contradicting the Trinity. These texts take a position against Polytheism: even Jewish thinkers like Maimonides recognize that the Trinity implies no Polytheism, therefore your texts are irrelevant. Next you give four verses in favor of the Trinity, clearly implying that these are the only ones. You completely omit texts in favor of the Trinity of Jesus; such texts, without directly proving the trinity, definitely have a bearing on the issue. A quickie search for such passages shows text at Phil. 2:5-6 (...in Christ Jesus: Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God--Ed.), Col. 2:9 (For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the godhead bodily--Ed.), Titus 2:13 (Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Savior Jesus Christ--Ed.), 1 John 5:20, and Roman 9:5 (of course, they don't prove anything beyond the opinion of their authors, but that is relevant to our discussion). I should add OT reference to Zech. 12:10, where God says Himself "Me, whom they have pierced": unless Jesus is God, mankind does not get many opportunities to pierce God. (To be Continued)

Editor's Response to Letter #44 (Part c)

The OT texts I cited have always been used in opposition to the Trinity, especially by Jewish scholars. Surely you are aware of this, ELF? Second Samuel 7:22 (Wherefore thou are great, O Lord: for there is none like thee, neither is there any God beside thee) and Isa. 46:9 (...for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me), for example, have always been used to refute not only polytheism but the Trinity as well. You are the first person I have read who feels they are irrelevant. Secondly, you quote several texts (Phil. 2:5-6, Col. 2:9, Titus 2:13 etc.) "in favor of the Trinity" but they don't directly prove the Trinity. I agree; so why mention them and why say they, "definitely have a bearing on the issue" when they don't even discuss the three persons of the Trinity? Verses equating Jesus with God--a duality--

are not proving a trinity. The verses you cited not only "don't prove anything beyond opinion of their authors," but they don't prove anything relevant to our discussion. Weren't you concerned with relevance? Thirdly, you used the King James Version of Zeck. 12:10. Why did you use its interpretation in light of your comment on page 4 (Part b) of May 1984, issue that "the authority of the KJV on scholarly issues is practically nil?" Could it be because the RSV, the Modern Language Version, the Jewish Masoretic text, the Living Bible, the NWT, the NAB, and the Catholic Confraternity Version say, "when they look on him (Not Me--Ed.) whom they have pierced." Since Jehovah is speaking, someone else is being pierced. The NIV and NASB agree with the King James Version and support your position. So, again, what you seek to prove determines what you choose. (To be Continued)

Letter #45 from SO of Santa Barbara, California

Please enroll me in a 6 months subscription.... I would like to leave you a little comment that may be of assistance. Your COMMENTARY sections are very strong. Your DIALOGUE and LETTERS portions clearly leave you with the last word in that issue. To come over as a fair host to dissenting readers, you might take care to afford your rebuttals the same number of lines as what you are rebutting. You could still handily best your adversaries in most exchanges. Giving yourself more lines I feel makes BE a bit less persuasive. Love your important work.

Editor's Response to Letter #45

Dear SO,

I'm grateful for your thoughtful comments, but have to dissent to some degree. I really don't think the COMMENTARY sections are any stronger than those in other rational publications dealing with similar material. Indeed, in comparison with much that is available today, they are rather mild. Moreover, you might want to read many writings of biblicists on agnosticism, humanism, atheism, and rationalism. "Vitriolic" is an apt description. Secondly, as long as an individual keeps sending me critical letters, neither of us will have the last word, unless I'm swamped with mail. Critics can always write answers to my rebuttals. You might want to note the running debate I had with SBJ in Issues 10-12. It was he who abbreviated the exchange. And lastly, correcting one comment often requires many more words, as you have probably noticed from political discussions. I try to be as concise and accurate as possible.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #46 from KEN of Sacramento, California

Bravo for another excellent issue (April 1984) of BE. This one contained some very telling points with regard to selective Biblical morality. Great ammunition for debates! Your reply to ELR (Letter #39) was also very much to the point. I confess I was surprised by ELR's assertions. Mainstream Christianity has held for centuries that being Christian is a matter of "faith" not "works"; in point of fact, the doctrine of the sufficiency of Faith in Christ is one of the few upon which nearly every denomination will agree. Why, then, would ELR attempt to equivocate on this? (ELR claimed that Hitler, Mussolini, et. al., were not Christians because their "works" were evil.)

Moreover, ELR was begging the question! He was hoping, perhaps, that no one would recall that the issue arose because of Letter #27 in BE #12 (Dec. 1983). The author of Letter #27, ostensibly a Christian, defended the Bible and Christianity on the grounds that many believers were good people. Now ELR suggests that evil people by definition, are not Christian. The argument runs in a perfect circle. You could use the same kind of reasoning to prove that all atheists are great philosophers--or that all plumber are talented ice-skaters.

Letter #47 from Jeff Frankel, Columnist, AAM, Decatur, Illinois
Dennis.

In February issue of BE you mentioned that biblicists would rather concentrate on NT figures because of the inherent sadism of the principle figures of the OT. Yet the central figure of the NT, Jesus Christ, preached a concept far more sadistic than anything in the OT, the concept of eternal suffering. I have checked all of the passages I could find in the OT mentioning hell. None link hell with eternal torture....

Letter #48 from AB of Ontario, Canada
Dear Dennis.

Thank you for the sample issue of BE (#11) that you sent me. I congratulate you for your efforts and hope that this periodical becomes a large circulation magazine one day.... To your answer to letter #25 (the bullet-stopping power of the Bible), I would like to add the following true story: In 1940, I was a political prisoner in the jail of Doftana (Romania) together with another 500 victims of the fascists' laws. In October it happened, the first earthquake of the 4th degree which gave us only a big scare. Afterward, we discussed it and resolved that the best place to shelter in such case is under the steel threshold of our cell. Sure enough, the second earthquake followed after a few days, this time of the 10th degree, the jail collapsed on us and we were buried under the debris. Those who sheltered under the steel doors saved their lives, but about 35 people who chose instead to kneel and pray were killed. We found them all with Bibles in their hands.

Issue No. 19

July, 1984

COMMENTARY

Moses and the Pentateuch (Part One of a Two Part Series)--Many defenders of the Bible vehemently contend that Moses wrote the first five books of the OT (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy), commonly known as the Pentateuch. They base their belief not only upon historical information but statements by Jesus to the effect that Moses authored the Law, i.e., the Pentateuch, "Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keepeth the law (John 7:19)" and "For the law was given

by Moses,...(John 1:17)." Moses could not have been the author, however, because of the large number of verses demonstrating the contrary. The following are prime examples:

- (a) "And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem,...and the Canaanite was then in the land (Gen. 12:6)," "...and the Canaanite and the Ferizzite dwelled then in the land (Gen. 3:17)." Both verses state that the Canaanites were then in the land. The work of expelling the Canaanites did not begin until the days of Joshua, after Moses, and did not end until the days of David. Since Gen. 12:6 and 13:7 could not have been written until after they had left the land, which was 450 years after Moses, Moses could not have been the author;
- (b) "And these are the kings that reigned in the land of Edom, before there reigned any king over the children of Israel (Gen. 36:31)." This passage could only have been written after the first king, Saul (See: 1 Sam. 10:24-25) began to reign over the Israelites. It had to have been written after Saul began to rule, and thus could not have been written by Moses;
- (c) "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come (Gen. 49:10)." These words could not have been written before Judah received the sceptre, which was not until David ascended the throne nearly 400 years after the death of Moses;
- (d) "Moreover the man Moses was very great in the land of Egypt...(Ex. 11:3)." People are usually spoken of as great only after their death, and Moses would hardly have made such a statement about himself;
- (e) "And the children of Israel did eat manna forty years, until they came...unto the borders of the land of Canaan (Ex.16:35)." Moses died in the wilderness before they crossed over into the land of Canaan. How could he have known what would happen after they crossed over? How could he have known when they would stop eating manna? Moreover, according to Joshua 5:12, they were still eating manna after they crossed the Jordan River and were encamped in Gilgal;
- (f) "The first of the firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the Lord thy God (Ex. 23:19)." This could not have been written before the time of Solomon, for God had no house prior to the erection of the temple 447 years after Moses. When David proposed to build God a house, God forbade it and said that he had never lived in a house since they left Egypt ("Whereas I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle"--2 Sam. 7:6);
- (g) "That the land spue not you out also, when ye defile it, as it spued out the nations that were before you (Lev. 18:28)." How could Moses have written this, since he never saw the promised land and the other nations were not driven out until David's time?
- (h) "And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the sabbath day (Num. 15:32)." How could Moses have written this, since it presupposes the Israelites were no longer in the wilderness? This verse says they were in the wilderness. The author of this

wrote after they had left the wilderness and, thus, could not have been Moses, who died in the wilderness;

- (i) "And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the sabbath day. And they that found him gathering sticks brought him unto Moses and Aaron, and unto all the congregation. And they put him in ward, because it was not declared what shall be done with him (Num. 15:32-34)." This says they did not know what to do with a man who gathered sticks on the sabbath because it had not been declared what to do. Yet, in truth, Ex. 31:15 ("whosoever doeth any work in the Sabbath day, he shall surely be put to death") declared what should be done, and Moses, himself, received this law. Thus, Moses could not have written Numbers 15;
- (j) The following verses appear to have been written by someone other than Moses:
 - "And if ye have erred, and not observed all these commandments, which the Lord hath spoken unto Moses, Even all that the Lord hath commanded you by the hand of Moses, from the day that the Lord commanded Moses,....(Num. 15:22-23),"
 - "...as the Lord commanded Moses (Ex. 39:57, 40:19, 27, 29, 32);"
- (k) Moses is often referred to in the third person, which shows the Pentateuch is a biography, not an autobiography. "And the Lord spoke unto Moses....(Num. 2:1, 5:1, 31:1)," "and this is the blessing, wherewith Moses, the man of God, blessed the children of Israel before his death (Deut. 33:1),"
- (l) "To drive out nations from before thee greater and mightier than thou art, to bring thee in, to give thee their land for an inheritance, as it is this day (Deut. 4:38)." This verse must have been written after Moses died, since they did not possess the land as an inheritance until after his demise;
- (m) "Thou shalt eat it within thy gates....(Deut. 15:22)." The phrase "within thy gates" occurs in the Pentateuch about 25 times. It refers to the gates of the cities of the Israelites, which they did not inhabit until after the death of Moses;
- (n) "And the Lord shall bring thee into Egypt again with ships, by the way whereof I spoke unto thee....(Deut. 28:68)." How could Moses have written this when he said earlier in Deut. 17:16 that "You shall never return that way (toward Egypt--Ed.) again?" If Moses wrote all of Deuteronomy, then he contradicted himself;
- (o) "And this the blessing, wherewith Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death (Deut. 33:1)." In this verse Moses is not only spoken of in the third person, but in laudatory terms. Moreover, his death is referred to as an event already accomplished;
- (p) "This they shall give,...half a shekel after the shekel of the sanctuary....(Ex. 30:13, 24)." Ingersoll noted that Moses could not have written these verses, since there was no such thing as a "shekel of the sanctuary" until long after Moses lived. (To be Continued)

REVIEWS

In *508 Answers to Bible Questions* (p. 120-121) M.R. DeHaan addresses the problems created by Mark 16:15-18, which alleges believers can take up serpents, drink any deadly thing, and cure the sick by laying on of hands.

This, of course, is a rather difficult passage, but I believe that when we learn to rightly divide the Word of truth, we should have no difficulty at all. I believe that verses 15 and 16 are a general commission which the Lord Jesus Christ gave unto us for this entire dispensation (or era--Ed.). However, verses 17 and 18, which have to do with the signs of the apostleship, were for a particular period only.... After the canon of Scripture was completed and all the books of the New Testament had been written, God expects us to believe His promises rather than to look for signs and miracles, so we believe that today signs and miracles as recorded in the 16th chapter of Mark are past....

DeHaan claims the believer's ability to pick up serpents and drink any deadly thing pertained to the period of the apostles only, although there is nothing to justify this assumption. Where is the evidence? He says "we believe," but there is no scriptural support for his belief. Where does the Bible say that the powers granted in Mark 16:16-18 applied only to people at that time? DeHaan proceeds with, "Whenever it pleases the Lord to perform these miracles or to give these gifts, He is still able to do so (Ibid. p.121)." We aren't discussing the Lord's ability to take up serpents and drink poison; we are discussing the ability of believers to do so, and the difficulty of finding someone who has been given these gifts. DeHaan then states, "I do not believe that we ought to tempt God by taking up rattlesnakes or by drinking poison just in order to test the word of God. That is presumption; and is tempting the Almighty and God cannot be tempted. ...nothing pleases Him more than when His children are willing to trust His word and His promise without any other evidence whatsoever (Ibid. p. 121)." How is one tempting God by merely asking believers to drink any deadly thing? During a 4-hour appearance on WING Radio (Dayton, Ohio) on June 4 1984, the editor of BE was accused of tempting God by asking callers to prove Mark 16. Is the Bible so sacrosanct as to be above testing? That's hard to believe, since the Book, itself, says, "Prove all things (1 Thess. 5:21)" and proof is all that was sought. DeHaan concludes, "If Mark 16:15-18 is all for us, then it must always succeed, and such is not the case, as you will soon find out, if you drink poison and handle snakes (Ibid. 121-22)." The promise fails not because Mark is speaking only to those in the apostolic age, but because the verse is simply false.

On page 111 in *508 Answers to Biblical Questions* DeHaan was asked if faith can literally move mountains, as taught in Matthew 17:20 ("If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove, and nothing shall be impossible to you"). He responded with, "Yes, I believe with all my heart that if we had enough faith we would be able to move literal mountains if it was for the glory of God. Of course, we must remember that merely moving mountains for the sake of making a demonstration is not pleasing to the Lord, but if it is to His glory and for the help of others, I believe it would be possible." In order to escape from the dilemma presented, DeHaan utilized some common ploys. First, he discussed a verse which has a qualifier--the faith must be as a grain of

mustard seed. If the wish fails, apologists can always say the faith did not measure up to the proviso. Why didn't he address Mark 9:23 ("If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth"), John 14:12 ("He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do"), and Matt. 21:21, which has no provisos, which says one only have faith, period. Second, surely any believer would have as much faith as a grain of mustard seed since the latter is so small. So why can't all believers move mountains? Third, where do any of these verses say it can't be done unless it is for the glory of God? This gratuitous qualifier is unsupported by anything in the text. Fourth, why does DeHaan assume people only want to make "a demonstration" by moving mountains? Perhaps some believers really do want some mountains moved. Are we to believe that it could be done by faith? Fifth, where does the Bible say a demonstration would not be pleasing to the Lord? Doesn't it say, "Prove all things (1 Thess. 5:21)"? And lastly, where do any of these verses say it must be done for God's glory and to aid others? The verses say you can move mountains if you believe. Limitations aren't even mentioned.

When asked if we can receive anything we want if we follow Matt. 18:19-20 RSV ("if two of you agree on earth about anything they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them") DeHaan said, "Jesus here is speaking about the ministry of believers, especially in the assembly. If we ask anything in the name of the Lord Jesus and agree with some other believer and trust the Lord, He gives us what we ask for upon condition; namely, that we ask according to His will (Ibid. p. 112)." Leaving aside the fact that the quotation says nothing about asking "in the name of Lord Jesus" or having to "trust in the Lord," the key question remains unanswered. Where is a condition attached? Where does the verse say anything about asking according to God's will?

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #44 ELF Continues from Last Month's Issue (Part d)

Going back to the four verses you cite in favor of the Trinity (1 Peter 1:2, 1 John 5:7, 2 Cor. 13:14, Matt. 28:19--Ed.), they don't prove very much either. Take e.g. the passages of baptizing in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. In American history we have the famous incident of Ethan Allen demanding the surrender of Fort Ticonderoga "In the name of the great Jehovah and the Continental Congress". Would anybody argue that Ethan Allen claimed that Jehovah and the Continental Congress were identical or part of some divine "duality"?

Editor's Response to Letter #44 (Part d)

You aimed your criticism at the wrong party, ELF. Biblicists cite these verses to prove the Trinity, not I. On page 2 of the March 1984 issue I said, "apologists continue to rely upon four major verses to justify their belief in the Trinity." Your criticism supports my position, not theirs.

Letter #44 Continues (Part e)

Here and there you manage to insert some little dirty remarks such as calling 1 John 5:7 ("For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one"--Ed.) forged. Interestingly, the evidence against it being forged is overwhelming. The passage was never used in the Arian debates by the Trinitarians (who would forge something for no good reason, without intending to use it?) Neither did the Arians ever complain about it being forged, even though the passage definitely goes back at least to the era of the Arian debates. What probably happened was that someone wrote a note on a margin of a manuscript, indicating the exact spot in the text he was referring to; much later the next copyist, not having other manuscripts to compare it to, thought it was part of the text, and copied it that way. Incidentally, this happened to many other Biblical texts, most of them of no importance; in most cases, comparison with other manuscripts enabled scholars to eliminate the added words.

Editor's Response to Letter #44 (Part e)

You say the evidence against 1 John 5:7 being forged is overwhelming but, then, proceeded to prove the opposite. You are correct, ELF; it was not used in the Arian debates, and the Arians did not complain about it being forged. Why? Because it did not exist until centuries later. You say the verse "definitely goes back at least to the era of Arian debates" but, then, showed that it was probably inserted into the text erroneously by a copyist who mistook a marginal note for part of the text. And you concluded by saying, "this happened to many other Biblical texts..., in most cases comparison with other manuscripts enabled scholars to eliminate the added words." Precisely! And that's why the modern versions (RSV, Modern Language, NWT, NASB, NIV, NAB), which you referred to as scholarship rather than tradition (May 1984, p. 4) have discarded 1 John 5:7 of the King James Version.

Letter #49 from KN of Dallas, Texas

An atheist friend of mine gave me your issue #17 to read. I found your response to ELF appalling. You do not cite even one primary source, yet you tell us unequivocally that the O.T. Hebrew word "ratsach" found in Ex. 20:13 ("Thou shalt not kill"--Ed.) does not mean "murder" (i.e. "you shall not murder") but only means "kill", and you use the RSV as a main support for your position. However, the issue can be quickly resolved by turning to the standard Hebrew lexicon in use today entitled, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* by Brown, Driver, and Briggs. Now there are three basic words in the Hebrew OT that in a general sense mean "to kill." They are: ratsach (murder, slay), harag (kill, slay) and shachat (slaughter, beat). Although it is true that all three of the above words could be translated with the general term "kill," a more refined and accurate examination of these Hebrew words yields the various shades of meaning given above. And in Exodus 20:13 "ratsach" is used. Your basic error, Mr. McKinsey, is with your preoccupation with the RSV and other selected English translations, which is unwarranted. Indeed, I find it incredible that you think that such versions as the NASB and the NIV are "based more on expediency than research" (an insult to over a hundred linguistic scholars), while upholding, apparently, the exclusive impeccability of the RSV. What nerve....

To summarize, Mr. McKinsey, you clearly have not researched the matter to a satisfactory degree. To merely say that the word in Ex. 20:13 ONLY means "to kill" is wrong. A detailed comparison with other Hebrew words which also convey the general sense of "to kill" delineates the various connotations each word can further convey, and in Ex. 20:13 there is no exception.

Editor's Response to Letter #49

Dear KN.

So you feel translations of the Bible, especially newer versions, are not influenced by expediency and my research is weak. Needless to say, we disagree. First, you cite a lexicon to prove there are three basic words (ratsach, harag, and shachat) in the Hebrew OT that in general sense mean "to kill." What happened to "nakah," "muwth," "tabach," "chala," and "naqaph"? Weren't you concerned with accurate research? Secondly, the RSV was only one of many versions I cited which translated Ex. 20:13 as "Thou shalt not kill." As I told ELF, "Your disagreement is with the Hebraic scholars who translated the KJV, the RSV, the Catholic NAB, the Jerusalem Bible, and the Douay Version." How you concluded that I used "the RSV as a main support" for my position is hard to tell! Thirdly, you prefer to translate the Hebrew word "ratsach," as "murder" and cite the newer NASB and NIV translation as your sources. If ratsach means "to murder" then why do the NIV and the NASB translate "ratsach" as "kill" in Deut. 4:42 and Num. 35:27 respectively? And why does the Jewish Masoretic text translate it as "kill" in 1 Kings 21:19 and Hosea 4:2? Even your own authorities admit that "ratsach" can mean "to kill." Fourthly, you accuse me of insulting "over a hundred linguistic scholars." Yet, the number of scholars throughout the past 500 years who have chosen "kill" over "murder" is well in excess of 100. You have impugned their knowledge of Hebrew and opted for the translation of a smaller group. If effect, you claim to have a body of scholars who know Hebrew better than a much larger group. And lastly, where did I imply, much less state, the "exclusive impeccability of the RSV"e;?

Letter #50 from GLF of Uxbridge, Massachusetts

...In regard to letter #43 in the May edition of BE I would like to ask how can DB state that he no longer believes in God and then state that he did know God personally? I am perplexed! I find DB's letter the most contradictory writing in this entire publication.

Editor's Response to Letter #50

DB's letter seemed consistent to me, GLF. He believed in God and later chose to reject him. I did not interpret that as meaning he no longer believed in God after having what he described as a personal relationship. Perhaps DB might want to respond to you.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #51 from FM of Novato, California

Judging by the spelling complaints of EFL of Long Beach concerning "gullability"

(See: Letter #44, Part (b), Issue #18, page 4) and of Thomas Jefferson using "unalienable", it appears that ELF was just a little fast on the trigger and shot himself in the foot. If he will consult *Webster's New Collegiate*, he will find both "gullability" and "gullibility," and "unalienable" synonymous with "inalienable."

Letter #52 from MEP of Tulsa, Oklahoma

...a couple of yars ago a Ph.D. computer scientist who teaches at the University of Tulsa told me in all seriousness that the Second Coming is imminent. That made me realize we are losing generations of people in this country to obscurantism. That is why I love your hard-hitting magazine; somebody has to challenge Christians on their own ground. (In another letter MEP asked the following--Ed.). If we are saved either through faith, predestination, or God's election, why did both Jesus and Paul give us all those rules to live by? The multiplicity of rules is consistent only with salvation through works, a doctrine which most Christian sects repudiate.

Letter # 53 from JK of Poplar Bluff, Missouri

...I was raised in an environment similar to the situation described in your May 1984 "Letters to the Editor" (the last letter in the issue). It's right (as you recently said) to expect "Born Again Christians" of long standing to have a great deal of trouble accepting views espoused in BE. The effects of being raised in a fundamentalist environment are difficult to shake, but not impossible.... I appreciate your work and hope that you will continue. It is most interesting when you quote various biblical supporters in explaining away "difficult passages." This was a common occurrence in the church in which I was raised. Fundamentalists sort of take a "mental vote" on which explanation they will accept. On page 3 of the recent May issue, I loved the comment on "knowing the mind of Christ". That revived old memories for me, as I've heard that phrase many times before. ...No wonder the fundamentalists advocate "faith" so much, as their views certainly do not stand up to the test of logic and reason. But that's the great thing about faith, it needs no logic or reason, and in fact, prefers not to have it.

Letter #54 from BBH of Miramar, Florida

I thought I would mention that quite frequently a couple of these "Mormon Elders", (they always travel in pairs) stopped by my home to sell me on Mormonism, or whatever they are selling.... They are all well educated young men and are most enjoyable to engage in conversation. What starts out planned as only a few moments' sales pitch ends up in many hours.... it usually takes all they can muster to defend their viewpoints.... I was wondering if there is a book of some kind on the refutation of the Book of Mormon....

Editor's Response to Letter #54

When people come to me with the intent to proselytise, I view this as an opportunity to provide them with information and assistance they don't realize they need. It becomes a question of who is persuading whom. Too many rational individuals are content with merely fending off evangelists and maintaining a successful defense posture. That accounts for much of the latter's strength and numbers. Fundamentalists, such as Falwell, are on the offensive, and their influence is all too pervasive, as recent

events have shown. Although BE does not focus on particular denominations, my notes on the Book of Mormon could very well be addressed in a future issue. Books criticizing Mormonism as a cult are quite prominent in Christian bookstores, if you simply want a critical writing. Of course, they are written from a Christian perspective.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

- (I) A couple of readers questioned the three-part series on Ignored Teachings in the April, May, and June issues feeling that, "In these issues you have merely pointed out contradictions in the lives of Christians." One must realize that BE is not a narrow, technical journal devoted merely to comparing verse with verse, although that is an integral part of the overall approach. It's a broadly based philosophical analysis of any and all internal problems having to do with the Bible's validity. This could involve not only technical errors, contradictions, fallacies, and philosophical quandries, but circumstantial evidence as well. When millions of the Book's most devoted proponents ignore many biblical teachings, significant evidence exists to the effect that the Book is not as sacrosanct as they claim. If it is, then why don't they adhere more clearly to its tenets? When people whose ethics are in doubt cite one book as the source of their morality, one can't help but question the book's reliability. If character witnesses during a trial are of dubious character themselves, that doesn't say much for the defendant.
- (II) We wish to extend a heartfelt thanks to those readers who have seen fit to aid BE by purchasing ads in local papers throughout the country. From our perspective you are unsung heroes. Our awareness of your support arises from the fact that we receive inquiries from people responding to ads in periodicals about which we know little. A special note of gratitude goes out to FM of Novato, California who not only designed an attractive ad for BE and funded its publication, he called a local call-in program and wrote letters about BE to a local newspaper editor. We would also like to thank Don Morgan of Crusade Publications, Dept. L, Box 200, Redmond, Washington 98052 for his continued advertising of BE. Don issues some interesting literature himself.

Issue No. 20

August, 1984

COMMENTARY

Moses and the Pentateuch (Part Two of a Two-Part Series)--Last month's commentary noted a couple of verses (John 1:17 & 7:19) which are often used to prove Moses wrote the Pentateuch, i.e., the Law or Torah. Additional prominent examples are Joshua 8:32 ("And Joshua wrote there upon the stones a copy of the Law of Moses, which he wrote in the presence of the children of Israel"), Mark 12:19 ("Master Moses wrote unto us,..."), Rom. 10:5 ("Moses writes...."), John 1:45 ("...of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write...."), and John 5:46-47 ("For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me (Jesus--Ed.): for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not in his writings, how shall ye believe my words?").

But just as these verses and many others are cited to prove Moses was the author, substantial evidence exists to prove he was not. Sixteen reasons were given last month, and the following are offered in conclusion:

- (q) "the book of the law of Moses" (Josh. 8:31, Neh. 8:1). This verses shows that Moses wrote one book, if any, not five;
- (r) "And keep the charge of the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, to keep his statues, and his commandments, and his judgements, and his testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses,...." (1 Kings 2:3). This verse refers to the laws and commandments of Moses, but doesn't say he wrote the entire Torah. Moreover, "written in the law of Moses" does not mean Moses did the writing himself;
- (s) "But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son,...nor stranger that is within thy gates" (Ex. 20:10). How could Moses have written this when it implies the author was in Palestine? "Gates" are not applicable to prior wanderings in the wilderness when Moses lived;
- (t) "The Horims also dwelt in Seir beforetime; but the children of Esau succeeded them, when they had destroyed them from before them, and dwelt in their stead; As Israel did unto the land of his possession, which the Lord gave unto them" (Deut. 2:12). How could Moses have written this when the words presuppose a time when the Israelites were already in possession of Canaan, having expelled its former inhabitants?;
- (u) "By these were the isles of the Gentiles divided in their lands" (Gen. 10:5). There were no gentiles until after the Jews became a nation when Israel split off from Judah and became an independent kingdom under Rehoboam, the son of Solomon. The Jews had no distinctive religion until after the days of Solomon;
- (v) "And Rachel died and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem. And Jacob set a pillar upon her grave: that is the pillar of Rachel's grave unto this day" (Gen. 35:19-20). Moses never saw Rachel's tomb, and there is little likelihood he knew it was standing. Until his dying day he could never look over from the mountain and see the country in which Rachel was buried;

- (w) "And Sarah died in Kirjath-arba; the same is Hebron in the land of Canaan" (Gen. 23:2). Moses couldn't have written this because the city was not called Hebron (a modern name) till Caleb received it after the division of the land and named it Hebron after one of his sons. As Josh. 14:13-15 says, "And Joshua blessed him, and gave unto Caleb...Hebron for an inheritance.... And the name Hebron before was Kirjath-arba...";
- (x) "and Moses rose up, and his minister Joshua" (Ex. 24:13). These don't sound like words Moses would have written:
- (y) "And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained servants...and pursued them into Dan" (Gen. 14:14) and the Lord shewed him [Moses--Ed.] all the land of Gilead, unto Dan" Deut. 34:1). There was no place called Dan until many years after Moses lived. Dan was built after the death of Samson, who died 350 years after Moses. The city was originally called Laish. "And they called the name of the city Dan, after the name of Dan their father,...howbeit the name of the city was Laish at the first" (Judges 18:29);
- (z) "For indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews" (Gen. 40:15). Moses could not have written this verse, since there were no "Hebrews" in the days of Joseph or of Moses. "Hebrews" could not be applied until they possessed Canaan late in Joshua's time;
- (aa) "Now the man Moses was very meek, above all men which were upon the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3). If Moses wrote this, then he couldn't have been very meek. Moreover, Num. 31:17 ("Now therefore kill every male among the little ones and kill every woman that hath known man by lying with him") hardly sounds like the command of a meek person;
- (bb) "And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face" (Deut. 34:10). This verse not only demonstrates an amazing lack of meekness on the part of Moses, in clear violation of Num. 12:3, but appears to have been written after Moses died. In addition, it's difficult to see how Moses could truthfully say he saw God face to face and also write Ex. 33:20 ("Thou canst not see my (God's--Ed.) face: for there shall see no man and live");
- (cc) Probably the most compelling argument that Moses did not author the Torah is found at the end of the last book. "So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab.... And he buried him in a valley...but no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day" (Deut. 34:5-6). How could Moses have described his own death and burial? Some scholars attempt to escape from this dilemma by alleging Joshua wrote the final verses of Deuteronomy. Unfortunately for them this would include Deut. 34:9, which says, "Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of Wisdom." It's difficult to see how Joshua could have authored this in light of the fact that if he was full of the spirit of wisdom, he certainly did not have the spirit of modesty. Just as important is the fact that by attributing the final verses of Deuteronomy to Joshua, apologists are admitting Moses did not write the entire Torah.

Other evidence of an even more technical nature could be presented, but isn't necessary. Instead, some general observations are in order. First, Moses nowhere

claims to have written the Pentateuch, nor does the Bible impute the Torah to him. Only the "law" is attributed to Moses. Secondly, the books are written in the third person. Moses never says, "I did," except when making a speech. Thirdly, the books of the Pentateuch are never ascribed to Moses in the inscriptions of Hebrew manuscripts or in printed copies of the Hebrew Bible; nor are they styled the "Books of Moses" in the Septuagint or the Vulgate. This only occurs in modern translations. Fourthly, the great amount of repetition in the Pentateuch tends to prove there was more than one author. Things are often introduced as if they had not been referred to before, and show different peculiarities of language. And lastly, there is no important difference between the language of the Pentateuch and that of books written shortly before the return from the Babylonian Captivity. If there was an interval of 1,000 years, these writings would present an unparalleled event in history of languages: no change in 1,000 years!

REVIEWS

In the *Encyclopedia of Biblical Difficulties* Gleason Archer replied to those doubting the Mosaic authorship of the Torah by emphatically stating, "The entire Pentateuch is the authentic work of Moses, under the inspiration of God and the Holy Spirit." (p. 45). His lengthy defense, however, is not directed toward those problems prevented in BE, but toward those critics who contend the Pentateuch was written by several authors hundreds of years after Moses--The Documentary Hypothesis. Because their debate involves a good deal of extra-biblical data, only Archer's points need be mentioned.

First, he contends the Pentateuch must have been written while in Egypt, and not hundreds of years later in Palestine, because (a) "the climate and weather referred to in Exodus are typically Egyptian, not Palestinian," (b) "the trees and animals referred to in Exodus through Deuteronomy are indigenous to Egypt or the Sinai Peninsula, and none of them are peculiar to Palestine," (c) "the geographical references betray the perspective of one who is personally unfamiliar with Palestine, but is well acquainted with Egypt." (Ibid. p. 46-47). Even if the above were true, which many deny, Archer has proved little. Any contemporary of Moses or anyone living in Egypt or the Sinai, even hundreds of years later, could have been the source. Secondly, Archer argues that "a far greater number of Egyptian names and loan words are found in the Pentateuch than any other section of Scripture. This is just what we would expect from an author who was brought up in Egypt, writing for a people who were reared in the same setting as he" (Ibid. p. 48). After being in Egypt for hundreds of years, the Hebrew language would undoubtedly have incorporated many Egyptian terms, and any subsequent Hebrew writer, Moses or otherwise, would have reflected that influence. This would not justify assuming Moses was the author. Thirdly, on page 48 Archer contends that if the Pentateuch was written hundreds of years after Moses, when Jerusalem was the Israelite capital (as the Documentary Hypothesis maintains), then Jerusalem should have been mentioned on many occasions. "A careful examination of the entire text of Genesis through Deuteronomy comes up with the astonishing result that Jerusalem is never once mentioned by name." Surely

Archer isn't suggesting that an American historian describing the Napoleonic Era, for example, must mention Washington D.C. because of its prominence today. Why should a 6th century B.C. writer, describing 14th century B.C. Egypt, have to mention Jerusalem because of the latter's significance in 6th century B.C. Palestine? And finally, Archer contends that Moses was the author because "he had just the right qualifications to compose just such a work as the Torah." "He had a fine education as a prince"; "he must have received a knowledge of the oral law"; he must have had "a full knowledge of the experiences of the patriarchs," and "as a lifelong resident of Egypt and the land of Midian in the Sinai, he must have acquired a personal knowledge of the climate, agricultural practices, and geographical properties of both Egypt and the Sinai, such as is obvious throughout the text of these four books (Exodus through Deuteronomy)." Archer concludes by saying, "Moses had, then, every incentive and every qualification to compose this remarkable production" (Ibid. p. 51). He neglected to mention that this could be applied to hundreds of his contemporaries. Archer acts as if Moses were the only educated Israelite among thousands.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #55 from KHB of Los Angeles, California

(KHB sent BE a page from the Catholic newspaper, *Our Sunday Visitor*. A spokesman for the Catholic Church was asked how priests could be addressed as "father" in light of Matt. 23:9 ["And call no man your father upon earth: for one is your father, which is in heaven"]. His response was as follows--Ed.). In reading the Bible we have to understand what is behind the words, otherwise what we read is subject to misinterpretation. The verse you cite is part of a passage in which Jesus is rebuking the Jewish religious establishment,.... He condemns their use of three titles: rabbi (master), abba (father) and morah (teacher), implying that they are not worthy of these titles. He also doesn't mean that you shouldn't call your dad your father, or refer to a teacher in school as teacher. Christian tradition from the first days has interpreted this verse in its restricted sense, that Christians should not crave worldly honor and that they should be servants of one another....

Editor's Response to Letter #55

Dear KHB,

According to my sources the word "father" comes from the Greek word "pater" not "abba." In any event, the problem with the spokesman's explanation lies in his unwarranted assumptions. He said we must "understand what is behind the words" and immediately inserted something that isn't there. On what basis does he conclude that the verse does "not mean that you shouldn't call your dad father"? It says, "call no man your father." Using Christian tradition as one's final interpreter is about as reliable as using the Supreme Court to determine what the Founding Fathers really had in mind when they wrote the Constitution and its Amendments. Opinions are many and vary considerably on many points. In this instance, tradition may say it's permissible, but the Bible says it isn't. There is nothing justifying Christian tradition interpreting this verse in its "restricted sense" other than a need for plausibility. But if

the latter becomes the criterion, then a substantial portion of the Bible will have to be modified. The verse says "Don't call anyone your father" and until a more substantive and authoritative source than tradition modifies my conclusion, I will have to assume the Book says what it means and means what it says.

Letter #56 from EMM of Lakewood, Ohio (Part a)

...I have a few questions for you. For I would like to know you better. Are you an agnostic or an atheist? Are you a skeptic or a flat out Bible rejecter? Concerning your questions. Do you ask questions because you don't know and want to know the truth? Or do you ask questions just to ask questions? If you received enough answers to your questions would you humble yourself and receive the Lord Jesus Christ as your savior? If so, do you require answers to all your questions or to certain vital ones?

Editor's Response to Letter #56 (Part a)

Dear EMM.

Your tendency to not only pose questions in multiple choice fashion but select options is rather devious. I suppose you could call me an agnostic, although BE is much more concerned with Bible's accuracy than nebulous theological questions on God's existence. "Yes, He exists; no, He doesn't" discussions generally persuade no one, and are decidedly lacking in solid evidence. You ask if I am a skeptic. "Skeptic" is an insidious term of approbrium applied by Christians to their opponents so as to give people the impression that the Bible is true, while its opponents are nit-picking, closed-minded doubters, who refuse to recognize scriptural "truths." From my perspective those holding to biblical inerrancy are skeptics because they refuse to recognize the irrationality of their position. They are skeptical of the wisdom inherent in a path of objectivity, logic, and reason. Am I a flat-out Bible rejecter? By no means! I don't flatly reject anything until it's been given a hearing. Virtually every book on a library shelf has some truth inside. I do, however, view the Bible in perspective and believe the evidence clearly shows it's neither inerrant nor God's word. I don't ask questions merely to know the truth or just to ask questions. I ask so that all within hearing will receive a more accurate perception of issues involved. I ask in order to inform. You ask if I would receive Jesus if I received answers to all my questions? My friend, I'd believe in Santa Claus and the tooth-fairy if sufficient evidence were provided. And there is about as much chance of that as Jesus being proved the Savior and the Bible being proved inerrant. Since you have asked me some questions, let me ask you one. How much evidence would I have to present to convince you that Jesus and the Bible are not worthy of the images portrayed?

Letter #56 Concludes (part b)

...I don't believe I will get to read all of your back issues but I will take your suggestion and purchase them.... One topic that caught my eyes is No. 16, May 1984. "Hitler, Mussolini, and the Klan as Christians." I realize that sometimes titles can be misunderstood. It looks to me as though you believe that those two people are Christians. You don't believe that do you? Hitler and Mussolini were both Roman Catholic,....

Editor's Response to Letter #56 (Part b)

You have touched upon a topic, EMM, that untold numbers of people continue to misunderstand. Let's take two individuals whom we will call Bob and Bill. Bob is one of the most considerate persons who ever lived. He exhibits virtually every positive trait imaginable. He is kind, moral, loving, generous, honest, loyal, cooperative, trustworthy, clean, punctual, reliable, hardworking, and patient. By any standard one can devise he is a thoroughly decent fellow. But he never accepted Jesus as his personal savior. Bill, on the other hand, is the epitome of degeneracy. His entire life has been devoted to lying, stealing, cheating, beating, dishonesty, greed, egotism, raping, and murder. He is a savage killer who has enjoyed merciless brutality on hundreds of occasions. However, just before being executed he repented of his acts and accepted Jesus Christ as his personal savior. The question then becomes: Which man will live in eternal bliss of heaven with Jesus? Bob, you say. Not a chance! Which man will spend an eternity in hell fire? Bill, you say. Wrong again! Bob will languish in hell and Bill will enjoy heaven for all eternity. Why? Because one's behavior has nothing to do with being saved or being a Christian. One is a Christian and saved by virtue of beliefs. Therefore, anyone who has accepted Jesus as his savior is automatically saved and a Christian. And this includes such despicable characters as Hitler, Mussolini, and the klansmen. On the Klan's membership application are the following words: "I am a white person...and I believe in the Christian faith.... I hereby swear that I am a white person of Christian ancestry." As Catholics, Hitler and Mussolini must have accepted Jesus as their savior. And once saved, always saved. Just as you can't be saved by good behavior; you can't be lost by bad behavior. That is basic to nearly all of Christianity. You deny Hitler and Mussolini are Christians, but admit they are Roman Catholics. Are you seriously contending Roman Catholicism is not Christian? You ask if I believed Hitler, Mussolini, and klansmen are Christian. Of course I do. Being good has nothing to do with being a Christian. It is neither a requirement nor a necessary by-product.

As far as I am aware Christianity is the only major religion that believes salvation is based on faith rather than works. All others teach you can earn your way to the promised land. The irrationality of salvation by faith is hard for many biblicists to understand, and has caused them to gravitate toward the more rational belief that better deeds produce greater rewards. Why biblicists are so concerned with having a good record on Judgement Day is difficult to comprehend, since the major decision is sealed at the moment of death. Everything else is anticlimactic. Moreover, if one really believed salvation came through acceptance of Christ as one's savior, then one could engage in all kinds of disgusting activity after submitting to Jesus, with full assurance of ultimate salvation. Subsequent immoral behavior would nullify nothing. As a defense, apologists contend that once one has made a sincere commitment to Jesus, one's beliefs and behavior will change accordingly. If this were true then why do saved and born-again Christians continue to willingly sin? Surely they aren't claiming perfection! And because they continue to intentionally sin, they are little better than someone who is taking advantage of his saved status to sin at will. At best, the difference is one of degree, not kind.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #57 from Vacaville, California

I realize your monthly letters deal with contradictions, errors, and fallacies of the Bible, but would it not be appropriate to print eight reasons why Jesus Christ never existed and is merely a mythological character? It would be interesting to see the reaction....

Editor's Response to Letter #57

Although the historicity of Jesus is an extra-biblical topic and doesn't relate directly to inerrancy, it does merit consideration and will be addressed eventually.

Letter #58 from MP of Tulsa, Oklahoma

Assume for the sake of argument that "Jesus is God" is a true statement. In Num. 31 God ordered Moses to kill the Midianites. What responsibility does Jesus have in all this?

Letter #59 from DWM of Dayton, Ohio

Have a question for you, if I may. On page 5, of issue 3, 13 lines from the bottom of the page, you state, "He (God--Ed.) punished a bastard for being illegitimate, DEUT 32:2." I have a Scofield Reference Edition, and looked up that verse, and for the life of me, cannot get that interpretation out of it. Is that the correct verse? If not, which is?

You sure have done some digging. Thank you for doing all this. I still cannot get over what some people do in the "name of their religion"--refuse blood and stay away from all politics; beat children; handle and get bitten by poisonous snakes; refuse doctors; call vaccines monkey pus; refuse pre- and post-natal care, resulting in excessive deaths to the babies and mothers; the Irish problem; marxist "minister" of all faiths; homosexual marriages," and other quirky things. Makes me glad to be an agnostic.

Editor's response to Letter #59

You are correct, DWM. Deut. 32:2 should have been Deut. 23:2

Letter #60 from JW of Mobile, Alabama (Part a)

Dear Mr. McKinsey

I find your work nothing short of impressive and amazing. I've read most of what you write about but I've not been able to put it together as you have. ...I know there are times I read the Bible and don't really think about what's being said. It's kind of hard sometimes when you have been reared with the Bible pushed at you your entire life, because you learn a lot of the verses by rote and don't think about the words you are saying or what they mean. I sometimes listen to the TV preachers for entertainment. I listen to their sermons and pick out the fallacies, non sequiturs, and incongruencies that they so often preach. They are just full of platitudes and anecdotes that actually have very little to do with the contents of the Bible. One that stands out is the time I was listening to Jimmy Swaggart regarding the verse in Genesis that says "Let us make man in our own image." He was saying that a man he was talking to said God

had a wife and this verse proved it. Well, Swaggart said, "No, it's talking about Jesus." Tell me, how did he come up with this conclusion? You can no more assume the verse is talking about Jesus than about a wife. It does not specify who "us" is. It could be anybody or anything. Just because it disagrees with what Jimmy has been taught, he automatically dismissed it as wrong. I don't see how Swaggart thought he was more right than the person who said God had a wife; but if you want to be logical...it would seem God would have to have a wife (or at least a woman) if he had a son, because he made man in "their" image and men can't have sons physically--so there would have to be a female of the species. (But that is not in the Bible either). So if he is going to assume "us" meant Jesus and only Jesus, than why can't we assume "us" meant wife? Does the list limit "us" to two people? I think its amazing how people can assume so much from so little. The person you spoke of that wrote of certain verses proving the earth rotated on its axis, etc. (Issue #13) was certainly reading a heck of a lot into those verses.... Apologists always have a way out, though. If they don't understand it (the Bible) then it's not God's will for us to know. God can do no wrong and they bend the facts to suit the situation. ...There are so many people who won't even consider what is written right in the Bible black and white. They dismiss it out of hand without question. Because it is supposed to be perfect they have to insist it is that way. I would also like to know if anybody who reads you and writes to you has written to say they have changed their viewpoint form Bible inerrancy to Bible errancy.... (To Be Concluded)

Editor's Response to Letter #60 (Part a)

Dear JW.

I appreciate your kind remarks and would like to respond to your last comment. Leaving the Bible is not an instantaneous act but the result of a long series of revelations over a period of time. People are somewhere on a spectrum, ranging from inerrancy to errancy. At what point someone is no longer a believer in the Bible is difficult to determine, and varies from person to person. So we have no way of judging if or when somebody has changed his or her viewpoint. Indeed, I'm not sure many people know themselves. I do know that providing information such as that found in BE facilitates the movement of many people along the spectrum. We provide information. How it is employed by others is their decision to make. BE doesn't seek to convert people to atheism, agnosticism, humanism or any other -ism. It's merely a forum in which to discuss the Bible's validity. If people discover and adopt another philosophy after rejecting the Bible, BE was not the source.

COMMENTARY

The Creation Accounts

(Part One of a Two Part Series)

Few topics in recent history have generated more controversy than the question of how the earth and its environs were created. For years two major positions--Evolution and Creationism--have been locked in an on-going struggle for influence in the schools, the media, and elsewhere with little chance of immediate victory for either. BE will not enter the fray directly because the issue involves a tremendous amount of technical information lying outside the Bible per se. Creationism is, for all practical purposes, an assault upon the integrity of nearly every physical science, and in order to cope effectively with such organizations as the Institute for Creation Research one would have to become quite knowledgeable with respect to geology, paleontology, anthropology, astronomy, biology, archeology, physics, chemistry, and other physical sciences. Few individuals on either side are sufficiently informed to conduct an impressive presentation. Nevertheless, some general points of disagreement between evolutionists and creationists are worthy of note, and can be discussed with confidence. Creationists obtain their philosophy from biblical accounts related in the book of Genesis, and refer to it as "Scientific Creationsim". But if their position is as scientific as alleged, then why does it clash with science on so many points? Prominent examples are the following:

- (1) "And God said, Let there be light" (Gen. 1:3) and "...And the evening and the morning were the first day" (Gen. 1:5), versus "And God said, 'Let there be light in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night....' "And God made two lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also.... And the evening and morning were the fourth day" (Gen. 1:14-19).
 - (a) God created light on the first day; yet there were no moon, sun or stars until the fourth day;
 - (b) how could it be known when the first three days ended if there was no sun until the fourth day?; and
 - (c) How could morning be distinguished from evening, if the sun and the moon were yet to be created?
- (2) "And God said,'Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yeilding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind.... And the evening and the morning were the third day" (Gen. 1:11-13), versus "And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night; he made the stars also" (Gen. 1:16), and "the evening and the morning were the fourth day"

- (Gen. 1:19). Vegetation was created on the third day; yet there was no sun for the photosynthesis until the fourth day.
- (3) " In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen. 1:1), and"... the evening and the morning were the first day" (Gen.1:5), versus "And God made two great lights; and the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; he made the stars also" (Gen. 1:16) and the evening and the morning were the fourth day" (Gen. 1:19).
 - (a) According to biblical "science", the earth was created 3 days before the sun, the moon and the stars;
 - (b) Scientists say there are many stars whose light takes millions of years to reach the earth. How, then, could they be 6,000 to 8,000 years old as many Christians allege?
 - (4) "And God said, 'Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind...' And the evening and the morning were the third day" (Gen. 1:11-13), versus "And God said, 'Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life... And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly.... And the evening and the morning were the fifth day" (Gen.1:20-23). Genesis says that life existed first on the land as plants and later the seas teemed with living creatures. Geological science says that the sea teemed with animals and vegetable life long before life appeared on land.
 - (5) " So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds,and every winged bird according to its kind.... And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day" (Gen. 1:21-23 RSV). Geological science says fishes appeared long before the birds. They were not created during the same day or period.
 - (6) "And God created...every winged fowl after his kind...." (Gen. 1-21) and "And the evening and the morning were the fifth day" (Gen. 1:23), versus "And God made ther beast of the earth... and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind...." (Gen. 1-25), and "... the evening and the morning were the sixth day" (Gen. 1:31). Science says creeping reptiles appeared on the earth before the fowl, not afterwards.
 - (7) "And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, the beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so. And God made...every thing that creepth upon the earth after his kind...." (Gen. 1:24-25). Science contends that reptiles were created long before mammals, not simultaneously. While reptiles existed in the Carboniferous Age, mammals did not appear until the close of the Reptilian Age.
 - (8) "And God said, 'Let the water bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven" (Gen. 1:20). Birds did not emerge from water.
 - (9) "So God created man in his own image,...male and female created he them" (Gen. 1:27), and "the evening and the morning were the sixth day" (Gen. 1:31). If Adam was created on the 6th day, approximately 6,000 years ago (Bishop Usher's calculations), then nobody lived before 4,000 B.C. Prehistoric men

would be fictitious. By tracing the genealogy of Jesus back 77 generations to Adam, the third chapter of Luke also supports belief in a very young earth. If each man had lived approximately 100 years, then the world would be no more than 9,684 (7,700 + 1984) years old. If each of Jesus' ancestors had lived to be 1,000 years old (an age not even reached by Methuselah), the earth would still be only 78,984 (77,000 + 1984) years old, according to creationists.

- (10) "And to every beast of the earth, and every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat: and it was so" (Gen. 1:30). Carnivorous beasts and fowl do not eat green herbs.
- (11) "And God saw everything that he had made...." (Gen. 1:31) and "on the seventh day God ended his work" (Gen. 2:2). Scientifically speaking, unless God had male organs or attributes, it is difficult to see how God could be masculine.
- (12) "And out of the ground the Lord formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof" (Gen. 2:19). Environmentally speaking, how could every living creature be brought to any spot in the Middle East or elsewhere without many animals dying because of climatic changes and other factors?
- (13) "And Lord God said unto the serpent, 'Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt eat all the days of thy life'..." (Gen. 3:14). If the serpent was a snake, snake-like, or reptilian in character and condemned to crawl upon its belly, how did it move before? And does science know of any serpent that eats dust?

In order to extricate themselves from the problems associated with a six-day creation approximately 6,000 years ago, many apologists assert that each day represents an age or era ,encompassing millions of years. In other words, literal days composed of 24 hours each were not intended. Their belief, however, is erroneous for several reasons:

- (1) The word translated as "day" is "yom" in the Hebrew, which means a definite 24-hour period from sunset to sunset;
- (2) Starting evening and then morning shows a 24-hour period was intended. This was how Jews computed a day;
- (3) If a day is an era, why are an evening and a morning even mentioned?;
- (4) Actual days must be intended; otherwise, men who lived hundreds of years, e.g., Seth and Noah, would really have lived millions of years. If a day is an era, then a year must be tremendously long, perhaps encompassing hundreds of millions of years;
- (5) If a day is an era, then much of the Old Testament becomes chaotic. For example, in each of the following verses the same Hebrew word "yom" is employed: "And the flood was forty days upon the earth" (Gen. 7:17), "And he (Moses--Ed.) was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights" (Ex. 34:28), and "Thus I fell down before the Lord forty days and forty nights..." (Deut.

9:25). If "yom" means era instead of a 24-hour period, Moses was "there with the Lord" for a **long** time.

- (6) If a day means more than 24-hour period, then how are we to interpret the following verses, as well as scores of others. "Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath.... in it thou shalt not work.... For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth...and rested the seventh day" (Ex. 20:9-11).
- (7) Gen. 1:16 ("And God made two great lights: The greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night") states the sun rules the day and the moon rules the night. This obviously is referring to time as we know it--time with days that are 24 hours long, with daylight ruling half of each.
- (8) And lastly, Adam was made on the sixth day (Gen. 1:26, 31), which was supposedly thousand of years long. This was followed by the 7th day which was also thousands of years long. Following the 7th day, Adam fell into sin and was expelled from the Garden. This would mean Adam lived thousands of years, which is false, since he died at age 930 (Gen. 5:5).

What is Science

At this point in the commentary an extra-biblical discourse is in order. Not long ago the editor of BE heard some creationists denounce the theory of evolution and its foremost proponent, Carl Sagan, in no uncertain terms. They accused evolutionists of having a theory with scores of unanswered questions, for which God was the only rational explanation. From these discussions it became evident that two major problems are indelibly written into their approach. First, it exposes a misconception about the nature of science. Physical scientists gather data and formulate theories or laws based upon the information collected. As additional information is gathered, the theories and laws are improved and perfected in a never-ending, on-going process. Physical scientists never arrive at a point where they can say they have a theory or law that is good for all time and under all conditions. They can never say they have an absolute truth that will be true forevermore. What they say is that, based upon all known data and information, a particular theory or law is valid. They are not saying the theory or law will never have to be modified. For the present, however, it's the best explanation available.

When creationists denounce Carl Sagan for calling evolution a proven fact, they are actually attacking all physical scientists, because no scientist can prove any physical law or theory will be eternally true. Creationists want absolutes, which science will never generate. Science does not provide the kind of eternal verities creationists seek. Every law or theory in science is a temporary truth, a relative truth. It works for now; it is true for now. But that is not to say it will never be enhanced. Scientists gather data and formulate theories based on what they have. As new information is collected, the theory is modified and improved, to take account of new facts. Creationists, on the

other hand, formulated theories based on the book of Genesis, gathered data to corroborate them, and discarded all information to the contrary. Facts were made to fit beliefs, rather than vice versa. Secondly, there are always going to be questions in the physical sciences for which current theories or laws have no provable explanation. That is inherent to the nature of science. And because scientists don't know all, creationists and others of an anti-science propensity will always have a void to exploit. And, of course, historically they have done just that. Quick to provide supernatural explanations for unknown causes or phenomena, they have specialized in focusing on the weakness of science and asking questions for which scientists had no conclusive proof. The history of the struggle between scientists and supernaturalists has been, and will continue to be, a perpetual process in which supernaturalists are retreating, while naturalists are advancing. Every time naturalists have found answers to the questions of supernaturalists, the latter have moved to new questions. And until naturalists can provide satisfactory explanations for everything, supernaturalists will always have an opening for divine intervention. The theory of evolution provides a prime example. Yet, it is a theory for which no absolutely conclusive proof is available. But, then, that is true of every law or theory in the physical sciences. If one seeks absolutes, statements which are true at all times, under all conditions, then he should stay with supernaturalists such as the creationists. They, alone, provide absolutes: absolutes which are absolutely wrong. They ignore or discount that which doesn't comply with a predetermined, eternal "truth," which is undoubtedly one of the greatest weaknesses of the entire Bible. It deals in absolutes. By saying "All have sinned" or all must die, it boxes itself into a corner, because exceptions aren't difficult to find in the Book itself.

True, evolutionists can't provide provable explanations for some questions; but creationists provide readily disprovable explanations for most questions. Originally, naturalists held sway 5% of the time and supernaturalists 95%. As naturalistic explanations have grown throughout history, as frontiers of science have expanded, supernaturalistic explanations have been forced to retreat. The percent of naturalistic influence has grown immeasurably, while the percent of supernaturalistic influence has decreased dramatically. But the former will never totally eradicate the latter until a provable natural explanation can be provided for every event, including those of the bygone ages. As Ingersoll once noted:

"At one time it was believed that a race of men existed with their heads beneath their shoulders. Returning travelers from distant lands were asked about the wonderful people and all replied that they had not seen them. Oh, said the believers in the monsters, the men with the heads beneath their shoulders live in a country you did not visit. And so the monsters lived and flourished until all the world was known. We cannot know the universe. We cannot travel infinite distances, and so, somewhere in shoreless space there will always be room for gods and ghosts, for heaven and hell." (Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 2, p. 480).

One would think, though, that creationists and other supernaturalists would learn from history and admit they are fighting a losing battle. They are correct in feeling they can never be eradicated, because science will never know all, it will never become God;

but they must realize their losses will grow with every scientific advance. Indeed, increasing numbers of biblicists are wisely abandoning the ramparts and leaving fundamentalists to cover the retreat.

REVIEWS

Interestingly enough, evangelicals, fundamentalists, and creationists don't agree with one another with respect to the original creative process. The Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, argue that each of the six days encompasses thousands of years.

"... some may say even the idea of this planet passing from a 'formless and waste' condition to its present form with continents, forests, plants, animals, and men, all in just six 24-hour days--this still is incredible! But where does the Genesis account say that the 6 days were 24-hours each? Though some religious groups teach this, the Genesis account does not say it. You yourself use the expression 'day' in a broad sense of your 'grandfather's day.' Likewise the Bible often used the word 'day' in a broad sense-Gen. 2:4. Keep in mind that the works spoken of in the first chapter of Genesis are those of God, not of man... Are God's 'days' of work controlled by the rotation of this globe? Obviously not. Of God, the Bible says:'One day is with Jehovah as a thousand years and a thousand years as one day'(2 Peter 3:8). And that even to God a 'day' can have more than one meaning is seen when comparing this text with Psalm 90:4 which says: 'A thousand years are in your eyes but...as a watch during the night.' So it is plain that the word 'day' can be used to refer to a 24-hour day, a person's lifetime, 1,000 years or even longer" (*Is the Bible Really the Word of God*, p. 18-19).

On pages 62 and 63 in the *Encyclopedia of Biblical Difficulties* Gleason Archer argues against 6 literal days of 24 hours each.

On the other hand, Henry Morris, one of the foremost creationists and Director of the Institute for Creation Research, supports six 24-hour periods. "The Hebrew word for'day' is 'yom' and this word can occasionally be used to mean an indefinite period of time, if the content warrants. In the overwhelming preponderance of its occurrences in the O.T., however, it means a literal day... Still further, the plural form of the word (Hebrew 'yamim") is used over 700 times in the O.T. and always, without exception, refers to literal 'days.' (*The Bible Has the Answers*, Henry Morris, p. 94). In denouncing the idea that each day represented an era, creationist Morris made a surprising admission. "Not only is the day-age theory unacceptable scripturally, but it also is grossly in conflict with the geological position with which it attempts to compromise. There are more than 20 serious contradictions between the Biblical order and events of the creative days and the standard geological history of the earth and its development, even if it were permissible to interpret the 'days' as 'ages.' For example, the Bible teaches that the earth existed before the stars, that it was initially covered by water, that fruit trees appeared before fishes, that plant life preceded the sun, that the first animals created were the whales, that the birds were made before insects, that

man was made before woman, and many other things, all of which are explicitly contradicted by historical geologists and paleontologists." (Ibid. p. 94).

Jerry Falwell's mentor, fundamentalist John R. Rice, also discounted the day-age theory. "Gen. 1:5 surely spoke of literal day and literal night, and the inference from the statement, 'And the evening and the morning were the first day,' is that it was a literal day of evening and morning, 24-hours... There is no Bible evidence that the days of this chapter were longer periods." (Dr. Rice, *Here is My Question*, John R. Rice, p. 259).

In order to resolve the conflict between a 6 day creation and one involving millions of years, some biblicists devised the gap-theory. Heaven and earth were supposedly created as related in Gen. 1:1 and the earth proceeded to evolve over hundreds of millions of years, if not billions. Then a cataclysm destroyed the earth and returned it to its former state. Then with Gen. 1:2 the 6 days of creation began. In other words, hundreds of millions of years, a gap, existed between Gen. 1:1 and Gen. 1:2. The gap-theory attempts to satisfy both evolutionists and creationists. Creationist Morris gave the following appropriate response: "...the pressures...have been so heavy during the past century that many Bible scholars have felt desirable to reinterpret Genesis in some way that would accommodate the supposed geologic ages. Two such theories have been advanced, one placing the geologic ages 'during' the 6 days of creation (thus making the 'days' into 'ages'), and the other placing the ages 'before' the 6 days (thus turning the 6 days into days of 're-creation' following a great cataclysm which had destroyed the primal earth)..." (Ibid. p. 90). After discussing "numerous serious fallacies" in the gap-theory, Morris concludes: "The gap theory therefore really does not face the evolution issue at all, but merely pigeonholes it in an imaginary gap between Gen. 1:1 and 1:2. It leaves unanswered the serious problem as to why God would use the method of slow evolution over long ages in the primeval world, then destroy it and then use the method of special creation to re-create (in 6 days--Ed.) the same forms He had just destroyed. Furthermore. there is no geologic evidence of such a world-wide cataclysm in recent geologic history.... (During the Glacial Age--Ed.) ice sheets only extended into the middle latitudes, and certainly did not destroy all previous life. There is no Biblical evidence of such a worldwide pre-Adamic cataclysm either. A few tests, isolated from the contexts, may possibly be interpreted to fit in with the gap theory, but nowhere in the Bible is there a clear, straightforward account of the supposed primeval creation and the character of the hypothetical pre-Adamic cataclysm. This is strange in light of the importance which this theory has come to hold in the theologies of many Bible teachers and in the much-too-easy answers which they offer for this basic issue in the foundational history of the cosmos." (Ibid. p. 91-92)

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #61 from DB of Ontario, California

(In letter #43 in May 1984 issue, DB described his evolution away from God and was criticized by GLF in Letter #50 in the July Issue--Ed.). It's your fault! GLF's confusion (letter #50) probably comes from a typo you made in reproducing my letter #43. My original letter has the sentence, "But I believed I did know him." You omitted the "d" in the "believed" which changes to the present tense. As it stands, I would agree with GLF that the statement appears contradictory. I do not presently believe that I did know God personally, but I did at one time hold such a belief. My point was to show how a belief can bias one's interpretation of the Bible. My former beliefs were very strong, but false nonetheless. Perhaps GLF presently believes he-she has a special relationship with God and can not conceive of ever rejecting something so precious. Or perhaps he is afraid to admit that my defection from Christianity touches that close to home. I often hear from concerned friends, "If you had really known God you never would have rejected him." Or "Satan has led you astray from your first love." At one time in my life I did sincerely believe that I knew God personally; but now I can see where I was experiencing a common delusion, bolstered by irrational acceptance of ancient, absurd, and contradictory superstitious documents, the Bible. Most of my Christian friends try to ignore the facts of Biblical errancy. Instead, they try to attack me through psychological intimidations and emotional appeals. It would be interesting to hear how GLF responds to some of the specific textual problems presented in BE.

Editor's Response to Letter #61

Dear DB.

Please accept my apology for leaving the "d" off of "believed." I thought you inserted it accidentally.

Letter #62 from LM of Springfield, Missouri

Dear Mr. McKinsey.

After receiving and reading my first issue of BE (Nov. 1983), I must write, mostly because of 1 Peter 3:15. My second reason would be to compliment you on possessing a logically functioning mind with the insight to develop questions of interest.... The questions you ask regarding the flood do not disturb or even interest me, because with God all things are possible (Matt. 19:26). Also, the Christian is not to be a disrupter or fighter with questions and disputes of words (1 Tim. 6:3, 4, 20) but rather to keep themselves in the love and peace of God (Jude 21-23), to show forth what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God....

Editor's Response to Letter #62

Dear LM.

I appreciate your thoughtful compliment, but find your letter to be typical of others I have received. In essence, you sent me a critique of those who believe as I, liberally sprinkled with biblical quotations which I generally omitted. But what have you proved? Let me repeat! What have you proved, LM? The fallacy inherent in your reasoning, which is so indicative of biblicists, is that you assume the very point in

dispute. You assume the Book is the word of God, and then quote it to prove points. You feel that if you have belief and can find a verse to support it, then you have proven your case. Yet you never substantiated your original premise. You ignore the biblical injunction to "Prove all things" (1 Thess. 5:21). You never prove the Bible is the word of God. Indeed, BE provides evidence to the contrary. If you could prove it's God's word or if you could provide evidence independent of the Bible that verses are accurate, then your commentary would carry some weight. As it is, it's a series of unfounded opinions, buttressed by nothing more than quotes from an errant writing. How could the Bible accurately reflect, agree with, or mirror the real world, when it doesn't even agree with itself?

A few of your specific points also need to be addressed. You stated you weren't bothered by my questions with regard to the Flood because God can do anything. A comment of this nature reflects the ultimate in closed-mindedness. In essence, you're saying, "I don't care what kind of facts, evidence, logic, or proof you have, if it conflicts with what I have already been told, then it's wrong." Can God abolish himself and then bring himself back into existence? Can God create an all-black white horse? Can God commit evil which will nullify his very definition? Can God make something that is both itself and not itself? Can God make a statement true and false simultaneously from the same perspective? Can God create something older or more powerful than himself? Secondly, you conveniently chose 1 Tim. 6 to show Christians should avoid disputes with people such as I, and ignored 2 Tim. 4:2 ("...convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching"), 1 Peter 3:15 ("Always be prepared to make a defence to any one who calls you to account..."), and 2 Tim. 2:24-25. Aren't you selectively choosing which verses to follow? And lastly, if you believe the god of the Bible has a "good and acceptable and perfect will" exuding "love and peace," please read page 5 in the March 1983 issue of BE.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

(Last month's letter #60 which was to be concluded this month will be completed next month.)

Issue No. 22

October, 1984

COMMENTARY

The Creation Accounts (Part Two of a Two-Part Series)

Last month's commentary on the scientific problems associated with the biblical account of creation noted there is one more version which occurred. There are actually two--the first beginning with Gen. 1:1 and concluding with Gen. 2:3, the second beginning at Gen. 2:4 and concluding the chapter. These are noteworthy in that they not only disagree with one another in numerous instances, but are internally plagued as well. Many examples of the former can be given.

- (1) "And God made the beast of the earth" (Gen. 1:25) and "So God created man in his own image" (Gen. 1:27), versus "God formed man of the dust of the ground" (Gen. 2:7) and "God formed every beast of the field and every fowl of the air, and brought them unto Adam"(Gen. 2:19). According to the 1st account man was created after the beasts. According to the 2nd he was created before them. In the latter instance, he had to have been created before the other beasts; otherwise, how could they have been brought to him? (
- 2) "And God created...every winged fowl" (Gen. 1:21) and "So God created man in his own image" (Gen. 1:27), versus "God formed man of the dust of the ground" (Gen. 2:7) and "...God formed...every fowl of the air (Gen. 2:19). In the 1st creation God made the fowl, then man. In the 2nd he made man, then the fowl.
- (3) "And the earth brought forth...the tree yeilding fruit...the third day" (Gen. 1:12-13) and "God created man in his own image...the sixth day" (Gen.1:27, 31), versus "God formed man of the dust of the ground" (Gen. 2:7) and "Out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is...good for food..." (Gen. 2:9). In the 1st creation God made the fruit trees on the third day and created man three days later. In the 2nd creation God made man before the fruit trees.
- (4) "And God said, 'Let the waters bring forth abundantly...fowl that may fly...'" (Gen. 1:20), versus "And out of the ground the Lord God formed every...fowl of the air..." (Gen. 2:19). According to the 1st creation all winged fowl were

created out of the waters. Yet, the 2nd account says that every fowl of the air was created out of the ground.

- (5) "And God created...every winged fowl...the fifth day" (Gen. 1:21, 23) and God made the beast of the earth...the sixth day" (Gen. 1:25, 31), versus "And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every fowl of the air..." (Gen. 2:19). According to the 1st creation, fowl were created on the 5th day and beast on the 6th. Under the 2nd creation, fowl and beast were created at the same time; they formed one creative act.
- (6) "And God said, 'behold, I have given you...every tree, in which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat'" (Gen. 1:29), versus "...of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it" (Gen. 2:17). In the last creation Adam may eat from any fruit tree; while in the second he may not eat the fruit of all trees.
- (7) "So God created man in his own image" (Gen. 1:27), versus "For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:5) and "the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become one of us, to know good and evil" (Gen. 3:22). In the 1st creation man is made in the image of God; in the second, likeness is acquired by learning of good and evil.
- (8) "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created him; male and female created he them" (Gen. 1:27), versus "...but for Adam there was not found a help meet for him. And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam and he slept: and he took one of his ribs...and the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman" (Gen. 2:20-22). In the first creation man and woman appeared on earth together; in the second, man came first and later his rib was taken to make a woman.
- (9) "And the earth was without form, and void.... And the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" (Gen. 1:2 and "God said, 'Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear': and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called he Seas..." (Gen. 1:9-10), versus "...in the day that the Lord God made the earth...for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not to till the ground. But there went up a mist from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground" (Gen. 2:4-6). In the 1st creation the earth, when created, was covered with water and the land did not appear until the 3rd day. In the 2nd creation there was no water at first; the earth was dry land.
- (10) "And God said, 'Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind...upon the earth..." (Gen. 1:11) versus "...in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, And every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew..." (Gen. 2:4-5). In the 1st. creation plants were created from the earth: they were a product of the earth. In the 2nd creation were created independent of the earth and then transferred to the earth. "Before it was in the earth" shows plants were created before they had contact with the earth.

- Although not necessarily contradictory, two additional inconsistencies are noteworthy. (11) "And God blessed them, and said unto them, 'Be fruitful, and multiply...and have dominion over...every living thing that moveth upon the earth'" (Gen. 1:28), versus "And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress and to keep it." (Gen. 2:15). Under the first creation God gave man and woman dominion over all things, and they were ordered to subdue the earth. Under the 2nd creation they were confined to the Garden and ordered to keep and dress it.
- (12) In the 1st creation account God is always called "God"; in the second he is always called "Lord God."

Besides contradictions and inconsistencies between the accounts, there are also problems within each. With respect to the first, the following are noteworthy:

- (1) "And God saw the light, that is was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night...the first day" (Gen. 1:4-5) versus "And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night....' And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night...the fourth day" (Gen. 1:14-16, 19). Why would God need to divide the day from the night on the 4th day when it was already done on the 1st day?
- (2) "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth...the 1st day" (Gen. 1:1, 5), versus "And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night...the 4th day" (Gen. 1:16, 19). According to science the earth was created after the sun, not before. Yet, Genesis says the sun was created three days after the earth.
- (3) "And the earth brought forth grass...and the tree yielding fruit...the third day" (Gen. 1:12-13), versus "And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly...the fifth day" (Gen. 1:21, 23). There are few reputable scientists who would say that the earth was covered with fruit-bearing trees before animal life appeared in the seas.
- (4) "And God called the firmament heaven" (Gen. 1:8), versus "...in the firmament of heaven" (Gen. 1:14,17). Are heaven and the firmament identical? The phrase "firmament of the heaven" implies they are not.
- (5) "And God blessed them, and said unto them, 'Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth...'" (Gen. 1:28). "Replenish" means that men or people must have existed before Adam.
- (6) "And on the 7th day God ended his work...and he rested on the 7th day..." (Gen. 2:2). If God ended his work on the seventh day, then he must also have worked on the 7th day. Unless he was working on the 7th day, he could not have stopped working on the 7th day. Therefore, God worked on all seven days. He worked on the sabbath.
- (7) "And God saw every thing that he made, and, behold, it was very good" (Gen. 1:31). How then could evil have entered a world which was good, yea perfect, when the work of creation was completed?

- (8) "And God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Gen. 1:26-27). Is God one or many?
- (9) Gen. 1:26 ("God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness'") appears to contradict Isaiah 40:25, which says, "To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One."

The second account is also not without internal problems. For example, "But of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:12) versus "...the serpent said unto the woman, ye shall not surely die" (Gen. 3:4) and "all the days that Adam lived were 969: and he died"(Gen. 5:5). Adam ate the forbidden fruit and did not die. The serpent told the truth and God didn't. If a spiritual death was intended, as many allege, then why wouldn't that also be the intent of the following verses. "And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the Lord. And Nathan said unto David, The Lord also hath put away thy sin: thou shalt not die. Howbeit because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord..., the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die" (2 Sam. 12:13-14). As the following verse shows, he certainly was not referring to a spiritual death. "And it came to pass on the 7th day, that the child died" (2 Sam. 12:18).

The narrative of events in the Garden of Eden, which is introduced in the second account, is not without problems either.

- (1) "...she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat and gave also unto her husband with, and he did eat" (Gen. 3:6), versus "God is the Rock, his work is perfect" (Deut. 32:4). If God's work is perfect and he created Adam and Eve, then they were perfect. How, then, could they have sinned?
- (2) "And the serpent said unto the woman...For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:4-5) and "the Lord God said, 'Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil'" (Gen. 3:22). In effect, in Gen. 3:22 God is saying the serpent told the truth when he said that man would learn good and evil. But in the Book of John we are told the Devil is incapable of telling the truth. "You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him...for he is a liar and the father of lies" John 8:44 RSV).
- (3) "...Adam and his wife (Genesis relates no marriage--Ed.) hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God...and the Lord God called unto Adam and said unto him, Where art thou?" (Gen. 3:8-9), versus "There is no darkness...where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves" (Job 34:22). Apparently, either the workers of iniquity can hide themselves, or God is practicing deception.

Pascal's Wager

While engaged in a debate with a couple of ministers some time ago, the editor of BE again heard a familiar refrain, similar to that created by the 17th century French philosopher, Blaise Pascal. The latter asserted one should believe because it might be true. If it isn't, you have lost nothing; if true, you have gained everything, so why not believe and "play it safe"? A major problem with this is: Believe in what? Members of nearly every denomination and every religion contend one must believe their way in order to reach the promised land. Some believe that in order to reach heaven, one must merely accept Jesus as one's savior; others believe various sacraments are required; the Church of Christ, for example, believes baptism is obligatory. The "play it safe" approach would force one to adopt the beliefs of nearly every denomination or religion in existence. Once you chose the beliefs of one religion or denomination over another, you are no longer "playing it safe." You are gambling; you are betting that you have selected the correct road to salvation out of hundreds available. If baptism is a necessity, as some maintain, or other sacraments are a must, as others contend, then millions of people, including Christians, are lost. Even if you decide to "play it safe" by accepting the beliefs of everyone, you would become involved in an impossible situation, since many beliefs are mutually exclusive. From the Muslim perspective, for instance, all believers in the Trinity, which would include most Christians, are doomed to perdition and guilty of the grossest blasphemy. "In blasphemy indeed are those that say God is Christ the son of Mary." (Sura 5:17 in the Koran). "They do blaspheme who say: God is Christ the son of Mary.... Whoever joins other gods with God, God will forbid him in the Garden, and Fire will be his abode. There will for the wrongdoers be no one to help. They do blaspheme who say: God is one of three in a Trinity: for there is no God except One God. IF they desist not from their word (of blasphemy), verily a grievous penalty will befall the blasphemers among them. Why turn they not to God, and seek His forgiveness?...Christ the son of Mary was no more than an apostle." (Sura 5:72-75). "They say: God has begotten a son! Indeed ye have put forth a thing most monstrous! At it the skies are ready to burst, the earth to split asunder,...for it is not consonant with the majesty of God...that he should beget a son." (Sura 19:88-92). "In blasphemy indeed are those that say God is Christ the son of Mary" (Sura 5:17)

Christians who believe they are "playing it safe" are actually engulfed in many gambles. They are betting their particular denomination's requirements are correct, out of hundreds that exist; they are betting the Muslims are wrong in consigning them to hell for belief in the Trinity; they are betting some sacraments are not required; they are even betting the Bible is God's book, despite its degradation of Him. They are taking more chances than an investment banker on Wall Street. If it's not God's work and God does exist, one can only pity their fate. If a group of people were selling a book which described you as "a false friend, an unjust judge, a braggart, a hypocrite, a tyrant, sincere in hatred, jealous, vain and revengeful, false in promise, honest in curse, suspicious, ignorant, infamous and hideous" (*Some Mistakes of Moses* by Ingersoll: See also March 1983 issue of BE) and claimed the work was written and approved by you, how would you treat them if given the opportunity? Any believer,

Christian or otherwise, who thinks he isn't making a lot of wagers, that somehow he "playing it safe," is only deluding himself.

REVIEWS

In *Answers to Tough Questions* Josh McDowell presented two major defenses that are usually offered to explain the "Two Creation" dilemma--the accounts are complementary and the second is not chronologically arranged. "It is a mistake to assume that the two Genesis narratives are duplicates, for they actually complement one another. The first outlined the broad processes of creation...while the second paid greater attention to the creation of man and set him with his mate in a specific geographical location" (Page 177). "Much of the problem results over the assumption by the critics that the sequence of chapter 2 is chronological, when it never was meant to be understood in that manner." (Ibid. p. 185).

Several problems accompany these explanations. First, out of 34 verses in the first account (KJV), 31 begin with the word "And", which is clearly used to denote sequence and chronology. This happened and, then, that happened. Out of 22 verses in the second account, 17 begin with "And" and serve the same function. There is nothing to justify the apologetic assumption that the first group of "Ands" denote sequence while the second do not. Secondly, one need only read chapter 2 beginning with verse 4 to see the events are arranged sequentially. Verse 7 (man's creation) would logically follow verse 5; verse 8 would logically follow verse 7; verse 9 would follow 8 (the Garden); verse 15 would follow verse 7 (the creation of man) and 8 (the Garden of Eden); 17 would follow 16; 20 would follow 19 (the naming of animals); 22 would follow 21 (the rib); and 23 would follow 22 (the woman). Indeed, understanding the 2nd version would be rather difficult if the events were not viewed sequentially.

Thirdly, Gen. 2:19 ("And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them") would present a contradiction, even if the second account were not sequential. As stated earlier, how could the animals be brought to Adam for naming unless Adam already existed? But according to the first account, man was the last being created. McDowell seeks to escape this problem by changing the verb "formed" to "had formed." He asserts that "in Gen. 2:19 there is not explicit warrant in the text for assuming that the creation of animals here happened immediately before their naming.... The proper equivalent English for the first verb in Gen. 2:19 is the pluperfect ("had formed")." (Ibid. p. 186). Apparently McDowell feels he knows Hebrew better than the scholars who translated all the following versions:KJV, RSV, LB, NASB, NAB, ASV, and the Jewish Masoretic text. Not one says "had formed." They all say "formed." Fourthly, even if the 2nd account is less general and focuses more on man specifically, that has little bearing on the chronological disagreements.

When the accounts discuss the same events, the sequences must agree. Both mention man, fowl, beast, fruit trees, woman, and plants.

One of the specific differences addressed by McDowell involves the creation of man and woman. "The sequential differences with regard to the creation of man and woman are also a major point of contention, but if properly understood the problem vanishes.... By the simple phrase "male and female created He them," we are not told how they were made or if they were created at the same time. There is only the indefinite statement that they were created. In the second account, when the writer elaborates the story of mankind's origins it is explained in detail how man and woman were formed respectively. This is not a matter of inconsistency, but of a general statement followed by a detailed account..." (Ibid. p. 184). McDowell conveniently ignored the verse immediately after 1:27. Gen. 1:27 says, "...male and female created he them" which is followed by "And God blessed them and said unto them, 'Be fruitful, and multiply...'" (Gen. 1:28). They were created simultaneously and blessed by God immediately thereafter and told to multiply. Not only does the "And" at the beginning of verse 28 denote sequence, but the blessing would logically immediately follow their creation. Moreover, the order to "be fruitful and multiply" is written in such a manner as to not only be the first comment of God to Adam and Eve, but one addressed to both of them. Whereas, Gen. 2:16-18 shows God conversed with Adam alone before Eve even existed. In other words, unlike that which is related in the 2nd account, the first account shows they were created together, as part of one act.

In *Bible Difficulties* apologist Arndt stated, "To all of the attacks made upon the account of Creation as presented by Moses the Christian can reply, in the first place, that the pronouncement of his God on the origin of the world is more important to him than the dicta of scientists. In the second place,...none of the critics was present when the universe was created..." (Page 109). Arndt's first comment demonstrates the close-mindedness that is so indicative of the apologetic mentality. "I don't care what evidence you have, if it contradicts the Bible then it's false." BE confines itself primarily to an internal analysis of the Book for this very reason. Secondly, Arndt claims none of the critics was present when the world was created. True, but then, neither was Moses. At least scientific critics can provide rocks, fossils, and other material evidence, which were present upon which to make judgements. Moses gave us nothing more than a book, assuming he wrote it.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #63 from VT of Huron, California (Part a)
(After criticizing Paine and Ingersoll, VT writes--Ed.) If one could destroy the Bible, in one broad sweep you would in effect destroy the Christian Church. This has long been the aim and purpose of all anti-Christian encounter groups. Destroy and divide and disarm might be called the battle cry of those that would apostate the Bible. The goal of the secular humanism is to dethrone God and elevate man. If you don't call yourself a humanist, you certainly fill the void for one. The humanists think, talk and

respond to the Bible just as you do. They disavow any belief in or association with the God of the Bible.

Editor's Response to Letter #63 (Part a)

Dear VT.

There are several points in your letter that need to be addressed. First, how do you know the motives of others? You mean everyone opposed to the Bible has an ulterior motive and actually seeks to destroy Christianity? What is your evidence for this? A survey? Motives vary widely, and for you to say this applies to "all" is presumptuous at best. BE, for one, intends to expose the Bible to critical analysis and refutation. If the abolishment of Christianity would be an unavoidable outcome, then Christianity is no more valid than the Book upon which it rests, and merits the same fate. Secondly, the battle cry of those in opposition to the Bible could more accurately be referred to as "Read, Refute, and Reveal." Your apologetic education has created an unwillingness to accept any critic of the Bible as a fair and honest questioner with valid and justifiable evidence. Thirdly, secular humanists are capable of speaking for themselves, but I take exception to your implied comment that I seek to dethrone God and elevate myself. You have dethroned God by attributing a Book to him that not only puts his character in the worst light imaginable, but attributes an incredible number of contradictory and inaccurate statements to him. Indeed, the entire history of this publication has been devoted to an itemized refutation of that which you assert without evidence. Don't just say the Bible is God's word, prove it; prove it as you would in a court of law. By what rationale did you conclude that I have been elevating myself by exposing the Bible? Are you saying the information BE has brought out should not be made available to people? Is that what you want? Are you saying the clergy will perform the task as well? After giving a speech to 50 people recently, I was told by a lady that my teachings would shake or destroy the faith of people and leave them nothing to believe in, nothing to hold on to. I asked her, "Are you saying people should not be told about the myriad of problems within the Book, that they should be kept in the dark, that they should not be given an opportunity to judge for themselves what is valid and what is not? Is that what you want? Are you saying others should do the thinking for them? Are you saying it is better for people to believe that which is false than believe in alternatives, or nothing? Are you saying as long as believers are content and well-behaved, accuracy is of little concern? Are you saying the end justifies the means? Pacific, orderly, controlled individuals (often referred to in the Bible as slaves and sheep) justify deception, falsehood, and rationalization? Is that what you prefer?

Hundreds of clergymen and theologians throughout history have noticed the tremendously large number of problems in the Bible. They can read as well as anyone, and aren't ignorant or unintelligent. But they have ignored, rationalized, and distorted the meaning of verses beyond recognition. Why? Mainly because they have sincerely believed the alternative is even worse. From their perspective, the only alternative is moral chaos--no Bible, no controls, no morality. So they have accepted the Book, fully cognizant of its imperfections, out of a misguided belief that morality arises from the words one hears rather than the environment in which one lives. And

finally, not only do humanists and I "disavow any belief in...the God of the Bible," but no doubt God does as well. You would be wise to follow suit.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #60 from the August, 1984 Issue Concludes (Part b)

I was reared in the fundamentalist baptist religion and went to a non-denominational "Christian" school and believed all these things fervently--now that I think back on it I remember questioning lots of things in my mind, but pushed them back because of what I was taught--that it is perfect. So any questions I might have had were because God was so intelligent and far above me that I couldn't understand what he was saying. I only began soul-searching when my friend (now husband) began asking me questions that I couldn't answer. And together we slowly came to the same conclusion. For instance, he asked me about the order of creation--the grass was created before the sun--how did the grass photosynthesize? Gradually the more I studied the more I learned--really learned and I've drawn my own conclusions.... In fact the Bible is a far more interesting subject now than it was when I considered myself a "born-again Christian." And I was very devout.... It has taken me 6 or 7 years to come this far. I'm 26. The biblicists say. "The truth shall set you free" and they are correct. I'm far freer and happier than I was in my guilt-inducing Bible days.... I feel you have put the "study" in Bible study. Your work is much appreciated by us. Keep it up.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Some readers have asked if there is any way they can aid BE. By all means! Most areas in the United States and Canada have call-in radio programs. The Editor of BE has been on several programs recently and found the dialogue and debate aspect of a call-in format to be highly effective. We would greatly appreciate assistance in this regard. You need only call stations with call-in programs and tell them you have an editor of a periodical who would be willing to go on-the-air and provide a much more balanced presentation of the Bible. Stress the importance of fair play and a responsible alternative to evangelists. This should be particularly effective if you can relate instances in which evangelists and other apologists have been provided an opportunity to express their views. Persistence helps! If the station sounds interested, please have them write us or call (513) 864-1268 any day after 5:00pm (EST) or on weekends. A three-hour long distance dialogue on WKBN (Youngstown) and a 4-hour discussion on WING (Dayton) recently were quite beneficial. Every appearance has resulted in a wider audience, additional subscribers, and more reflective populace.

COMMENTARY: Biblical "Math"

From a scientific perspective, one of the more interesting aspects of the Bible concerns the number of times numerical calculations are inaccurate. Poor addition, erroneous measurements and fallacious counting are all too evident. Several examples are noteworthy:

- (a) "... and the sons of Zerubbabel; Meshullam, and Hananiah, Jusha-bhesed, five." (1 Chron. 3:19-20). How can there be five sons of Zerubbabel when 7 males and one female are listed?
- (b) "And it had for its inheritance Beer-sheba, Sheba, Moladah, Hazar-shual, Balah, Ezem, Eltolad, Bethul, Hormah, Ziklag, Beth-marcaboth, Hazarsuah, Beth-lebaoth, and Sharuhem- thirteen cities with their villages" (Josh. 19:2-6 RSV). Fourteen cities are listed, not 13.
- (c) "The cities belonging to the tribe of the people of Judah in the extreme South, toward the boundary of Edom, were Kabzeel, Eder, Jagur, Kinah, Dimonah, Adadah, Kedesh, Hazor, Ithnan, Ziph, Telem, Bealoth, Hazor-hadattah, Kerioth-hezron (that is Hazor). Amam, Shema, Moladah, Hazar-gaddah, Heshmon, Bethpelet, Hazar-shual, Beer-sheba, Biziothiah, Baalah, Iim, Ezem, Eltolad, Chesil, Hormah, Ziklag, Madmannah, Sansannah, Lebaoth, Shilhim, Ain, and Rimmon; in all twenty-nine(29) cities, with their villages" (Josh. 15:21-32 RSV). Thirty-six cities are listed, not 29.
- (d) "...and the sons of Shemaiah; Hattush, and Igeal and Barial, and Neariah, and Shaphat, six" (1Chron. 3:22). Five names don't total six.
- (e) "...the sons of Jeduthun; Gedaliah, and Zeri, and Jeshiah, Hashabiah, and Mattithiah, six, under the hands of their father Jeduthun,..." (1 Chron. 25:3). Again, five names do not total six.
- (f) "And in the lowland, Eshtaol, Zorah, Ashnah, Zanoah, En-gannim, Tappuah, Enam, Jarmuth, Adullam, Socoh, Azekah, Sha-araim, Adithaim, Gederah, Gederothaim: fourteen cities with their villages" (Josh. 15:33-36 RSV). Fifteen cities are listed, not 14. Biblical authors not only counted inaccurately but often added with comparable precision.
- (g) "The whole congregation together (those who returned from the Captivity-Ed.) was forty and two thousand three hundred and threescore (42,360)" (Ezra 2:64). The number of people in each tribe that returned from the Captivity are listed from Ezra 2:3 to Ezra 2:60. One need only total the figures to see that 29,818 returned, not 42,360- an error of 12,542.
- (h) A similar problem is encountered in Neh. 7:66, which says, "the whole congregation together was forty and two thousand three hundred and threescore (42,360)." One need only add the figures between Neh. 7:8 and Neh. 7:62 to see that the total for all the tribe should have been 31,089, not 42,360-- an

error of 11,271. Besides adding inaccurately, Ezra and Nehemiah can't agree on what the total should be. The former supports 29,818 while the latter asserts 31,089.

- (i) "And this is the number of them: Thirty (30) charges of gold, a thousand (1,000) charges of silver, nine and twenty (29) knives, Thirty (30) basins of gold, silver basins of a second sort four hundred and ten (410), and vessels a thousand (1,000). All the vessels of gold and of silver were five thousand and four hundred (5,400)" (Ezra 1:9-11). Even if all these items were composed of silver and gold, they would not total 5,400 ($30 + 1,000 + 29 + 30 + 410 + 1,000 = 2,499$ not 5,400).
- (j) "And these were the sons of Levi by their names; Gershon, and Kohath, and Merari" (Num. 3:17) and "Those that were numbered of them (the Gershonites-Ed.)...were seven thousand and five hundred (7,500)" (Num. 3:22) and "...these are the families of the Kohathites...eight thousand and six hundred (8,600)" (Num. 3:27-28) and "...these are the families of the Merari. And those that were numbered of them,...were six thousand and two hundred (6,200)" (Num.3:33-34), versus "All that were numbered of the Levites,...were twenty and two thousand (22,000)" (Num. 3:39). The author of Numbers added inaccurately, since $7,500 + 8,600 + 6,200$ equals 22,300, not 22,000.

Besides fallacious counting and adding, biblical authors had difficulty measuring and computing.

- (k) "And he made a molten sea, ten cubits from one brim to the other: it was round all about, and his height was five cubits: and a line of thirty cubits did compass it round about" (1 Kings 7:23). How could a circle be 10 cubits in diameter and 30 cubits in circumference? Since pi is 3.14, the circumference must be 31.40 (3.14×10) cubits.
- (l) "Thirty and two years old (32) was he (Jehoram-Ed.) when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem eight (8) years, and departed without being desired. Howbeit they buried him in the city of David,... And the inhabitants of Jerusalem made Ahaziah his youngest son king in his stead:... So Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah reigned. Forty and two years old (42) was Ahaziah when he began to reign..." (2 Chron. 21:20). If Jehoram began to reign at age 32 and ruled 8 years, he died at age 40. Yet his son took over immediately and was 42 years old. The son, Ahaziah, was two years older than his father, Jehoram.
- (m) Ezek. 40:27 is translated as followed in three different versions: "...and he measured from gate to gate the south an hundred (100) cubits" (KJV). "He measured from gate to gate one hundred and seventy-five (175) feet" (Modern Language). "And the distance between the passageway was 175 feet" (Living Bible). If 100 cubits equals 175 feet, then one cubit equals $1 \frac{3}{4}$ feet. On the other hand, these versions translate Gen. 6:15 as follows: "...The length of the ark shall be three hundred (300) cubits, the breadth of it fifty (50) cubits, and the height of it thirty (30) cubits" (KJV). "...The length of the ark four hundred and fifty (450) feet; its width seventy-five (75) feet and its depth forty-five (45) feet" (Modern Language). "Make it 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet

high" (Living Bible). If 300 cubits equals 450 feet, then 1 cubit equals 1 1/2 feet. The authors of the various versions of the Bible can't agree on the length of a cubit. Is it 1 3/4 or 1 1/2 feet long?

The Matriarchs

The January, 1984 issue of BE discussed the immoral character of many well-known Old Testament patriarchs. It should be noted, however, that many OT patriarchs exhibited immoral proclivities as well. For example:

- (1) Michal lied to Saul-"And when Saul sent messengers to take David, she said, He is sick" (1Sam. 19:14);
- (2) Jael murdered Sisera-"Then Jael Heber's wife took a nail of the tent, and took an hammer in her hand, and went softly unto him and smote the nail into his temples, for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died" (Judges 4:21);
- (3) Rachel deceived her father-"Now Rachel had taken the images and put them in the camel's furniture, and sat upon them. And Laban searched all the tent, but found them not. And she said to her father, Let it not displease my lord that I cannot rise up before thee; for the custom of women is upon me. And he searched, but found not images" (Gen. 31:34-35);
- (4) Instead of marrying one of her cousins, Ruth went to bed with another of them- "He (Boaz-Ed.) said, Who are you? And she answered, I am Ruth, your maidservant: spread your skirt over your maidservant, for you are next of kin" (Ruth 3:9 RSV);
- (5) Sarah lied when she claimed she did not laugh-"But Sarah denied, Saying, I did not laugh; for she was afraid. He said, No but you did laugh" (Gen. 18:15 RSV);
- (6) Tamar seduced the father of her late husband (Gen. 38:6-19);
- (7) Rahab was a common prostitute- "And they went, and came into an harlot's house, named Rahab, and lodged there" (Josh. 2:1)
- (8) And Bathsheba was an adulteress, since she appears to have gone to David willingly- "Then David sent for her and when she came he slept with her" (2Sam. 11:4 LBV). Four of these women are listed in the genealogies of Jesus-- Tamar (Matt. 1:3), Rahab (Matt. 1:5), Ruth (Matt. 1:5), and Bathsheba (Matt. 1:6)--which certainly doesn't say much for his pedigree.

The Book of Mormon

Although BE does not normally engage in extra-biblical discussions, and occasional digression is appropriate. Some topics are so relevant to the Bible's validity, or of such importance that their omission would be a significant oversight. The Book of Mormon is a good example. Because it is viewed by many as comparable in weight to

the Bible, and we have all been contacted by its adherents, an abbreviated analysis of its contents is in order. Points one might want to mention when Mormons come to visit are the following:

- (a) According to Alma 7:9-10, Jesus was supposed to have been born in Jerusalem, not Bethlehem-- "...for behold, the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and the Son of God cometh upon the face of the earth. And behold, he shall be born of Mary, at Jerusalem..., she being a virgin...who shall be overshadowed and conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost;"
- (b) According to Moriah 26:23, God created sin. "For it is I that taketh upon me the sins of the world; for it is I that hath created them...:"
- (c) The list of the 12 disciples in the Book of Mormon in no way resembles that of the Bible. "...behold Nephi and his brother whom he had raised from the dead, whose name was Timothy, and also his son, whose name was Jonas, and also Mathoni, and Mathoniah, his brother and Kumen, and Kumenochi, and Jeremiah, and Shemnon, and Jonas, and Zedekiah, and Isaiah--now these are the names of the disciples whom Jesus had chosen...." (3 Nephi 9:4);
- (d) While the Bible promotes the subservience of women and slavery, the Book of Mormon also buttresses racism. "And the skins of the Lamanites were dark, according to the mark which was set upon their fathers, which was a curse upon them because of their transgression and their rebellion..." (Alma 3:6). "...wherefore, as they were white, and exceedingly fair and delightsome, that they might not be enticing unto my people the Lord God did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them.... And cursed shall be they seed of him that mixeth with their seed" (2 Nephi 5:21-23). "And their curse was taken from them, and their skin became white like unto the Nephites; And their daughters became exceedingly fair..." (3 Nephi 2:15-16). "O my brothers, I fear that unless ye shall repent of your sins that skins will be whiter than yours, when ye shall be brought with them before the throne of God" (Jacob 3:8).
- (e) Most interesting is the fact that Christians condemn polygamy, which the Bible does not denounce, except possibly in Deut. 17:17, while Mormons practiced polygamy, which the Book of Mormon does denounce. "Behold, David and Solomon truly had many wives concubines, which thing was abominable before me, saith the Lord" (Jacob 2:24). "For there shall not any man among you have save it be one wife; and concubines he shall have none; For I, the Lord God, delight in the chastity of women. And whoredoms are an abomination to me..." (Jacob 2:27-28). "...Riplakish did not do that which was right in the sight of the Lord, for he did have many wives and concubines..." (Ether 10:5). "For behold, he (Noah--Ed.) did not keep the commandments of God, but he did walk after the desires of his own heart. And he had many wives and concubines. And he did cause his people to commit sin..." (Mosiah 11:2). "...and indulge themselves somewhat in wicked practices, such as like unto David of old desiring many wives and concubines..." (Jacob 1:15).
- (f) Anti-semitism is also a significant factor in the Book of Mormon. "Wherefore, as I said unto you, it must needs be expedient that Christ...should come among the Jews, among those who are the more wicked part of the world; and they shall crucify him...and there is none other nation on earth that would

crucify their God?" (2 Nephi 10:3). "For I, Hefhi, have not taught them many things concerning the manner of the Jews; for their works were works of darkness, and their doings were doings of abominations" (2 Nephi 25:2). (See also: Jacob 4:14).

- (g) "And lastly, like the Bible, the Book of Mormon contradicts itself with respect to how one is saved, assuming salvation exists. Is it by faith or works? "And whoso believeth in me, and is baptized, the same shall be saved; and they are they who shall inherit the Kingdom of God. And whoso believeth not in me, and is not baptized, shall be damned" (3 Nephi 11:33-34) and "...for he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned" (Ether 4:18), versus "...if ye keep the commandments of God ye shall be saved" (Mosiah 12:33) and "if ye shall be obedient to the commandments, and endure to the end, ye shall be saved..." (1 Nephi 22:31).

REVIEWS

In the *Encyclopedia of Biblical Difficulties* Gleason Archer sought to answer the problem presented in section (k) of this month's commentary on biblical "math."

"While it is true that the more exact calculation of pi is essential for scientific purposes, or for the manufacture of precision parts in a factory the use of approximate proportions or totals is a familiar practice in normal speech, even today. If the statistical statements concerning the population of cities or nations were subjected to the same stringent standard as that leveled at 1 Kings 7:23, then we would have to say that all population statistics are in error...any exact sum that might be true at 1:00AM on a given day would be inaccurate by 1:00PM that same day. It is perfectly proper to speak of the circumference of any circle as being three times its diameter if we were speaking approximately.... The Hebrew author here is obviously speaking in the approximate way that is normal practice even today" (Ibid.p. 198-199).

Professor Archer is on the Executive Board of the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy and one of the foremost proponents of an errorless Scripture. Yet, he admits the mathematical calculation in 1 King 7:23 is inaccurate. The analogy drawn between the computations of biblicalists and those of demographers has no relevance, since perfection is at issue, not varying degrees of accuracy. Population experts aren't attributing perfection to their figures, while inerrantists do attribute perfection to theirs. An "approximate" figure is not a perfect figure. The Bible is either perfect, i.e. inerrant, or it isn't. There is no in between. To admit a calculation is only "approximate" is to admit that insofar as perfection is concerned, the calculation is false. There is no evidence the Hebrew author was "obviously speaking in the approximate way." The analogy is also inappropriate because population figures are fluid and ever-changing, while the value of pi and the bowl's size are static.

Archer also contends that "if the rod used to mark out a length of five cubits for the radius (10 cubits in diameter--Ed.) were used to measure the inside circumference of

the same bowl-shaped vessel here described, then it would take exactly six of those five-cubit measures to complete the circumference" (Ibid. p. 199). The major flaw accompanying this explanation arises from the fact that only one circumference is mentioned. Nothing is said about an inside circumference, nor is the thickness of the brim even mentioned. Archer arbitrarily assigned it a degree of thickness which would allow the outside diameter to measure 10 cubits while the inside circumference measured 30 cubits, which is slightly less than 31.40 (3.14 x 10), the true circumference. One can't help but question the veracity of apologetic scholarship when rationalizations of this nature are freely employed.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #63 from VT of Huron, California Continues from Last Month's Issue (Part b)

There are two faiths: One that fails and one that triumphs. One that affirms death, and one that affirms life. One that rejects authentic human existence, and one that exalts it. One that denies God and man, and one that praises God and serves His people.

Editor's Response to Letter #63 (Part b)

The problem with this kind of commentary, VT, is that, except for your comments on God, humanists, agnostics, and atheists couldn't agree with you more. Religion, which they equate with superstition, fails; rationality triumphs. Faith affirms death; reason affirms life. Religion rejects authentic human existence, while humanism exalts it. Religion denies; humanism serves the people best. This is the kind of blind alley one encounters by asserting without proof, and is indicative of many publications on the market. After reading much that is available, one can't help but ask: What have I read that I can use, and what have I covered that's been proved? Opinions abound but proofs do not, and unfortunately too many people can neither distinguish between them nor exercise the self-discipline necessary to collect a convincing body of the latter. It's easier and more enjoyable to summarize to the jury than present evidence that would logically lead to the summation.

Letter #63 Concludes (Part c)

Why is it you want to exert so much energy talking and writing about something you consider total error? Is it because of your love and concern for your fellow beings? What is it that makes all the humanists, atheists, and agnostics want to spend so much time on something that they consider blatantly absurd? Could it be because Jesus is alive? Could it be because the Bible is still God's word in all its power and conviction? The Bible points to God but the unbeliever wants to dethrone God and place man at the center of life. I'll not quote scripture since (of course) you don't believe it to be true. As a nation will get the kind of government it deserves, a person will get the kind of god he deserves.

Editor's Response to Letter #63 (Part c)

Several of your points are misleading, VT. First BE has never claimed the Bible is "total error." Virtually any book available on a library shelf has some truth therein. The question is one of degree, not kind. Second, the very fact that the Bible is permeated with error while tenaciously believed by so many is all the more reason to read, reveal and refute its contents. One shouldn't run from error when so many people are adversely affected by its presence. Indeed, one should proceed in the opposite direction. Otherwise, biblicists will always have a privileged sanctuary to which they can retreat with impunity, whenever engaged in controversy. Third, surely you aren't contending Jesus is physically alive today. If, on the other hand, you are referring to a "spiritual" presence, then one could say as much of Mohammed, Buddha, and others, since they are alive in the minds of millions. Fourth, your unsubstantiated assertions that the Bible is God's word and opponents seek to dethrone God and elevate man were answered last month. Fifth, could your reluctance to quote scripture be attributable to the fact that verses to support your position are easily counteracted? For purposes of dialogue, whether you or I believe a biblical verse to be true is not as important as whether or not another part of the Bible believes it to be correct. And lastly, your statement to the effect that people will get the kind of god they deserve is superficially profound but wholly inaccurate, since there is only one kind of god, according to biblicists. If, on the other hand, you mean god exercises different kinds of behavior appropriate to one's activities, then you face the unenviable task of explaining why so many moral people are plagued like Job, while corrupt individuals often experience the least discomfort. Incidentally, if a nation gets the kind of government it deserves, then millions of people must be asking themselves where their nation went wrong.

However, it must be said in your favor, VT, that your willingness to repeatedly purchase, read, weigh, and respond to BE shows you are open-minded and sincerely seeking the truth. For this you are to be applauded.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Letter #64 from MP of Tulsa, Oklahoma

I got the Oct. 1984 issue today. I'd like to comment on your response to Letter #63. The biblicist who asserts both salvation-through-faith (fideism) and the necessity of Bible belief for morality, puts himself in a logical bind. According to the fideistic position, you are saved not by being moral, but by having faith. In that sense the biblical fideist assumes amorality, since he holds that in the end morality doesn't count. One can have faith and be immoral at the same time, and the result is still salvation. So you can respond that the Bible does not need to be "replaced," since it is not even responsible for morality now.

As for my local efforts to spread the word: I've put up a number of your 81-2 x 11 announcements around the campus of the University of Tulsa,.... As for call-in programs, I'm sorry to inform you that they don't do well.... Tulsa is not a cerebral

town, so the call-in show does not prosper. However, I shall continue to cast about for more avenues....

Editor's Response to Letter #64

Dear MP.

We greatly appreciate your efforts to obtain a hearing for BE, especially on a radio talk show. Hopefully others will follow your lead and contact stations in their areas. BE needs assistance, and this is an excellent way for people to become actively involved in opposing evangelicals, fundamentalists, TVpreachers, and the "Moral Majority."

Letter from ET of Indianapolis, Indiana

Dear Sir.

In the BE issue No. 21 in response to Letter #62 from LM ,when he says, "With God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26), you should have referred him to Judges 1:19, which says, "And the Lord was with Judah, and he drave out the inhabitants of the mountain, but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley because they had chariots of iron." Ha! If the Lord is that weak, what would he do if put up against a troop of Boy Scouts with .22 rifles?

And on the evolution issue...long ago I came to the conclusion that evolution is a universal cosmic law. Just the same as gravitation, centrifugal force, momentum, etc. Evolution is chnge, evolution is an arrow in flight, a tree growing.... One of the old Greek philosophers put it well when he said, "You cannot step into a river at the same place twice." Without evolution nothing would or could happen (change).... Without the cosmic law of evolution NOTHING could happen, the atom would be frozen. Evolution is not a theory. It is an ABSOLUTE FACT! The Bible thumpers cannot deny this!

Editor's Response to Letter #65

Dear ET.

I couldn't agree with you more. Long ago, I, too, concluded that evolution is a fact, but the point I tried to make in Issue #21 is that it's going to take more than just stating we have come to that conclusion to convince people such as Duane Gish and Henry Morris. We have to do our homework. We have to validate evolution because, believe me, those you call Bible-thumpers most assuredly do deny it.

Letter #66 from AR of New York, New York

Dear Dennis...

I have just finished reading the sample issue of your periodical and loved it. It is so nice to hear the voice of reason among the clamor of irrational whimworshippers. I have had the honor of taking up the sword of reason and debating against the christian fundamentalists. It has been no difficult task once you understand the crux of their

position. They can be a slippery lot, however, and I have always found it helpful to focus on key issues.

- (1) Faith verses Reason, make them explain faith, show them the differences, write out the definitions etc. Everything hinges on this. Their blind overriding "Faith" in the face of all evidence to the contrary.
- (2) Keep the burden of proof on them. Ask them the question, jot down their answer, investigate their responses. They are easier led than pushed.
- (3) Take it literally. You are very keen on this and I agree totally. Once they begin interpreting the Bible, they will try to make it say anything they want it to. They don't have firm grasp on reality anyway. It is important to keep them grounded.... Suffice it to say that I admire your style and integrity. I agree with what you are doing. Thomas Paine would, I am sure, appreciate your work.

Editor's Response to Letter #66

Dear AR.

Several other readers of BE have also engaged biblicists and would like to know what tactics and strategies people have found most effective. BE would like to offer an open forum over the next few months on this topic. Readers are asked to send letters describing what they feel are the most effective measures one can employ to counteract biblicists, ranging from Falwell and Swaggart to neighbors and acquaintances.

Letter #67 from MF of New Haven, Connecticut

Dennis.

Thanks for a wonderful viewpoint. Thank god for freedom of speech here in Amerika. Last spring in a Renaissance Lit class, I had the pleasure of doing a nifty little experiment which simply reinforced all my earlier assumptions. Yes, the bible has many holes, and our experiment showed some of them. What we did was translated a portion of the RSV into French, then later into Spanish, than back to English. We stuck with the 23rd Psalm, Acts, and a bit of Exodus. My team was in charge of moving 23rd towards what you might call a french translation. We literally fished for French equivalents to the English words. I can't tell you what a mess things became. There were some words that had more than three French words, so we had to "toss the coin." Sometimes there was no word at all, so we just found something close. When another team finally read the "new" English version in class, we got quite a laugh. Many of us could remember just what we did add to the confusion. Psalm 23 came out like this. "God is quide, but I don't want. He brings me downs in grassy fields. He brings out my spirits, and leads me to still waters. He sends me the right way; his way." This being just three translations, imagine what may have happened from early scripture to now....

COMMENTARY

Jesus, the Imperfect Beacon (Part One of a Four Part Series)

In issues 2, 3, and 9 BE discussed some of the reasons Jesus is unqualified to act as the perfect light to lead mankind on the road to morality and "salvation." A much more extensive, if not exhaustive, listing is now in order. The Bible, itself, independent of outside sources, provides more than enough data to prove Jesus is not worthy of the emulation accorded him by millions. In addition to reasons mentioned in prior issues, the following statements by Jesus are noteworthy:

- (1) " And Jesus said, 'Go to the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with my disciples'(Matt. 26:18). Jesus should have displayed better manners. You don't invite yourself into someone's home. First you receive an invitation.
- (2) "And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do" (Luke 12:4). Jesus advised others to show courage when threatened, but often backed down, fled, escaped, or hid when faced with similar situations. "After these things Jesus walked in Galilee: for he would not walk in Jewry, because the Jews sought to kill him" (John 7:1) and "Then they took up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and passed by" (John 8:59) and "Then the Pharisees went out, and held council against him, how they might destroy him. But when Jesus knew it, he withdrew himself from thence: and great multitudes followed him, and he healed them all; and charged them that they should not make him known..." (Matt. 12:14-16) and "Then from that day forth they took counsel together for to put him to death. Jesus therefore walked no more openly among the Jews..." (John 11:53-54) and "Therefore they sought again to take him: but he escaped out of their land..." (John 10:39) and "...Jesus could no more openly enter into the city, but was without in desert places: and they came to him from every quarter" (Mark 1:45). (See also: John 6:15). Jesus not only fled but advised others to follow his example. "But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another" (Matt. 10:23). He apparently felt discretion was the better part of valor. Bravery was not one of his strongest attributes.
- (3) "...but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.... Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matt. 19:17,19) and "the second (great commandment) is like unto it. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matt. 22:39) versus "A new commandment I give to you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another" (John 13:34). If loving thy

neighbor as thyself was an OT commandment, how could it be a new commandment?

- (4) "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; ...and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:29-30) versus "But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; and ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake..." (Matt. 10:17-18) and "ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake:...But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye to another,,"(Matt. 10:22-23) and ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake" (Luke 21:17) and "In the world ye shall have tribulation" (John 16:33). Being scourged, hated, and persecuted does not sound like a "light" and "easy" burden.
- (5) "I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star" (Rev. 22:16). The genealogies in Matt. 1 and Luke 3 trace Jesus' descent from David to Joseph. If Jesus came from a virgin birth, then Joseph was not his physical father and he could not be a physical descendant of David. As mentioned in the June 1983 issue, Mary's lineage is not even discussed.
- (6) "For I am with thee (Paul-Ed.) and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee" (Acts 18:10) versus "...and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul" (Acts 21-32) and "And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth" (Acts 23:2) and "...I (Paul-Ed.) am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned..."(2 Cor. 11:23-25). Is Jesus the kind of friend one can trust?
- (7) "And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness..." (Luke 16:9) versus "Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Luke 16:13).
- (8) "How much then is a man better than a sheep?" (Matt. 12:12) versus "...and I lay down my life for the sheep" (John 10:15) and "I am the sheperd, and know my sheep" (John 10:14) and "Feed my lambs" (John 21:15) and "Feed my sheep" (John 21:16). (See also: John 10:11,26,27 Matt. 10:16 and Mark 6:34). Jesus says men are better than sheep, yet repeatedly calls his followers sheep.
- (9) " If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true" (John 5:31) versus "Though I bear witness of myself, yet my record is true" (John 8:14).
- (10) "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works" (Matt. 5:16) versus "Take heed that ye do not your alms before men to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your father which is in heaven" (Matt. 6:1).
- (11) "...that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth from the blood of innocent Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barachiah whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar" (Matt. 23:35 RSV) versus "the spirit of God took possession of Zechariah the son of Jehoida the priest, and he stood above the people,... they conspired against him, and... stoned him with stones..."(2 Chron. 24:20-21 RSV). As the latter verses show,

Zechariah was the son of Jehoida, not Barachiah. The name Barachiah is nowhere to be found in the OT.

- (12) "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and hate thine enemy" (Matt. 5:43). This statement does not exist in the OT either. In fact, Prov. 24:17 says, "Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth..."
- (13) "And he saith unto them, Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her" (Mark 10:11, Luke 6:18), versus "And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery" (Matt. 19:9). In the book of Matthew, Jesus said a man could put away his wife if one factor--fornication--is involved. In Mark and Luke he allowed no exceptions.
- (14) "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20), versus "For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always" (Matt.26:11), Mark 14:7, John 12:8) and "Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am thither ye cannot come" (John 7:34). Is this the kind of friend one can rely on?
- (15)"Judge not, and ye shall be not judged; condem not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive,and ye shall be forgiven" (Luke 6:37, Matt. 7:1), versus "Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment" (John 7:24). Jesus stated men are not to judge but, then, allowed it under certain conditions. As in the case of divorce, he can't seem to formulate a consistent policy.
- (16) "...I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit" (John 12:21). Jesus exhibited rather weak comprehension of science. How can the dead produce anything?
- (17) "Salt is good: but if the salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it?" (Mark 9:50). Again, poor science! Indeed, poor logic! How could salt lose its saltness? If it lost its saltness, it would no longer be salt.
- (18) "And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven" (John 3:13). If Jesus is in heaven, how can he be down on earth speaking? Moreover, according to 2 Kings 2:11 ("and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven') Jesus was not the only person to ascend into heaven, nor was he the first. Elijah preceded him and apparently Enoch did also ("And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him"--Gen. 5:24).
- (19) "Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (Matt. 24:23-24). Jesus' criteria for false Christs and false prophets could easily be applied to himself. Judging by his standard, how do we know he is genuine?
- (20) "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? (Matt.27:46), versus "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour?' No, for this purpose I have come to this hour" (John 12:27 RSV). Jesus

can't seem to decide whether or not he wants to die. One moment he is willing; the next he isn't.

- (21) "Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is God" (Matt. 19:17). This obviates any possibility of Jesus being the perfect man, much less God.
- (22) In Luke 23:30 ("Then shall they begin to say to the mountains, Fall on us, and to the hills, Cover us") Jesus quoted Hosea 10:8 ("...and they shall say to the mountains, Cover us; and to the hills, Fall on us"). And, like Paul, he often quoted inaccurately. In this instance, he confused mountains with hills.
- (23) "And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they know him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist" (Matt. 17:11-13). John the Baptist was beheaded, but Jesus was not. And what did John the Baptist restore? Nothing!
- (24) "The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it" (Luke 16:16). Certainly every man is not pressing to enter the kingdom of God.
- (25) "Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless?" (Matt. 12:5) Nowhere does the OT state that the priests in the temple profaned the sabbath and were considered blameless.
- (26) "Yea; have ye never read, "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise" (Matt. 21:16). Jesus is quoting Psalm 8:2, which says, "Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies...." "Perfect praise" has little to do with "ordaining strength because of thine enemies." Another misquotation!
- (27) "But I say unto you, That Elias is indeed come, and they have done unto him whatsoever they listed, as it is written of him" (Mark 9:13). There are no prophecies in the OT of things that were to happen to Elijah.

Messianic Prophecy (Isaiah 7:11-20, 8:2-8)

Few OT messianic prophecies carry more weight with apologists than the 7th chapter of Isaiah. Yet, like the 5th chapter of Micah (See: Issue #7) it is not applicable to Jesus for many reasons, which an itemized analysis of each verse will show:

- (a) "Behold a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isa. 7:14). In Hebrew this actually reads: "Behold the young woman is with child and bareth a son and calleth his name Immanuel." Christians changed "almah" which means "a young woman" in Hebrew to "virgin." The actual Hebrew word for virgin is "bethulah." Wherever the word "virgin" appears in the KJV of the OT, it comes from "bethulah." Isa. 7:14 and Gen. 24:43 are the only exceptions. Almah means maid, damsel, or a young woman, which is how it is translated in Ex. 2:8, Prov. 30:19 and Psalm 68:25 of the KJV. The RSV and the Jewish Masoretic texts correctly translate Isa. 7:14 as "a young woman." Mistranslators also changed "harah" from its correct

meaning of "has conceived" (i.e. is) to "shall conceive." The word "harah" (conceived) is the Hebrew perfect tense, which in English represents past and completed action. There is not the remotest hint of future time. The correct translation, "is with child," is in the present tense and shows it pertains to a woman then existing.

- (b) "...and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isa. 7:14). Jesus was never called Immanuel except by those who do so in order to fulfill the prophecy. Never was Jesus referred to as Immanuel in the NT, except in Matt. 1:23 ("and they shall call his name Immanuel"). Nowhere in Isaiah does Isaiah call Immanuel a Messiah or Jesus Christ the son of God or Savior or Holy Redeemer. They are never equated or related in any way. Moreover, according to Luke 1:31 ("And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS") he was to be called Jesus, not Immanuel.
- (c) "Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know how to refuse the evil and choose the good" (Isa. 7:15). Applying this to Jesus seems irrational. How much sense would it make for Jesus (God) to learn to refuse evil and choose good?
- (d) "For before the child shall know to refuse the evil, and choose the good, the land that thou abhorrest shall be forsaken of both her kings" (Isa. 7:16). It would make no sense for Ahaz to be concerned with a sign--the birth of Jesus--that wouldn't be realized until centuries after the death of Ahaz. This verse shows that the prophecy is not referring to a future child, but to a child then conceived, a child then existing, on the way to being born. The reference to the kings of Syria and Israel further shows the verse is referring to a child back then.
- (e) "And I (Isaiah--Ed.) got reliable witnesses, Uriah the priest and Zachariah the son of Jeberechiah, to attest for me. And I went to the prophetess and she conceived and bore a son. Then the Lord said to me, Call his name Maher-shalal-hashbaz; for before the child knows how to cry 'My Father' or 'My Mother,'..." (Isa. 8:2-4). Maher-shalal-hashbaz means "Make speed spoil, hasten to the prey." Some biblicists have concluded that Maher-shalal-hashbaz, like Immanuel, is referring to Jesus. John Calvin correctly denied the validity of this belief by stating, "Isaiah having prophesied about the coming of Christ in the former chapter (Isa. 7:14) many improperly explain this (Maher-shalal-hashbaz--Ed.) also as relating to the same subject, that, endued with heavenly power, he (Jesus--Ed.) came to spoil 'the prince of this world' (John 12:31) and therefore 'hastened to the prey.' This ingenuity is pleasing enough but cannot at all harmonize with the text;..." (*Calvin's Commentaries*, on Isaiah, Vol. I, p. 262). Several aspects of these verses show they are referring to a child born hundreds of years before Jesus:
 - (1) Isaiah clearly states Maher-shalal-hashbaz is his son.
 - (2) The birth must have occurred when the two witnesses lived, which was in the time of Ahaz; otherwise, how could they be witnesses?
 - (3) Past tense verbs such as "conceived" and "bore" show it occurred in the time of Ahaz.

- (4) Where and when was Jesus ever called Maher-shalal-hashbaz, especially in the NT?
- (5) Where in the Bible was Mary shown to be or ever called a prophetess?
- (6) Many theologians, such as the Jewish scholar Troki, even feel Immanuel and Maher-shalal-hashbaz are the same child, because both names are followed by, "For before the child shall...." which are in perfect consonance.
- (f) "And he (the king of Assyria) shall pass through Judah; he shall overflow and go over,...and the stretching out of his wings shall fill the breadth of thy land, O Immanuel" (Isa. 8:8). Jesus never owned any land, so how could he be Immanuel? Moreover, the Assyrians stopped passing through Judah hundreds of years before Jesus was ever born. The verse implies that Immanuel was either a king or the son of a king, which Jesus was not.

Messianic Prophecy (Psalm 22)

Another part of the OT often viewed as a prophetic commentary on Jesus is the 22nd Psalm. But as in the case of Isaiah 7, many aspects thereof refute this thesis:

- (a) "my God, my God why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring" (Psalm 22:1). Asserting that comparable statements by Jesus in Matt. 27:46 and Mark 15:34 are prophetic creates problems. First, Jesus would be contradicting Psalm 46:1, which says, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." Second, was Jesus praying for salvation of his flesh or of his divinity? If his flesh, then his prayers were unanswered. If his divinity, the divine needs no salvation.
- (b) "I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent" (Psalm 22:2). This verse contradicts Isa. 42:2 ("He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street"), which is also applied to Jesus. Moreover, the sufferings of the speaker in Psalm 22:2 continued for a time. He cried in vain to God for help by day and night, whereas Jesus cried for a short period.
- (c) "But I am a worm (a "maggot" according to *Strong's Concordance*)..." (Psalm 22:6). Would Jesus call himself a worm or maggot?
- (d) "Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help" (Psalm 22:11). This indicates that if there were someone to help, he (Jesus) would gladly agree to be saved, which would have meant his death occurred against his will. How then can Christians say he willed it?
- (e) "...my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels" (Psalm 22:14). Why was Jesus afraid, since events were allegedly moving as he desired? Some critics have facetiously contended Jesus again failed as a scientist, since he apparently didn't know there was a diaphragm.
- (f) "...they pierced my hands and feet" (Psalm 22:16). Nowhere in the gospels does it say the feet of Jesus were pierced or nailed to the cross. According to some authorities, crucified persons did not have their feet nailed to the cross. Moreover, some scholars claim this verse should have been translated, "They

cling like a lion to my hands and feet." What group clung to the hands and feet of Jesus? The Jewish (Hebrew) Masoretic text translates the verse as: "Like a lion they are at my hands and feet" (Psalm 22:17).

- (g) "They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture" (Psalm 22:18). "Part" and "cast" are present tense verbs that couldn't apply to Jesus. "Vesture" does not always mean clothing of any kind or property. As used here it appears to represent property, which Jesus did not have, according to Matt. 8:20.
- (h) "Deliver my soul from the sword;...." (Psalm 22:20). The description of his distress in the prospect of deadly peril, his worry in prayer, and his desire to be delivered from death and saved alive are unsuitable to Christ, who supposedly gave himself up to death freely. In addition, technically speaking, when was Jesus threatened with the sword? He was threatened with cross and crucifixion.

Micah 5, Isaiah 7, and Psalm 22 are only three OT chapters out of scores that are improperly applied to Jesus by apologists. Thomas Paine and Robert Ingersoll analyzed the situation with their usual acuity: "In the following treatises I have examined all the passages in the NT quoted from the Old, and so-called prophecies concerning Jesus Christ, and I find no such thing as a prophecy of any such person, and I deny there are any.... I have given chapter and verse for everything I have said, and have not gone out of the books of the Old and New Testament for evidence that the passages are not prophecies of the person called Jesus Christ" (*The Life and Works of Paine*, Vol. 9, p. 206). "The practice which the writers of the books (gospels--Ed.) employ is not more false than it is absurd. They state some trifling case of the person they call Jesus Christ, and then cut out a sentence from some passage of the OT and call it a prophecy of that case. But when the words thus cut out are restored to the places they are taken from, and read with words before and after them, they give the lie to the NT" (Ibid. p. 269). "There is no prophecy in the OT foretelling the coming of Jesus Christ. There is not one word in the OT referring to him in any way--not one word. The only way to prove this is to take your Bible, and whenever you find the words: 'That it might be fulfilled' and 'which was spoken' turn to the OT and find what was written, and you will see that it had not the slightest possible reference to the thing recounted in the NT--not the slightest" (*Ingersoll's Works*, Vol. 5, p. 277). Many additional examples of the misapplication of OT verses to Jesus will be discussed in future issues of BE.

REVIEWS

On Page 80 in *So the Bible is Full of Contradictions*, Carl Johnson sought to answer some of the previously-mentioned problems with respect to comments by Jesus. The ninth problem in this month's commentary dealt with the validity of Jesus' witness, to which Johnson responded, "On the surface this looks like a contradiction. In the first verse ("my witness is not true") Jesus meant that if He bore witness of Himself the

Jews would call the witness untrue, because the Law required two or three witnesses before any evidence could be accepted as true (Deut. 19:15)." Johnson, unfortunately, ignored several facts. First, Jesus said his witness was not true, period. Nowhere did he mention Jews or the Old Law. Second, Johnson says, "Jesus meant." How does he know what he meant, especially when that's not what he said? Third, John 8:14 (Though I bear record of myself, yet my record is true") shows Johnson's theory is weak. Jesus alone is bearing record of himself, and feels he alone is sufficient to make his witness true. No other witnesses are needed.

On page 144 in *Does the Bible Contradict Itself*, W. Arndt confronted the problem mentioned in the 10th example in this month's commentary. Are good works to be done openly or in secret? Arndt says, "In Matt. 5:16 Jesus says, 'Do good works; they will be seen and will help to exalt the name of your great God.' In Matt. 6:1 He says: 'Do not do good works in order to be seen doing them.' In that case they would lose all ethical value.--Putting it tersely, we might say: In one passage Jesus precribes good works, in the other He warns against the wrong motive for doing good works." Although Arndt wishes this were the case, close examination of Matt. 5:16 shows otherwise. The latter says, "let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works..." The word "that" means "so that." In fact, the NAB, the Modern Language Bible, and the Living Bible translate it as "so that." In other words, Matt. 5:16 says we are to do good deeds so that others will see us, which violates Matt. 6:1. In good apologetic style, Arndt created a subtle shift in meaning. Matt. 5:16 did not say "do good works; they will be seen and help exalt...." It said, "Do good works so that they will be seen". In the former we are told to do good works per se. As a by-product they will unavoidably be seen by others. In the latter we are told to do good works because they will be seen by others. The motive has shifted. Matt. 6:1 rules out doing good deeds because they will be seen by others. Subtle and often insidious shifts in words and phrases are one of the most common ploys of the most creative apologists. The mileage one can obtain by ingeniously altering, inserting, or omitting a word or punctuation mark is truly amazing. Where the comma should be in Luke 23:43 is a prime example. Should it be before the word "today" or after as it in the NWT? Changing its position completely alters the meaning.

An intriguing question that has often occurred to many people reading the Bible is: Where did Cain get his wife? On pages 98 and 99 in *Answers to Tough Questions*, McDowell and Stewart seek to allay these concerns with the following reply: One of the most frequent questions asked by Christians and non-Christians alike is where did Cain's wife come from. This question also involves a larger question: what population existed at the time Cain built his city, and what of incest? ...The Bible also records...that Cain obtained a wife at some point (Gen. 4:17) and built a city (Gen. 4:17). One theory that has been put forth to explain the existence of sufficient numbers of people is directly contradictory to Scripture and posits a "pre-Adamic" race dwelling in the neighborhood of the Garden of Eden from which Cain could take a wife. This is not a tenable solution, however, for the Scriptures clearly teach that Adam was the first man (1 Cor. 15:45) and that his wife, Eve, was "the mother of all living" (Gen. 3:20). In this instance, McDowell is correct. The pre-Adamic theory is fallacious, although it answers another problem which many biblicists discreetly

evade. When God told Adam in Gen. 1:28 to "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth" (KJV, ASV, and the Masoretic text) and gave Noah the same instructions in Gen. 9:1, the question became: How can you replenish if people did not "plenish," i.e. live, earlier. McDowell continues, "Gen. 5:4 tells us that Adam had sons and daughters...Cain probably married a sister or niece or grand niece." Married? There is nothing said about marriage in the creation accounts. Indeed, marriage isn't even mentioned until the 19th chapter of Genesis. The word "wife" is used, but there is no more evidence of a marriage between Cain and his wife than between Adam and Eve. McDowell says Cain "probably" married a sister or grand niece. In other words, he doesn't know and is merely guessing. If he is correct and Adam's children mated, then we are all products of incest. McDowell's solution for this embarrassment is that "God forbids incest on moral grounds,...(and--Ed.) after God's ordained family structure stabilized, incest was sin." How could incest be sinful now and not originally? Is morality that fluid? This reminds me of "situation ethics", which evangelicals so vehemently denounce. Moreover, what part of the Bible supports McDowell's contention that incest was permissible and later became anathema?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #68 from MP of Tulsa, Oklahoma

Dear Dennis.

...I used your anti-Resurrection argument on a Christian a few weeks back (the argument on page 1 of BE #2), and he countered by saying that whereas all those other people were raised in their old, cruddy bodies, Jesus was raised in a "glorified" body--whatever that means. I did not have a good response at the time, but now I do.

- (a) How could Jesus' body have changed, since he is "the same yesterday, and today, and forever" (Heb. 13:8)?
- (b) Acts 26:23 says that Jesus was the "first" to rise from the dead. If this means simply coming back to life, then it is false, because of 1 Sam. 28:7, 11, 15 etc. But if it means that Jesus was the first to resurrect in a "glorified" body (which is undefined), then again this is false, because the dead Moses and Elijah "appeared in glory" (Luke 11:31) at the time of the transfiguration; so it seems that they were raised in glorified bodies before Jesus....
- (c) If Christians are supposed to respect all secular authority because it comes from God (Rom. 13:1-7, Titus 3:1, John 19:11, 1 Peter 2:13-14) and if the anti-Christ is to come with "all power" (2 Thess. 2:9), then should Christians in the Tribulation accept the mark of the beast? If they do, they face damnation (Rev. 14:9-10). If they do not, then they are resisting authority, and "he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment" (Rom. 13:2)

COMMENTARY

Jesus, The Imperfect Beacon (Part Two of a Four Part Series)--Last month's commentary noted some of the reasons Jesus of Nazareth is unqualified to act as a model for all mankind, much less its savior. Continuing in that vein are the following: (28) "While he (Jesus--Ed.) was speaking, a Pharisee asked him to dine with him; so he went in and sat at table. The Pharisee was astonished to see that he did not at first wash before dinner. And the Lord said to him, `Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of extortion and wickedness. You fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside also?... woe to you Pharisees! for you tithe the mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God; these you ought to have done..." (Luke 11:37-44 RSV). Jesus showed rudeness, crudeness, and insensitivity. Imagine talking like this to someone in his house after he invited you to dine with him. Even if it were true, common decency dictated a more refined approach. (29) "...and the governor asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And Jesus answered him, Thou sayest" (Matt. 27:11) and Jesus answered him, `sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me?" (John 18:34) and "Pilate therefore said unto him, `Art thou a king then?' Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king" (John 18:37) and "And went again into the judgment hall, and saith unto Jesus, Whence art thou? But Jesus gave him no answer" (John 19:9). Jesus often gave insolent replies and evaded questions. A civil response or a simple yes or no would have been more appropriate, not to mention polite. (30) "And the Lord said unto the servant, Go out unto the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled" (Luke 14:23). In this parable the lord, who represents God, compelled people to enter his house. Would God compel people to enter heaven. The just and peaceful Jesus is sanctioning compulsion! (31) "So the devils besought him (Jesus--Ed.) saying, If thou cast us out, suffer us to go away into the herd of swine. And he said unto them, Go. And when they were come out they went into the herd of swine; and, behold, the whole herd of swine ran violently down a steep place into the sea, and perished in the waters" (Matt. 8:31-32). What had the owner or owners done to have their property destroyed by Jesus? What had the animals done to deserve such treatment? The French philosopher, Voltaire, asked why swine were there at all since the keeping of swine was prohibited in ancient Judea and Galilee as in modern Israel. (32) "Woe unto you! for ye build the sepulchres of the prophets, and your fathers killed them" (Luke 11:47). Jesus is condemning people for having ancestors who killed prophets, yet, he had such ancestral killers as David and Solomon. (33) "but he answered her not a word" (Matt 15:23). Jesus seems rude. Politeness required a response. (34) "Jesus said, ... `Thou shalt not steal... (Matt. 19:18) versus "Go ye into the village over against you; in the which at your entering ye shall find a colt tied, whereon yet never man sat: loose him, and bring him hither. And if any man ask you, why do ye loose him? thus shall ye say unto him, Because the Lord hath need of him. And they that were sent went their way, and found even as he had said unto them. And as they were loosing the colt, the owners thereof said unto them, Why loose ye the colt?" (Luke 19:30-33). Are we to believe this isn't theft? Imagine seeing a stranger driving your car away while claiming the lord needed it. (35) "For as yet they know not the scriptures, that he must rise again from the dead" (John 20:9). There is no OT statement that he (Jesus--Ed.) must rise from the dead. Moreover, "again" means that he was to rise a second time. And since Jesus allegedly rose from the dead only once, it couldn't apply to him anyway. (36) "thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" (Matt 19:19) versus "Jesus saith unto her, "Woman, what have I to do with thee" (John 2:4). Jesus' love seems to have escaped him. (37) "and it came to pass on the second sabbath after the first, that he (Jesus--Ed.) went through the corn fields; and his disciples plucked the ears of corn, and did eat, rubbing them in their hands. And certain of the Pharisees said unto them, Why do ye that which

is not lawful to do on the sabbath days? And Jesus answering them said, Have ye not read so much as this, what David did, when himself was an hungered, and they which were with him. How he went into the house of God, and did take and eat the shewbread, and gave also to them that were with him; which it is not lawful to eat but for the priests alone" (Luke 6:1-4)? Jesus and his disciples not only violated the sabbath but also stole property. The ears of corn were not theirs to consume any more than the Gadarene swine were theirs to destroy (Luke 8:33). Moreover, very little support can be obtained by relying upon David's acts as a defense, since he not only violated the sabbath and many other laws but also stole the priests' shewbread. (38) "...for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matt. 9:13) versus "and Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God" (Mark 10:18). How could some be righteous if only God is good? (39) "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (John 9:5) versus "ye are the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14). Who, then, is the light of the world? (40) "...The Kingdom of heaven is like to a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: Which indeed is the least of all seeds: but when it is grown, it is the greatest among herbs, and becometh a tree, so that the birds of the air come and lodge in the branches thereof" (Matt. 13:31-32). Poor knowledge of science is again evident in the fact that a mustard seed is not the least of all seeds, is not the greatest among herbs when grown, and could not give rise to a tree. (41) "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath" (Matt. 13:12). The latter is impossible since from nothing, nothing can come (Ex nihilo, nihil fit). (42) "Verily, I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecution, and in the world to come eternal life" (Mark 10:29-30). This teaching is not only immoral, but inaccurate. Jesus is saying that the reward for giving up your wealth and following him is far greater wealth; i.e., people should do right in order to obtain personal gain, not because it is the right deed to do. Selfaggrandizement is not a decent basis for morality. Moreover, people who give up everything for the gospel's sake rarely "receive an hundredfold now in this time." Indeed, precisely the opposite is often the case. (43) "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh, it shall be opened" (Matt. 7:7-8) versus "Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doeth his will, him he heareth" (John 9:31) and "The Lord is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous" (Prov. 15:29). Everyone who asks receives; yet, God doesn't hear sinners and is far from the wicked. (44) "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own; for he is a liar, and the father of it" (John 8:44) versus "And devils also came out of many, crying out, and saying, Thou art Christ the Son of God" (Luke 4:41). Jesus refuted his own divinity, unless some devils are more honest than "the devil." (45) "Then said Jesus to him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (Matt 26:52) versus "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword" (Matt. 10:34) and "...and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one" (Luke 22:36) and (Luke 22:38). (46) "And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him..." (Matt. 20:19) and "...and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles: And they...shall kill him..." (Mark 10:33-34) versus "And it was the preparation of the passover, and about the sixth hour: and he (Pilate--Ed.) saith unto the Jews, Behold your King! But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him... Then delivered he (Pilate--Ed.) him therefore unto them to be crucified. And...they crucified him..." (John 19:14-18). Although Jesus prophesied he would be crucified by Gentiles, the Book of John says he was killed by Jews. (47) "Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish by the sword" (Matt 26:52) versus "I saw the Lord standing upon the altar:

and he said...I will slay the last of them with the sword" (Amos 9:1) and "And I (God) will bring a sword upon you..." (Lev. 26:25). According to Jesus, God (i.e., Jesus himself) must perish since he took up the sword. (48) "...for verily I (Jesus) say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you" (Matt. 17:20). The inaccuracy of Jesus' statement is shown in the fact that nobody, with or without faith, has ever successfully ordered a mountain to move. (49) "and these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" (Mark 16:17-18). Clearly a false statement by Jesus! Few Christian believers would be willing to test its validity by drinking poisons, such as arsenic, handling deadly snakes, or emptying local hospitals with touches of the hand. It's far more practical to rationalize the verse away. (50) "And devils also came out of many, crying out, and saying, `Thou art Christ the Son of God.' And he rebuking them suffered them not to speak: for they knew that he was Christ" (Luke 4:41) and "unclean spirits, when they saw him, fell down before him, and cried, saying, Thou art the Son of God" (Mark 3:11). It's interesting to note that the first beings to recognize the messiahship of Jesus were devils, the most corrupt and deceitful of all beings.

REVIEWS

The Suffering of the Innocent--On pages 259 to 261 in *The Bible Has the Answer* apologist Henry Morris of the Creation Research Institute sought to answer one of the most common questions asked of theists: Why does God allow innocent people to suffer. His opening comments were as follows: "This is one of the most difficult questions for Christians to answer. The `problem of pain' as the well-known Christian scholar, C.S. Lewis, once called it, is atheism's most potent weapon against the Christian faith... they say, how can a God of love permit such things in His world as war, sickness, pain, and death, especially when their effects often are felt most keenly by those who are apparently innocent? Either He is not a God of love and is indifferent to human suffering or else He is not a God of power and is therefore helpless to do anything about it. In either case, the Biblical God who is supposedly one of both absolute power and perfect love became an impossible anachronism. Or so they claim." Having made these opening remarks, Morris then presented the following arguments which are permeated with the intellectual dishonesty so typical of Christian defenses. (1) "People continue to believe in their deepest hearts that somehow, ultimately, right will prevail over `wrong.' These innate beliefs are in themselves evidence that there is a God who is a moral being and who has implanted these hopes in the human soul." Surely Morris realizes this is an emotional appeal, not an argument based on proof. Millions of people--theists and non-theists-- believe "right" will prevail in the end but there is no evidence this is inherent. (2) "...it is utterly presumptuous for us to use our minds to question His motives... We need to settle it, in our minds and hearts, whether we understand it or not, that whatever God does is by definition, right." Again, this is not an argument based on evidence, Biblical or otherwise. It rests on belief alone and is nothing more than another way of saying, "Although it looks bad; it isn't." The following arguments, however, are of greater concern to BE because they rely on the Bible itself rather than theological beliefs in a God. (3) "There is really no such thing as the `innocent' suffering. Since `all have sinned and come short of the glory of God' (Rom. 3:23), there is no one who has the right to freedom from God's wrath on the basis of his own innocence. As far as babies are concerned and others who may be incompetent mentally to distinguish right from wrong, it is clear from both Scripture and universal experience that they are sinners by nature and thus will inevitably become sinners by choice as soon as they are able to do so." Any resemblance between this reasoning and justice is purely coincidental. We are to believe babies at Dachau and Buchenwald justly died because of a nature which they inherited from one man's transgression and acts which they allegedly would have committed if they had been given an opportunity. (4) "The world is now under God's Curse

(Gen 3:17) because of man's rebellion again God's Word. This 'bondage of corruption,' with the 'whole world groaning and travailing together in pain' (Rom. 8:21-22) is universal..." Not "man's" rebellion but one man's rebellion! Mankind didn't rebel; a man did. It's his problem and he should pay the penalty. (5) "The Lord Jesus Christ, who was the only truly 'innocent' and 'righteous' man in all history, nevertheless has suffered more than anyone else who ever lived." This comment is not only wholly inaccurate but quite irrelevant. Not only do some biblical verses attribute perfection to Noah (Gen. 6:9) and Job (Job 1:1) as well, but the pain of many people throughout history has exceeded that experienced by Jesus. Even more important is the fact that the death of an innocent man on a cross, God or otherwise, voluntarily or otherwise, does not justify the torture, pain, and suffering of innocent people. Just because he suffered is no reason others should suffer as well. (6) "The sufferings of unsaved men are often used by the Holy Ghost to cause them to realize their need of salvation and to turn to Christ in repentance and faith. The sufferings of Christians should always be the means of developing a stronger dependence on God and a more Christ-like character..." Adversity may build character at times but that does not explain why many experience excessive travail while others hardly know the meaning of the word. In addition, it's difficult to understand how an unjustified demise could improve the deceased's character. Sickness, suffering, and pain also encompass death.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #69 from ET of Greenville, South Carolina

Dear Dennis. I was considering the problem in Lev. of the grasshopper, cricket and locust having only "four feet." I don't think the Hebrews were blind. So perhaps they merely considered the moremost two appendages on those insects to be their "arms," i.e., with "four feet" lying behind them? When a locust eats it does appear to hold its food with its two foremost "arms." Maybe the "four feet" idea originally came from the Hebrew categorization of "four feet" as a symbolic number for most beasts to have. That would also explain why mention of the locusts' "two arms" would be made, after all why elongate a symbolic number that fits so many other animals as well?....

Editor's Response to Letter #69

Dear ET. Your explanation for the "four-footed insects" problem created by Lev. 11:22-23 is a variation on the common apologetic theme that the Bible was not meant to be a scientific text. If the authors felt the two front appendages were "arms," then they were wrong. What a locust "appears" to be doing is immaterial. If your assumption--"the four-feet idea originally came from the Hebrews categorization of 'four-feet' as a symbolic number for most beasts to have"--is correct, then Hebrews were even worse scientists than is often imagined, since many animals travel on something other than four legs. Why should we elongate a symbolic number, you ask? Because accuracy requires it and the Bible is allegedly the epitome of truth.

Letter #70 from GL of Uxbridge, Mass. (Part a)

Dennis, Concerning your commentary in November 1984's issue of BE, are you suggesting that the errors in numbers are because of copyist errors or that the author of the book has made the mistake? I think it would be illogical to assume that the author--after listing the persons, places, etc.--would err in his count. Of course we can not know this for certain but I think that the authors were mathematically competent.

Editor's Response to Letter #70 (Part a)

Dear GL. The primary concern of BE is to reveal problems in the Bible. How they came about is for others to speculate and of secondary importance. Apologists often attribute errors to copyists' mistakes but have no way of proving their hypothesis since the original writings no longer exist. It's difficult to see why you feel an inaccurate count would be illogical in light of the multitude of other errors in the Book. We do not know that the original authors were mathematically competent. If you are going to assume they were, however, then you are also assuming later copyists were incompetent and couldn't duplicate that which was in front of them. The Bible is replete with miracles and other impossibilities. Why would errors in numbers and addition be unreasonable while sticks turning into snakes and people rising from the dead be plausible. The former are much more common and feasible than the latter. In any event, we agree that errors do exist.

Letter #70 Continues (Part b)

In your commentary on the matriarchs you portray the women very well. But what was your point? The Bible does not condone these actions; it simply records them as they happened. Also the genealogy of Jesus has nothing to do with his character.

Editor's Response to Letter #70 (Part b)

Actually GL, several points were intended. First, as in the case of the patriarchs (See Jan. 1984 issue), are these the kinds of individuals you would want to awaken your children on Sunday mornings to read about. Secondly, you said the Bible does not condone their actions; but, it doesn't condemn them either. How were Michal, Jael, Rachel, Ruth, Sarah, Tamar, and Bathsheba punished for their immoral behavior. The Song of Solomon says, "Blessed above women shall Jael (a murderess--Ed.)...be, blessed shall she be above women in the tent" (Judges 5:24) and the Book of James says, "...was not Rahab the harlot justified by works..." (James 2:25). You don't feel their acts are being condoned? Thirdly, my comment with respect to the genealogy of Jesus was that "certainly doesn't say much for his pedigree." And it doesn't! It's difficult to believe God-incarnate could have such a disreputable ancestry. His personal character wasn't even mentioned. Apparently you read more into them statement than was there.

Letter #70 Continues (Part c)

In your response to Letter 63 from VT you state that "Religion rejects authentic human existence, while humanism exalts it." Could you explain what "religion" rejects authentic human existence, what exactly is authentic human existence, who determines what this authentic existence is and why is humanism outside the realm of religion?

Editor's Response to Letter #70 (Part c)

Since VT chose to embark upon a flurry of grandiloquent rhetoric, my response was in like form. Neither of us provided corroborative evidence, which accounts for BE's propensity to avoid discussions of this nature. To answer your query, religion in the generic sense, rejects authentic human existence by dealing more in the realm of fantasy and mythology, while humanism does not. However, that's an extra-biblical controversy that you might want to debate the the humanists.

Letter #70 Continues (Part d)

In response to letter #65. The "he" that could not drive out the inhabitants of the mountains was not God, it was the tribe of Judah. The text (Judges 1:19) simply states that God is with Judah; it

does not state that God promised him (Judah) victory. You are assuming more than is advisable. Also, I do not think any creationist would disagree with your simplistic view of evolution: an arrow in flight, or a tree growing. But I have failed to observe an arrow in flight which did not land as an arrow; or a tree growing into something else. And finally, which version of evolution is fact? And when did it move into the realm of fact? I suggest you consult a dictionary before answering. You are assuming that because you have been convinced that it is the best alternative to answering the question of origins, that it must be fact. Certainly a man of your intellectual capacity could not possibly be mistaken. I regret to inform you that you are as mistaken as the creationist who defends his position by announcing that it is a fact. Neither of these theories is a fact. They are presuppositions supported by some facts. Facts can be proven beyond a shadow of a doubt right now!!

Editor's Response to Letter #70 (Part d)

I think you should reread Letter #65 and my response GL. You have confused my reply with the comments of its author, ET. Your quarrel is with him, not me. He used Judges 1:19 ("And the Lord was with Judah; and he drove out the inhabitants of the mountains; but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron") to prove the impotence of God. I've never used this verse as do many critics of the Bible because "he" does appear to refer to Judah and not God. The statement doesn't clearly prove God is powerless. The only thing it appears to substantiate is that the Lord wasn't with Judah very much. Second, you described my view of evolution as simplistic. Again, if you will reread the letter you'll see ET, not I, mentioned an arrow in flight and a tree growing. I think you missed ET's point, however, which was that evolution follows a lineal progression according to inexorable laws. ET may wish to reply in a later issue. Third, I didn't know there were versions of evolution. But even more important, I think you missed the gist of the discussion between ET and myself. ET was indirectly criticizing my comment in What is Science (Sept. 1984 issue) that science could not provide absolute, i.e. eternal truths. If you'll read What is Science GL you'll see it described the theory of evolution as a relative truth, i.e., the best explanation possible. In that sense, it is fact. It was not described as an absolute truth which can never be modified. That's the view biblicists have of creationism. The theory of evolution is a relative truth; it is not an absolute truth. That was the point intended in issue #21 and again in #23. If I have a theory which the vast preponderance of the evidence tends to substantiate, then I have a relative truth viewed as a fact. That does not mean I have a truth which will be viewed as a fact thousands of years from now. Additional data may arise which will necessitate modification or abolishment of the theory. But for now it's a fact and one can only pity he who operates on any other assumption. That's the essence of science. Lastly, you subtly put the facts provided by creationists on a par with those provided by evolutionists. The evidence is decidedly opposed to this; but, then, BE is not concerned with the evolutionist/creationist debate which involves a tremendous amount of extra-biblical data.

Letter #70 Conclusion (Part e)

In response to letter #67. Assuming that your "nifty experiment" was carried out by conscientious experts in the French and Spanish languages--good job.

Editor's Response to Letter #70 (Part e)

Your compliment is appreciated GL; however, MF conducted the experiment, not I. His team translated the 23rd Psalm from English to French and back into English with the resultant evidence that translations are fallible. His team mates are the ones to whom you might want to direct your applause.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #71 from Ken Bonnell of Los Angeles, California

Dear Dennis. Here is a case of "biblical errancy" for your file and future use. Mark 9:14-29 contains the story of Jesus' "exorcism" of a "dumb spirit." It concludes curiously. The disciples ask why they could not cast it out, and Jesus says, "This kind cannot be driven out except by prayer and fasting." But the story had not a whit of prayer or of fasting. The absence of fasting from the story has caused the reference to be edited out of certain families of manuscripts, so that "and fasting" does not appear in all translations we read..

EDITOR'S NOTE: Because next month's issue will be devoted to letters from readers, the four-part commentary on Jesus, The Imperfect Beacon will resume in the March, 1985, issue.

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COMMENTARY

Extra-biblical Subjects-- We are occasionally asked why extra-biblical subjects are not an integral part of BE since they comprise a substantial amount of many other publications. The reasoning behind this is threefold. First, the best evidence one can use against the Bible is the Book itself. There is more than enough data contained therein to convince any reasonably objective person that it could not be God's word. Amassing a vast amount of external data and bringing it to the Book to refute its contents is essentially ineffective. Biblicists will counter with assertions to the effect that regardless of what the evidence shows, if it says the Bible is false then it's inaccurate. External sources will be viewed as less authoritative than the Bible. Comparing one part of the Book with another, however, is a different matter. In such instances, we don't have external data saying the Bible is false; we have the Bible saying the Bible is false. And that's a decidedly different situation which apologists find hard to counter. It's one thing for external information to say the Bible is erroneous; it's quite another for the Bible itself to say so. I've made this point repeatedly on radio appearances. Of course, a strategy of this nature requires one to know the Bible as well as, if not better than, its proponents, something many agnostics, rationalists, humanists, and atheists refuse to do. Their disdain for the Book and propensity to strike-at-a-distance has provided biblicists a sanctuary to which they invariably retreat when confronted with criticisms. Critics seek to pull biblicists out of the Bible rather than pursue them into its narrative and fight on biblical grounds. Allowing apologists a sanctuary from which to launch their incessant forays is unwise while hot pursuit into their arena has greater potential. Knowledge of the Bible's weaknesses and an ability to present them in a persuasive manner is crucial. Any weakening of the opponents' resolve is progress. We engage biblicists at every opportunity and always receive Mormons, Baptists, and Jehovah's Witnesses with a certain degree of enthusiasm. Believing they have come to convert, they leave with a substantial body of new information. It becomes a question of who is influencing whom. If we don't provide these people with a far more balanced presentation of the Bible, who will? Certainly clergymen and theologians won't. BE teaches a kind of Sunday-school-in-reverse. People are told all the things they should have heard in Sunday school but didn't. It's also important to note that liberal Christians such as those in the World Council of Churches also need to know the Bible's problems, since many are far more under its influence than they realize. A second reason for concentrating on the Bible, per se, is that millions of believers tend to discount or ignore extra-biblical data. Although hard to believe, most have little interest in the Babylonian influence on the Pentateuch's formation, the scientific data discounting the Flood, the evidence in opposition

to the six days of creation accounts, the history of papal corruption, the fraudulent Shroud of Turin, the multitude of pagan influences on the formation of Christianity, the similarities between Christianity and earlier religions, the history of the Canon's formation, the resemblance between Jesus and other gods and saviors, etc. Certainly these issues are of significance and should be discussed, but they are of secondary importance. They can be used to disprove the validity of the Bible and Christianity, but the real question is whether or not they can be effectively utilized to weaken people's resolve. They're useful in winning debates but winning people is another matter. A third and final reason for concentrating on the Bible rather than religion in general is that millions of people, especially evangelicals and fundamentalists, derive their political and social views on abortion, civil rights, sexual equality, justice, punishment, free speech, military involvement, criminal activity, and so forth from biblical teachings. Their beliefs come straight out of the Bible. Consequently, court battles over school prayers, nativity scenes, "In God We Trust," chaplains in the military, creationism in the schools, textual censorship, and other current issues represent little more than superficial struggles over more basic concepts. As long as the foundation upon which biblicists base their beliefs remains unshaken, the secondary struggles will continue unabated. If I believed the Bible was the inerrant word of God and Jesus was my Savior, I'd be supporting nativity scenes and prayers too. Interesting, indeed, is the fact that we hear all kinds of political debates on a wide variety of subjects but we almost never witness conflicts over the validity of the source from which millions of people approach these secondary issues.

DIALOGUES AND DEBATES

Letter #72 from GL of Uxbridge, Mass. (Part a)

Dennis. I would like to offer some solutions to a few of the alleged contradictions mentioned in the Dec. 1984 issue of BE. (Jesus invited himself into someone's home without first receiving an invitation--Ed.) There is a possibility that the man had already invited Jesus and the disciples to keep the passover with him. (Mark 14:13-15) and (Luke 22:10-12) seem to indicate that the man expected them--he had a room furnished and ready.

Editor's Response to Letter #72 (Part a)

Dear GL. You are using what I call the behind-the-scenes apologetic defense by assuming events for which there is no evidence in order to resolve an imbroglio. It's one of the more sophisticated, although usually intellectually dishonest, stratagems. In this instance, there is no evidence, stated or implied, that Jesus had been invited earlier. If you are going to assume Jesus had been invited, although there is nothing stated to this effect, then I am going to assume he stole the silverware as he left. If you are going to make gratuitous assumptions to enhance his image, then I'm going to assume the opposite. The sky is the limit for both sides once we start down this road. As for the guest rooms being prepared in Mark 14 and Luke 22, my grandmother always had the guest room ready whether someone was coming or not.

Letter #72 Continues (Part b)

The verses you have indicated do not show that Jesus was afraid of men. Jesus himself tells us why he was evading his persecutors. (John 7:6)--"The right time has not yet come." I can not understand how you could imply that Jesus was a coward. You may not believe that he was God or had any divinity in his character but you cannot deny that he believed wholeheartedly in what he was doing. In Matt. 10:23 Jesus tells his disciples to flee persecution, not because of the fear of men but in order to preach the message.

Editor's Response to Letter #72 (Part b)

You want us to believe, GL, that every time Jesus sneaked away or hid from his captors he was saving himself for the day he could die on the cross for our sins. This legend continues to be perpetrated, despite the fact that when Jesus was on the cross he clearly stated, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Does this sound like someone who gladly died for your sins? Those are the words of a man who can think of a hundred places he would rather be. Secondly, in Matt. 10:23 Jesus told his disciples to flee. Why they were to flee is not material. The fact remains that in Luke 12:4 he told them, "Be not afraid of them that kill the body." Why run at all if fear is not involved? Thirdly, the amount of "heart" Jesus had in what he was doing does not prove bravery. The fact is he fled on numerous occasions. Any cowardly soldier could say he fled because it was not time for him to die.

Letter #72 Continues (Part c)

This new commandment ("A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye love one another"--John 13:34) differs from its Old Testament counterpart in that this love for one another is to resemble the love Jesus had for them. It is a new commandment because it is a modification of the old.

Editor's Response to Letter #72 (Part c)

How does the love Jesus had for them differ from the love they had for one another? But even more important is the fact that stiff penalties await anyone who modifies, increases, or diminishes the Old Law. "What thing soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it" (Deut. 12:32) and "Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar" (Prov. 30:6). But the strongest condemnation of Jesus is to be found in Rev. 22:18-19 if, in fact, he did modify an OT commandment. "If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things that are written in this book."

Letter #72 Continues (Part d)

In Matt. 11:30 ("For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light") Jesus is not offering physical rest. He is offering spiritual rest to those who are weary from trying to achieve spiritual rest but are burdened by futile rituals and obligations. It is rest for the soul that Jesus is offering. Matt. 11:29 says, "Take my yoke upon you,...and ye shall find rest unto your souls."

Editor's Response to Letter #72 (Part d)

What does Matt. 11:30 have to do with rituals and obligations and why do you limit the rest he promises to the spiritual realm only? The biblical word soul is used in reference to both physical and spiritual beings. In any event, if only a spiritual rest was intended, then why did a righteous soul experience turmoil according to 2 Peter 2:8 (RSV): "...for what that righteous man saw and heard as he lived among them, he was vexed in his righteous soul day after day with their lawless deeds" and some spiritual souls who followed Jesus couldn't help but be troubled and restless according to Rev. 20:4 (RSV): "Also I saw the souls of those who had been heheaded for their testimony to Jesus and for the word of God, and who had not worshipped the beast or its image...." This is spiritual rest?

Letter #72 Continues (Part e)

(In Part 5 of the Dec. 1984 issue BE stated the genealogies in Matt. 1 and Luke 3 trace Jesus' descent from David to Joseph and since Jesus allegedly came from and virgin birth, he couldn't be a physical descendant of David through Joseph--Ed.). I agree that Mary's genealogy is not mentioned, but assuming that Jesus is not a physical descendant of David because he is not a physical descendant of Joseph is narrow-minded. Mary could be of the lineage of David. We can not assume that she is not simply because her genealogy is not given.

Editor's Response to Letter #72 (Part e)

As in Part A, GL, you are basing your position on an extra-biblical assumption. I have no obligation to your comment as long as you don't forget to tell people there is no biblical evidence whatever that Mary descended from David; indeed, as was mentioned on page 2 of the sixth issue of BE, Mary appears to have been from the house of Judah, not David, since her cousin Elizabeth (Luke 1:36) was a daughter of Aaron, i.e., from the house of Judah (Luke 1:5). Secondly, by denying the common apologetic theme that the genealogy in Luke 3 is that of Mary you are re-igniting the contradiction between Matt. 1:16 and Luke 3:23 which say Joseph's father was Jacob and Heli respectively. (To Be Continued Next Month.)

Letter #73 from VT of Huron, California (Part a)

(In letter #63 of the 22nd issue was the following comment by BE's editor: "Don't just say the Bible is God's word, prove it as in a court of law"--Ed.)...The proof of the Bible being God's word is born out in the lives of those that accept God as their Father and Jesus as their savior. Christians accept the Bible as God's Word, By faith we accept Jesus as our Savior. The PROOF is born out in the lives and actions of those that do the will of God.... No one is ever going to prove anything to you that you prefer not to be convinced of. Arguments do not change a persons' mind...

Editor's Response to Letter #73 (Part a)

You have offered no proof whatever, VT. The consequences people have experienced after accepting the Bible as God's word and Jesus as their savior have been as varied as the people involved, ranging from contentment to catastrophe. Prisons, cemeteries, and hospitals are replete with true believers. People may accept Jesus as their savior; but that proves nothing. What kind of specific proof do you have? That's the question. Faith is not proof. As was discussed in prior issues, the lives and actions of many hardly reflect what you call "the will of God," assuming the Bible is God's word and his will can be determined therefrom. Secondly, your conclusion that no one has proven anything to me that I preferred not to believe is no more worthy of comment than your assertion that arguments don't change minds. If the latter were true, presidential debates would be a tremendous waste of money. I've reluctantly changed my mind on numerous occasions.

Letter #73 Continues (Part b)

When Christ was nailed to the cross with the claim of "the king of Israel" over his head, their spiteful assertion was that they would believe if he would come down from the cross is plainly untrue. They would have shifted their ground and invented some other excuse.... These "Pious scoffers" are like many today who make factitious and arbitrary demands of Christ. Now the character, power, and diety of Christ are plain to all whose eyes are not blinded by the gods of this world. Christ will not give new proofs to the blind of heart....

Editor's Response to Letter #73 (Part b)

Several of your assertions warrant comment, VT. First, to be technically correct, what version are you using? None of the gospels in the KJV say "the King of Israel" was written over his head. Second, how could you know the thoughts of some people who lived 2,000 years ago? To say that is is "plainly untrue" that they would have believed Jesus if he had come down is nothing more than unsubstantiated speculation. How can you be certain they would have invented another excuse? Third, what was arbitrary about the demand by people at the foot of the cross for Jesus to prove his power by coming down? It seems to be a reasonable request. Fourth, you shifted the focus of attention to Jesus. BE is discussing the Bible's validity, not making demands on a person who allegedly lived 2,000 years ago. The genuineness of Jesus is inextricably tied to the book in which his activities are related. If the Book is shown to be invalid then certainly his alleged activities become dubious at best. Fifth, there is nothing plain about the character, power, or diety of Christ. Indeed, BE has engaged in an on-going process of proving precisely the opposite. His qualifications and integrity are flawed throughout. And lastly, how can there be "new proofs" when there were never any old ones?

Letter #73 Continues (Part c)

The problem whith so many people is that they just don't want to believe, period....

Editor's Response to Letter #73 (Part c)

No, the problem with so many people is that they do want to believe, period. Regardless of evidence to the contrary, they want something to hang on to, something to believe in. With far too many people the situation is such that if it sounds good, looks good, feels good, and seems to make sense, they don't really care if it's true or not. Rational minds only ask for demonstrable evidence. "I feel that" or "my reaction is" or "it seems to me" or "I believe" or "I think that" or "faith tells me" or "I was taught" explain nothing and prove less.

Letter #73 Continues (Part d)

Now we can accept this or we have the option to reject it. It is really just that simple.

Editor's Response to Letter #73 (Part d)

No, it isn't that simple by any means. There is the question of truth and that depends on proof. Whether people believe something or not has nothing to do with truth. It's true or false regardless of what people think. There is a real world out there that one must learn.

Letter #73 Continues (Part e)

The problem in translation is where the greatest of scholars run into trouble. The Greek and Hebrew have many synonyms. One word will have eight or even ten synonyms. Thus we have many different translations of the Bible. This is the point of contention. Any serious student of the Bible should use several different translations. Doctrine is not changed. There is no point at which a person can show where the doctrinal and theological importance has been impaired or diminished.

Editor's Response to Letter #73 (Part e)

How can you say doctrine does not change if the doctrine can't be determined initially? One can't show where the doctrinal and theological importance has been changed because varied interpretations obviate any possibility of definitely knowing the original teaching. Doctrine may

not change; but the problem is one of determining what the doctrine should be. Impairing or diminishing isn't the problem; the question is one of fixing the correct doctrine to begin with.

Letter #73 Continues (Part f)

...Most all of the translations will differ in some degree. This is really no big thing as you make it out to be.... For you to make an issue of a rooster crowing at the wrong time to me is dwelling on trivia. This is the type of thing that got 'ol Thomas Paine and the other humanists started on their road of trivial pursuit. The only harm that it does is to the unsophisticated and the naive. Your paper is attractive to those that don't think for themselves.

Editor's Response to Letter #73 (Part f)

I didn't know I made a "big thing" out of the difference in translations, VT. Actually, we view them as little more than additional nails in the coffin. As far as the rooster crowing is concerned, one would hardly be justified in categorizing this as trivia, since Jesus is shown to be a false prophet and the gospels conflict with respect to what occurred and what should have happened. Frankly, I don't know what kind of evidence you want and I'm beginning to doubt any would be persuasive. The problem with so many apologists lies in their tendency to view any and all criticism as trivial. I'd hardly call Paine's Age of Reason trivial pursuit. The real harm done to the naive and unsophisticated comes about when they adopt your philosophical approach of discounting major problems. Your final comment is wholly inaccurate. Well over 200 subscribe to BE of whom a high percentage are lawyers, professors, holders of advanced degrees, and other individuals who have exhibited exceptional intelligence. You have made adamant judgments with respect to BE, its editor, its readers, and the thoughts of people who lived 2,000 years ago and, yet, have probably had no contact with anyone involved. Letters to BE clearly show many readers not only think for themselves but exhibit a considerable degree of sophistication. Indeed, having been surprised on several occasions, I've learned to choose my words like someone picking apples in an orchard. Choose with care because what you pick today you may have to eat tomorrow. Read the back issues of BE and you'll see that both sides are presented and readers are left to judge for themselves who is correct.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #74 from ET of Indianapolis, Indiana

In response to Letter #70 and GL's attack on my interpretation of Judges 1:19, let me quote Judges 1:19 from the NWT of the Holy Scriptures..."And Jehovah continued with Judah, so that he took possession of the mountainous region, but he could not dispossess the inhabitants of the low plain...." Since it says the Lord continued with Judah, would it not be logical that God was with...Judah when he tried the innocent people of the plains? You say the "he" was not God but Judah and his tribe. NOTE: Of course the "he" was Judah because there was, or is, no God. Judah was defeated by the war chariots....

On evolution...an arrow is NEVER the same when it is spent as when it leaves the bow! However, that was not my point; my point was this, without the cosmic law of evolution an arrow could not EVEN draw another breath. In fact, without evolution GL you could not take another step...or EVEN draw another breath. The Thorndike dictionary says of evolution "Any process of growth, gradual development, etc. Then it gives as an example a giant steamship evolving from a dugout canoe. That all life on this earth came from a single cell...is a theory...but EVOLUTION is NOT THEORY...it is a fact, a cosmic law of the universe, the same as gravitation, centrifugal force, momentum, etc.

Editor's Response to Letter #74

When you are criticized in BE by another reader, ET, you have a right "to respond." Your letter received priority.

Letter #75 from RO of Jamestown, Penn.

I am renewing my subscription...out of respect for your philosophy. But I think you have embarked on a hopeless task. The Bible was discredited quite well in the Age of Enlightenment but it did no good. Christians have just gone off on another tangent as they always will. It seems to be human nature to want to believe in something mystical, even if it is false.

Editor's Response to Letter #75

The task isn't hopeless, RO. Difficult, yes, but not hopeless. You'd be surprised at the number of people who seriously think about biblical difficulties when they are kept simple, relevant, and material and presented in a serious, respectful manner. I feel this especially during radio appearances. We have never received untoward phone calls and our subscriptions have grown steadily. When presenting information to people, you must give them time to weigh the merits before presenting more. It's an on-going process in which people are progressively re-educated. Granted many people are beyond hope but that's no reason to abandon the cause. I can't agree with your assertion that the Enlightenment discredited the Bible quite well. I know of no comprehensive refutation of the Bible that is available in the English language and, even more importantly, I know of no on-going systematic campaign against biblical defenses. Apologetic replies are as dynamic and fluid as criticisms. Voltaire and Paine's critiques have long since been attacked, showing there must be a perpetual response to the biblicists. It's a never-ending struggle, not a final battle. Even more important and difficult is projecting information to people. First one must gather as much data as possible. That's where BE enters. It's intended to be the most thorough refutation of the Bible available in the English language. Secondly, one must spread the information to others. That's where readers come in. People don't want to believe in something mystical; they want to believe in something that gives hope, a way out of their problems, something to look forward to, something that elevates their spirits.

Letter #76 from MP of Tulsa, Oklahoma

In Matt. 6:26 Jesus says "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them." But this is false, because millions of birds starve every winter!

EDITOR'S NOTE:

(a) BE recently moved 11 miles to larger, more convenient quarters. Our new address and phone number are: 3158 Sherwood Park Drive Springfield, Ohio 45505 (513) 323-6146

(b) Too many letters of good quality have been sent to BE for all of them to be published. If your's isn't printed, please don't feel slighted. Someday we hope to publish twice a month and/or increase the number of pages.

(c) We thank all of you who have entered advertisements for BE in periodicals and contacted radio stations on our behalf.

Issue No. 27

COMMENTARY

Jesus, The Imperfect Beacon (Part Three of a Four Part Series)--The Jan. issue noted 23 additional reasons Jesus is not the star one should follow and the following continue that enumeration: (51) "Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees which were of Jerusalem, saying, 'Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread.' But he answered and said unto them, 'Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?'" (Matt. 15:1-3). "Why do ye also" is an admission by Jesus that his disciples were violating a commandment of God. He doesn't deny they are breaking God's law; he simply says his critics are guilty of the same offense. (52) "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26) versus "Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe, All things are possible to him that believeth" (Mark 9:23) and "...If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you" (Matt. 17:20) and (John 14:12, 14). (53) "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:16) and "The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand" (John 3:35) versus "and he saith unto them...to sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give" (Mark 20:23). (54) "Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19) versus "But God raised him from the dead" (Acts 13:30) and "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom ye slew" (Acts 5:30). Jesus never raised himself but was raised by another. His prophecy that he would raise himself proved erroneous. (55) "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy" (Matt. 5:7) versus "then shall he (Jesus--Ed.) say unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was an hungered, and ye gave me no meat;..." (Matt. 25:41-42) and "when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away" (Matt. 21:18-19). Jesus failed to practice the mercy he preached. An eternal curse resulting from disappointed hunger is hardly the reaction of a divinely merciful being equal to God. Killing a tree for lacking fruit isn't indicative of a reasonably merciful and composed individual. (56) "Woe to you! for you build the tombs of the prophets whom your fathers killed. So you are witnesses and consent to the deeds of your fathers; for they killed them, and you built their tombs" (Luke 11:47-48 RSV). Logic and scientific precision were not among Jesus' strong points. Building a tomb for someone whom my ancestors killed certainly does not mean I approve of the killing. (57) "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body" (Matt. 26:26). If the bread is really his body then there are two bodies of Jesus, two christs. Christians can't agree among themselves on how to approach this one. (58) "and I seek not mine own glory" (John 8:50) and "whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted" (Matt. 23:12) versus "And Jesus answered them saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified" (John 12:23) and "now O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self..." (John 17:5). (59) "And he said unto them, In what place soever ye enter into an house, there abide till ye depart from that place" (Mark 6:10). Superficial profundity is evident in the fact that one could hardly do anything else. Obviously one must abide in a place until one departs. (60) "Then, if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect: (Matt. 24:23-24) versus "...the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me" (John 5:36) and (John 3:2, 20:30-31, Matt. 11:20-21). According to Jesus the ability to do great signs and wonders, i.e., miracles, does not prove one is the messiah. Yet, he contends his works prove he is from God. Using Jesus' own criteria, how do we know he is genuine? (61) "...verily I

say unto you, There shall no sign be given unto this generation" (Mark 8:12) versus "A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas" (Matt. 16:4). Jesus said in Mark 8:12 that no sign would be given; now there is an exception. (62) "For as Jonas was three day and three nights in the whale's belly" (Matt. 12:40) versus "...and Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights" (Jonah 1:17). According to the OT Jesus erred. It was a fish, not a whale. (63) "the Son of man has come eating and drinking; and you say, `Behold, a glutton and a drunkard..." (Luke 7:34 RSV). If this comment is true, and there is little evidence to the contrary, Jesus' character is, indeed, substandard. (64) "Jesus saith unto her (Mary Magdalene--Ed.), `Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father'" (John 20:17) versus "and after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus.... Then saith he to Thomas, `Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side'" (John 20:26-27). Unless Jesus ascended to his Father during the eight day period after he told Mary Magdalene not to touch him, he either broke or abolished his own rule. He told Mary not to touch him until he ascended; yet, eight days later he told Thomas to touch him. (65) "For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if ye will receive it, this (John the Baptist--Ed.) is Elias, which was for to come" (Matt. 11:13-14) versus "I (John the Baptist--Ed.) am not the Christ. And they asked him, what then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No" (John 1:20-21). Jesus says John the Baptist is Elias. John the Baptist says he is not. Someone is dishonest and, logically speaking, which man is in a better position to know. Secondly, if John the Baptist is Elijah, where is the "great and dreadful day of the Lord that is supposed to follow his appearance according to Mal. 4:5 ("Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord"). And lastly, if John the Baptist is Elijah the prophet, then Jesus taught reincarnation. (66) "And from the days of John the Baptist unto now..." (Matt. 11:12). These words signify that a long period had elapsed since John. Yet, on the very day Jesus is said to have uttered these words, he received a visit from the disciples of John who was in prison as Matt. 11:2-3 shows. (67) "Oh my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me..." (Matt. 26:39). This verse along with Matt. 27:46 ("Why hast thou foresaken me") shows that Jesus did not offer himself spontaneously as a sacrifice for mankind. "Cup" comes from a Hebrew word which actually means fate or, in this case, death. (68) "And Jesus began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer...and be killed, and after three days rise again" (Mark 8:31) and (Matt. 27:63) versus "The Son of man must suffer...and be raised the third day" (Luke 9:22) and (Luke 24:46, Mark 9:31). Jesus contradicted himself with respect to whether he was to arise on or after the third day. (69) "Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a King then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born...." (John 18:37). Jesus often didn't seem to know the difference between a question and a statement. Pilate posed a query; he did not make an announcement. (70) "There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands for my sake, and the gospel's, But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands..." (Mark 10:29-30). What wealth did the apostles and disciples receive? What houses and lands did they obtain for following Jesus? How does one grant retrospective motherhood? Promising one's followers immense riches is actually a form of bribery. (71) "Behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes; and some of them ye shall kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city...Verily I say unto you, All these things shall come upon this generation" (Matt. 23:34, 36). What prophets, wise men, or scribes did Jesus send to that generation who were also killed, crucified, and scourged in the synagogues, and persecuted from city to city? (72) "Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:54). Would this include Judas who so ate and drank (Matt. 26:26-27); whom Jesus called a devil (John 6:70), and whom Satan entered (Luke 22:3)? (73) "There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his Kingdom" (Matt. 16:28) and "there be some of them that stand here, which

shall not taste of death, till they have seen the Kingdom of God come with power" (Mark 9:1), Luke 9:27). These passages show Christ's coming in power and glory to judge the quick and the dead was to come in the lifetime of persons living then; yet, they all died and the kingdom is yet to come. (74) "Watch therefore for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh" (Matt. 24:42-44). It is interesting that Jesus compares himself to a thief breaking into a good man's house. But, then, who knows his morality better than he himself?

(TO BE CONTINUED NEXT MONTH)

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #72 Continues from Last Month (Part f)

(BE noted in the Dec. 1984 issue that Jesus' promise of protection to Paul failed--Ed.) The defense for your 6th accusation concerning Acts 18:10 ("For I am with thee (Paul--Ed.), and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city") is located in that very same verse. You neglected to print the last portion of that verse which clearly has Jesus only assuring him that no harm will come to him while he is in Corinth.

Editor's Response to Letter #72 (Part f)

I don't feel this verse is as clear as you claim, GL. Perhaps the last part does promise protection only in the city of Corinth, but I don't interpret it that way. Actually, it is too nebulous to prove either position and probably should have been left out.

Letter #72 Concludes (Part g)

(In part 7 of the Dec. issue BE noted the following problem: "Make yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness" versus "Ye cannot serve God and mammon"--Ed.). Making yourself friends of mammon is not tantamount to serving mammon.

Editor's Response to Letter #72 (Part g)

I don't think you really believe the distinction you have made GL and only offer it as a debating tactic. Judging from the context in which both verses appear, the author did not intend the contrast you have drawn. You also face the unenviable task of explaining how Jesus can be our moral beacon while teaching people to befriend unrighteousness.

Letter # 77 from FW of Portland, Oregon

I just received your sample copy today. You're doing an excellent job about something which should be done on a massive scale. Count me in as a subscriber. There's something, however, which I must point out to you as in error. In your commentary about the Flood and the Ark and the related nonsense that goes with it, you talk about the variety of domestic dogs as if they were species. This is false. Science only recognizes *canis familiaris* as a species. All the subsequent breeds of dogs from the Great Dane to the Chihuahua were derived by the genetic manipulation of human dog breeders from ancient times to the present--or selective breeding, if you will. Check it out in the Britannica or some other authoritative source. Keep up the good work.

Editor's Response to Letter #77

We thank you for your considerate comments, FW. With regard to your specific point, I think you misunderstood my position with respect to the dogs. Perhaps I wasn't clear enough. If you will recall, the commentary on this topic began with the following observation: "Anyone believing in the Flood must provide rational answers to the following questions." You have provided what you feel is a rational explanation. I, on the other hand, find it difficult to believe that the tremendous variety of dogs today could have evolved from a single pair in only a few thousand years. Not being a scientist, however, I didn't attempt to prove my case. That's an extra-biblical problem which I'll leave to qualified evolutionists. If they support your position, I'm quite willing to alter mine. Alerting people to the problem was my only concern.

Letter # 78 from DEM of Long Beach, California

(Part K of the commentary in issue #23 noted the problem presented in 1 Kings 7:23 of having a circle 10 cubits in diameter and 30 cubits in circumference--Ed.) With respect to 1 Kings 7:23 I feel that you are on thin ice. Granted that a circular object of 10 cubits in diameter cannot have a circumference of 30 cubits. As the figures are "30" was not qualified in the Bible, you have assumed that it should stand or fall according to mathematical exactness. It is either right or it is wrong, as you put it. But consider the following. Your answer of 31.40 is also wrong as you rounded off pi to two decimal places before using it in your calculation. In fact, no amount of decimal places would suffice due to the number pi. Mathematically, the exact value for the circumference must equal $10 \times \pi$ which can never be precisely captured by a decimal expression.... If we give the benefit of the doubt (and we should as we cannot know exactly the biblical author's thoughts here), then we must assume that the number given is an approximation of some type. The degree of accuracy depends on what we want. You used 31.40 based on rounding pi to two decimals. I might prefer the value 31.42 which is based on rounding off the "exact" answer to two decimals. Someone else might prefer the nearest whole number and they would select 31 as the answer. On the other hand, 30 is a nice clean number and may well have suited the needs of the biblical authors who used it. Since all length measurements must be an approximation we should insert that qualification in our reading unless the text specifically claims otherwise....

Editor's Response to Letter # 78

Dear DEM. You might be interested in knowing that this topic generated an exceptional amount of interest on the part of many readers. Your response in particular is essentially a variation on the common apologetic theme that the Bible was not meant to be a scientifically precise text. But the fact is the Bible is either inerrant or it isn't, and a circle with a circumference of 30 and a diameter of 10 isn't possible. If the author had said "approximately 30" there would have been no problem. But he didn't. Granted all measurements are approximations, but there is a qualitative difference between 31.40 and 30. The latter doesn't appear to acknowledge even the existence of pi. According to your reasoning when my teacher in school subtracted for my slightly erroneous answer, I should have told him my response was a "nice clean number." Moreover, if you are going to accept 30, why not accept 33, 32, 29, or 28? They are just rough approximations too. Why grant this privileged status to 30 only. Thousands of math students are going to have legitimate complaints when their answers, which are closer to the correct response than 30 is to 31.40, are counted wrong, while "God's word" is considered correct. And lastly, remember this is supposed to be God's book, not a man-made instrument. And like God it has to be perfect. Approximations don't count. You can't be approximatly perfect. You either are or you are not. If the book was giving an approximate figure, it should have said so or otherwise qualified the answer.

Letter #79 from KEN of Sacramento, California (Part a)

Dear Dennis. I am still an avid reader of BE, and hope you will take the time to review some constructive criticisms of some recent issues. First issue 22, page 1, Item (4). (BE quoted Gen. 1:20 and 2:19 and stated, "According to the 1st creation all winged fowl were created out of the waters. Yet, the 2nd account says that every fowl of the air was created out of the ground--Ed.) I'm sure by now many readers have pointed out the "contradiction" is just poor translation. If you check some of the more accurate and better documented translations, such as the NIV and the NAB the contradiction evaporates. Perhaps this item proves that the KJV is imperfect, but it argues nothing about the Bible in general.

Editor's Response to Letter # 79 (Part a)

Dear KEN. Problems of this nature are unavoidable no matter what version is used. Every version of the Bible has its detractors. If I used the RSV, the NEB, the NWT or any one of several other versions, someone would take issue with particular verses and cite other versions to the contrary. That's why I focus on the KJV. It seems to be most acceptable to the largest number of people. Dealing with every version of the Bible on an individual basis is out of the question. You have chosen to rely upon recent versions which are not only tendentious but opposed by a substantial number of fundamentalists. Before we can debate the Bible we must first agree on which version is to be used. There must first be a consensus on what the Bible is. If it isn't a book, but, instead, a compilation of bits and pieces from many books, then communication will rapidly deteriorate. If we are going to leap from one version to another, then the only practical way to communicate would be for you to write your own version composed of those verses you prefer and send me a copy. I've confronted this rather sophisticated technique before. Individuals will quote the KJV until they encounter difficulties and then switch to another version which is then quoted until it, too, creates problems, at which time a third version is employed. It's a kind of catch-me-if-you-can game in which apologists are provided a wide variety of sentences to choose from for each verse in the Bible. In effect, there is no Bible, per se, but only a vast array of sentences in a variety of versions which can be compiled as conditions dictate. I have no objection to discussing any standard version providing we stay with that version. Allowing biblicists to have 10 or 15 versions of every verse in the Bible from which to choose at will would be absurd.

Letter #79 Continues (Part b)

(On page 2 of the same issue BE contrasted Gen. 1:9-10 with 2:4-6. After quoting both, BE stated: "in the 1st creation the earth when created was covered with water and the land did not appear until the 3rd day. In the 2nd creation there was no water at first; the earth was dry land"--Ed.) I'm at a loss to understand how you can interpret Gen. 2:4-6 (the 2nd version--Ed.) this way. The verses say only that in the early days of the earth, there was no rain. It does not say that lakes and oceans did not exist. Perhaps you can enlighten me. If this argument is as weak as it looks, I fear you are only giving ammunition to the evangelists.

Editor's Response to Letter #79 (Part b)

Essentially we are discussing the extra-biblical question of how the earth was formed, KEN. I find it difficult to believe the earth initially had oceans and lakes and yet, not one drop of rain had fallen. If you can produce adequate evidence and reputable scientists willing to testify on your behalf, I'd be willing to reconsider my position. However, I think your belief runs counter to accepted scientific data.

Letter #79 Concludes (Part c)

(On page 2 of the 23rd issue BE quoted 2 Chron. 21:20-22:2 and showed that Ahaziah began to reign at age 42 even though his father had just died at age 40, i.e., Ahaziah was two years older than his father--Ed.) When I checked the NIV, for example, I see that Ahaziah was actually 22 years old when he began to reign (2 Chron. 22:2).

Editor's Response to Letter # 79 (Part c)

Why didn't you choose the KJV, the RSV, the MLV, the ASV, or the Jewish Masoretic text, KEN. They all say 42, not 22. Personally, I consider the RSV to be far more reliable than the NIV. Even the Living Bible, which has 22, has a footnote stating that literally speaking, the number should be 42. You quoted the NIV but it, too, has a footnote stating the number is 42 in Hebrew. Apologists have tried to escape from this problem by inserting the number 22 because 2 Kings 8:26 says Ahaziah was 22 when he began to reign. The compilers of expediency-motivated modern versions such as the NIV have sought to resolve the contradiction between 2 Kings 8:26 and 2 Chron. 22:2 by simply rewriting the latter.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #80 from MP of Tulsa, Oklahoma

Dear Dennis. Consider this problem. Jesus often referred to himself as the "Son of man" (Matt. 16:13, 19:28, 25:13, 26:2) and many biblicists would have us believe that Jesus was/is God. Yet, Balaam in an alledged revelation from God says, "God is not a man, that he should lie neither the son of man, that he should repent" (Num. 23:19).

Letter No 81 from DWC of Boydton, Virginia

Last night I and a few christian brothers were involved in a "heated" debate concerning the Bible and christianity; therefore, I decided to write you, after I remembered hearing you bring forth some good/excellent remarks about the bible on a talk show, three months ago, to see if you could come to my defense by sending me some of your literature and your newsletter. Also I would like to become one of your students. I can't honestly say if I'm an atheist or not, but I'm sure not a Christian! And I say this because there hasn't been a christian in my 10 years of incarceration who can answer my questions! Also most of these guys who have been converted into christianity are either doing it as a means of escapism (from drugs, gangs, etc.), something to cling to, or a chance to meet women in the choir. These converts smoke, shoot dope, and do almost everything else under the sun; yet, they claim to be christians! They also return to prison at a fast pace with a worse offense and head right back to the chapels. On several occasions I raised my hand during the christian services to ask question and was almost thrown out.... to be honest, I feel as though the bible is shoved down the poor people's throats to keep us in submission.... Where do we go when times are hard? Straight to church or to pick up a bible. But when we leave these churches or put down these bibles, things are still the same. People came from the Parole Board with the fake story of having the holy ghost....

Letter #82 from RM of Fairview, Canada

Dear Dennis. It is with pathological delight that I am renewing by subscription to BE for the 1985 term. How can I control my eagerness to make waves within my community, as well as provincially. However, it is great fun, thanx to you. Besides creating controversy in a local paper, I am in the process of putting much of BE on computer disk for immediate recall.

Furthermore, I am designing a correspondence course of twenty lessons apart from the disk. Having been a school teacher, I find grammatical errors within the covers of the Bible very interesting, especially the ones you have found like "replenish" and "mountains" in Genesis. I think the one in Gen. 3:8 is also interesting: "And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day...." When does a voice take on legs for walking? ...thank you so much for all the intelligence you have shown me.

Editor's Response to Letter #82

Dear RM. Your remarks are very kind and I'm glad to see you are using BE as a basic tool to confront biblicists. That's one of the primary reasons for which it is written.

Letter #83 from AK of Port Moody, B.C., Canada

Dear Dennis. I would like you to know how much I appreciate reading BE. It is the most intelligent writing I ever read in the 77 years of my life. I like your logic and sense of humor and look forward to every new issue. Certain writings in the Bible, which for decades have been doubtful to me, have now been proven to be plain nonsense by BE. In discussions about religion, it is pleasant to have BE writings for support. Please accept the best wishes from my wife and myself for further success in the enlightenment of the people.

Editor's Response to Letter #82

Thank you AK and I'm glad to see that you, too, are using BE as support in discussions.

EDITOR'S NOTE: A special note of gratitude goes out to KEN who wrote this month's Letter #79. Although we have had our differences, KEN has always been a reliable supporter of BE and is solely responsible for my Feb. 18th hour-long appearance on radio station WGMR of Sacramento, California, and the resulting additional subscribers. Such support is greatly appreciated.

Issue No. 28

Apr. 1985

COMMENTARY

Jesus, the Imperfect Beacon (Part Four of a Four Part Series)--Although this month's list of Jesus' aberrations marks the conclusion of an extensive critique of Christianity's namesake, even more examples are available for future analysis and may someday be presented. In the meantime, however, the following will complete the topic: (75) "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matt.20:28) versus "Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him" (Psalm 72:11) and "...that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him" (Dan. 7:14) and "...all dominions shall serve and obey him" (Dan. 7:27). Jesus' concept of the messiah conflicts with that of OT prophets. (76) "but I say unto you, `That ye resist not evil, but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also" (Matt. 5:39) versus "And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers" (Matt. 21:12-13) and "when he had thus spoken, one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of the hand, saying, `Answerest thou the high priest so" (John 18:22)? Apparently Jesus ignored his own maxim since he overthrew the tables and was struck by an officer for talking back. (77) "These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them saying,

"Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not" (Matt. 10:5) versus "So when the Samaritans were come unto him, they besought him that he would tarry with them: and he (Jesus--Ed.) abode there two days" (John 4:40) and "He (Jesus--Ed.) left Judaea, and departed again into Galilee. And he must needs go through Samaria. Then cometh he to a city of Samaria..." (John 4:3-5) and "...ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria..." (Acts 1:8) and (Luke 17:11, Isa. 49:6). Jesus not only ignored his own command but advised others to do as much. (78) "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 15:24) and "These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them saying, 'Go not into the way of the Gentiles...But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel'" (Matt. 10:5-6) and (Matt. 7:6, 15:26, Mark 7:27) versus "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations..." (Matt. 28:19) and "he said unto them, 'Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature'" (Mark 16:15) and "the gospel must first be published among all nations" (Mark 13:10) and (Luke 24:43, Acts 1:8). Jesus originally sent his followers only to the house of Israel, but later reversed course and sought a wider audience. In the vernacular this is known as not having it together." (79) "then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (Matt. 26:52) and "...and his name shall be called...The mighty God, The everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace" (Isa. 9:6) and "Peace I leave with you, nay peace I give unto you" (John 14:27) and (Matt. 5:9, 5:22, Isa. 2:4, Zech. 9:10) versus "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I come not to send peace, but a sword" (Matt. 10:34) and "I am come to send fire on the earth" (Luke 12:49) and "...he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one" (Luke 22:36). Jesus' contradictory approach to peace is even more apparent than that of current political figures appealing to the gallery. (80) "For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son" (John 5:22) and "As I hear I judge: and my judgment is just...." (John 5:30) and (John 5:27, 8:26, Matt. 25:31-32) versus "...for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world" (John 12:47) and "Ye judge after the flesh; I judge no man" (John 8:15) and Luke 12:14, John 8:50). (81) In both Luke 24:17 RSV ("And he said to them, 'What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk?") and Luke 8:43-45 ("And a woman...came behind him and touched the border of his garment:...and Jesus said, 'Who touched me?") Jesus deceived his audience by pretending he, i.e. God, didn't know something. For whatever reason, his act was deceptive. (82) "...go thou to the sea, and cast a hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them (as a tax--Ed.) for me and thee" (Matt. 17:27). One can not help but ask how this money originated. Either Jesus created it, in which case he was a counterfeiter or, as the omniscient God, he failed to perform the morally correct act of returning it to the rightful owner. (83) "Ask and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you: For everyone that asketh receiveth..." (Matt. 7:7-8) versus "Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am thither ye cannot come" (John 7:34) and "...they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me" (Prov. 1:28) and "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me" (Matt. 27:46) and (Luke 13:24, John 9:31, Psalm 18:41, Jer. 7:16, 11:11, Ezek. 8:18, Micah 3:4, Hab. 1:2). Sometimes Jesus' oratorical flourishes exceeded his grasp. His promise of success to all who ask is not only in opposition to comment by himself and OT prophets but refuted by his own experience. (84) "But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment..." (Matt. 5:22 RSV). Yet, Jesus himself, ("looked round about on them with anger--Mark 3:5) and overthrew the moneychangers' tables. Again, he didn't practice what he preached. (85) "Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 22:13) and (Matt. 8:12, 25:30) versus "And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. 13:42) and (Matt. 25:41). How could weeping and gnashing of teeth occur in darkness and fire? (86) "I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish" (Luke 13:3, 5) versus "I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance" (Luke 15:7). All must repent; yet, many need no repentance. Strange "logic,"

indeed! (87) "Why doth this generation seek after a sign? verily I say unto you, There shall no sign be given unto this generation" (Mark 8:12) versus "And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples..." (John 20:30) and "Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you..." (Acts 2:22) and (Mark 16:20, Acts 5:12, 8:13). (88) "Because strait is the gate and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matt. 20:16) versus "and all flesh shall see the salvation of God" (Luke 3:6) and "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (John 12:32). Explaining this one should be left to theologians, for as Elbert Hubbard stated in *The Philistine* "Theology is an attempt to explain a subject by those who do not understand it. The intent is not to tell the truth but to satisfy the questioner." (89) "So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:33) and "Jesus said unto him, 'If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me'" (Matt. 19:21) and (Mark 10:21, Luke 3:11, 11:41, 12:35, 18:22) versus "And it came to pass, that, as Jesus sat at meat in his house" (Mark 2:15). Jesus has a house while telling others to surrender their wealth. (90) "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Matt. 24:35) versus "One generation passeth away, and another cometh: but the earth abideth for ever" (Eccle. 1:4). In this instance, as well as that which follows, Jesus is inaccurate according to the OT. Jesus said, "...all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth" (John 5:28-29) while Job 7:9 says, "as the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away: so he that goeth down to the grave shall come up no more." (91) "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father..." (John 15:26) versus "But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name..." (John 14:26). Who, then, will send the Comforter? (92) "...but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder" (Matt. 19:17-18) versus "Thou knowest the commandments,...Do not kill" (Mark 10:19, Luke 8:20). Murder and killing are not identical. Jesus contradicted himself unless he intended to equate the two, in which case soldiers, police, executioners, and those killing in self-defense or by accident are in trouble. (93) Jesus called himself a prophet ("Jesus said unto them, A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country"--Matt. 13:57) as did others ("And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee"--Matt. 21:11). But he couldn't be a prophet in the OT tradition because: (a) None of the prophets of Israel ever taught in his own name or on his own responsibility. The "I" of the prophets is God; the "I" of Jesus is himself; (b) No prophet added to or diminished the laws of the Torah; (c) No prophet arrogated to himself the power to forgive sins which the OT reserves for God alone; (d) No prophet ever did a miracle on his own authority or represented it to be a sign of his own power. Jesus performed miracles to cause people to believe in him OT prophets wrought miracles to strengthen belief in God; (e) and no prophet in the OT, not even Moses, ever claimed to be nearer God than others. Jesus claimed a special nearness to God not shared or even approximated by any other human being. (94) Jesus said, "If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true" (John 5:31) and later stated, "I am one that bear witness of myself..." (John 8:18). The logical conclusion to be drawn from combining these two statements is that Jesus disproved his own honesty. (95) "And the high priest answered and said unto him, 'I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God.' Jesus saith unto him, 'Thou hast said; nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven'" (Matt. 26:63-64). The inaccuracy of Jesus' prophecy is shown in the fact that the high priest never saw this. (96) And finally, like Paul, Jesus was not averse to twisting OT verses should the need arise. "For this is he, of whom it is written, 'Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee'" (Matt. 11:10). This is a quote from Mal. 3:1 which actually says, "Behold, I will send my messenger and he shall prepare the way before me..." Several differences are evident: (a) Malachi says, "the way before me" not "thy way before thee"; (b) Jesus left out "before thy face"; (c) Malachi says "will send" (future tense) rather than "send"; (d) Since it's unclear as to

whom the pronouns apply, there is little reason to believe Malachi is referring to John the Baptist or Jesus, and (e) the scene in Malachi of the coming of the Lord is one of fear and terror, like the day of judgment; whereas the birth of Christ is always spoken of as a time of joy and happiness. Thus, the scene in Malachi would not be referring to the birth of Christ. A substantial number of additional examples could be mentioned and probably will appear in future issues, but by now any reasonably objective assessment must lead to the conclusion that Jesus is an imperfect beacon and wholly unqualified to act as mankind's savior.

REVIEWS

Letter #84 from Arthur Rice of Hale Center, Texas (Arthur wants his full name published) Dear Dennis...I have just finished reading and studying McDowell and Stewart's Answers to Tough Questions. If this work is typical of the apologists then they have a very weak case indeed. Time after time they distort the argument by using faulty logic, appeal to authority, appeal to ignorance, circular reasoning, watering down the conflict, i.e., always a difficulty never a contradiction, etc. McDowell is very apt to use whichever version of scripture most suits his assertions. As in the case on page 140 where in defense of christian faith as an "intelligent faith" he used the NASB version of Mark 12:34 showing a scribe answering intelligently instead of the KJV which shows the scribe answered discreetly. Whatever device furthers his position he uses extensively so that his "Answers" begin to look more like "Evasions and Unsupported Assertions."

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #85 from JP of Philadelphia, Penn. (Part a)

Dear Dennis. I just read your sample issue and I must say that the problem that I find with it is that you focus on individual points of apparent inconsistency and not the main issue at hand: Is the Bible God's Word, and is Christ who He said He was?...In your sample issue you quote 8 reasons given by McDowell and Stewart for the Bible's Divine Inspiration, all of which you rightly complained were internal and therefore no proof at all.

Editor's Response to Letter #85 (Part a)

Dear JP. I think that if you had read more than one issue of BE you'd realize the focus extends far beyond individual inconsistencies. They are used primarily as blows in the larger philosophical bout. Any attorney knows you prove your case by taking points one at a time. I can't disprove the entire Bible in one fell swoop. Cases are built point by point. It's technical and methodical, but what do you recommend? Broad glittering generalizations which are nothing more than unsubstantiated opinions? Opinions are a penny a pound.

Letter #85 Continues (Part b)

I would like to give you five reasons that I consider the Bible to be God's Word, all of which are external to its own claim of Divine Inspiration: (1) In a book written over 1600 years by 40 different men, I find a consistent message of man's sin, God's righteousness, etc.... (2) Fulfilled prophecy, both political and messianic, too numerous to be coincidence. (3) A practicality that is manifested in the changed lives that Christ has affected. (4) A message too unique and wonderful to be man's invention...especially in the concept of...salvation through grace. What man could have invented the greatest love story ever told. God becoming a humble babe...suffering death.... (5) Overwhelming evidence that Christ was resurrected and therefore who he said he was....

Editor's Response to Letter #85 (Part b)

The problem with your analysis, JP, is that it is not only a litany of unproven generalizations but permeated with the myopic vision so evident in those who have been taught early in life to believe their's is the only way. Let's look at your points individually: (1) Anyone who finds the biblical message to be consistent hasn't looked very hard or with a critical eye. One of the primary reasons for BE's existence is to prove the Bible is anything but consistent. (2) With respect to prophecy, biblical perspicacity is about on a par with that of most fortune tellers as past and future issues of BE will show. (3) Changed lives also occur to those who have adopted the beliefs of Mohammed, Buddha, and countless other religious figures. Why single out Jesus for special attention? (4) What is unique about the Christian message and upon what possible basis would you conclude that it is beyond man's invention. Are you saying no one thought of basic Christian beliefs such as salvation by grace, the atoning death and resurrection of one's god, etc. prior to Jesus' appearance? Are you saying Christianity is not a composite, an amalgam, of many earlier beliefs? One might just as well say it emerged isolated from all outside influences with no evolutionary history, in which case it truly would be unique. I'd be interested in knowing what aspect of Christianity was not evident in an earlier religion or faith. (5) And lastly, even if Jesus had arisen from death, why would that be of any consequence since resurrections were rather common in that age. Essentially, JP, you have made some all-encompassing generalizations to which I have more or less responded in kind. From your perspective the Bible is God's word, teeming with fulfilled prophecy and other accurate teachings. I say the exact opposite is true. Now that that is out of the way, where do we go from here? Do we prove and provide evidence or do we merely continue making assertions which the other side considers wholly inaccurate? That's the problem with so many letters I receive, JP. They equate belief with proof. They aren't able to separate proven facts from opinions. They also seem to have no ability to sit back and critically analyze their own beliefs. They don't ask themselves: What would be the logical response of critics to what I just said.

Letter No. 86 from GL of Uxbridge, Mass. (Part a)

Dennis. In response to your response to my letter (#72-Part a), I must point out that you obfuscated the issue by introducing your proposition that Jesus peculated silverware. First of all silverware was most likely not present. Secondly, my logic was far from dishonest unless you have made an escape from reason. You hold your assumption that Jesus rudely invited himself to the man's house as fact. There is no more supporting evidence for your assumption than there is for my proposition that Jesus may have been invited earlier. The passage in Mark 14 records Jesus as stating..."the teacher asks where is my room...? Even if you can not accept the possibility that Jesus was invited earlier, at best you must admit that the passages don't clean the matter up, but you can not assume the worst because of your dislike of Jesus which is the only thing that could bring you to the point where you contend that Jesus definitely invited himself beyond a shadow of doubt. Your response was specious at best.

Editor's Response to Letter #86 (Part a)

GL. We disagree on several points. First, silverware has been used for centuries. The Encyclopedia International in front of me says, "Greece, Byzantium, Rome and other countries of the ancient world produced admirable silverware." Your comment that it was "most likely not present" exposes poor homework. You're guessing! Moreover, don't you think your comment is rather immature, if not petty? I could have used any number of items. Secondly, I don't know what version you are using, GL, but the KJV says, "The Master saith, Where is the guestchamber" (Mark 14:14). The possessive pronoun "my" isn't even present. Thirdly, let's return to the original problem. In Matt. 26:18 Jesus said he would keep the passover at a man's

home and BE's commentary noted this displayed rude manners. You stated Jesus could have received an off-camera invitation. As I mentioned earlier, if you are going to make behind-the-scenes assumptions, then so am I. If we stay strictly with the Bible, however, you will have little to present in Jesus' behalf. True, the passages "don't clear the matter up," but they are decidedly in my favor. If they aren't, why did you create something outside the Bible for support? You accuse me of assuming the worse because of my dislike of Jesus when actually you are assuming the best because of your devotion to Jesus. Unlike you, who formulated an extra-biblical event, I remained within the text. I could write an entire library if extra-biblical assumptions were allowed.

Letter #86 Continues (Part b)

(In part 3 of the Dec. 1984 commentary BE asked: If loving thy neighbor as thyself was an OT commandment, how could it be a new commandment as Jesus claimed. GL said it was a new commandment because it modified the old. BE replied that this violated Deut. 12:32, Prov. 30:6, and Rev. 22:18-19 which prohibit any modification of the Old Law--Ed.) In response to the Editor's response to my letter #72 (part c), Rev. 22:18-19 ("For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book. If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away..." was your strongest argument. But you took the verses out of context. If you examine the verses you will see that warning refers to those who..."add unto these things"; and to those who "shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy. This warning covers those who tamper with the book of Revelation only.

Editor's Response to Letter #86 (Part b)

Interestingly enough, GL, you accused me of taking Rev. 22:18-19 out-of-context when that is the criticism used by other biblicists when people have not applied Rev. 22:18-19 to the entire Bible. You contend the verse applies only to the Book of Revelation whereas apologists whom I have contacted apply it to the entire Bible. You need to meet with your Christian brothers and sisters and agree on a common policy. I think you are in a class by yourself. On this point I'd have to ask the same question many others would pose. Upon what basis do you assume that Rev. 22:18-19 does not apply to the entire Bible? Many groups who have given extra-biblical writings, such as the Book of Mormon and Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures, authority commensurate with that of the Bible, could probably use you as a spokesman. They are tired of hearing Rev. 22:18-19 applied to the entire Bible. Secondly, you ignored Deut. 12:32 ("What things soever I command you, observe to do it: thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it") and Prov. 30:6 ("Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee"). Surely you aren't going to contend that they also apply only to the book in which they appear. If so, then for all practical purposes you have exposed the entire Bible to any group who seeks to modify the text with a more up-to-date revelation. In effect, the canon is not closed. Books and other writings can still be added. In trying to save Jesus, you have severely, if not mortally, wounded the Bible.

Letter #86 Concludes (Part c)

(In letter #70--Part d--GL described ET's concept of evolution as simplistic and ET defended his position in Letter #74--Ed.) In response to letter #74 and ET's response to my letter I must apologize ET. I assumed that you were speaking of the theory of Evolution when you stated that Evolution is fact. Part of the misunderstanding was due to your charge against "Bible thumpers." I know of no "Bible thumpers" who would disagree with you that evolution (change) is constantly at work. What we do reject as fact is the theory that all life on earth has come from a single cell.

Letter #87 from IF of Vacaville, California

(We sent a small note to IF explaining why BE doesn't emphasize the non-existence of Jesus--Ed.) I received your card explaining why you don't believe the non-existence of Jesus belongs in BE. I differ on that score. It is an errancy to pray and carry on by the hundreds of millions to a personage that never existed. This would be exposing the wealthy electronic evangelists plus the evangelist-in-chief in the White House....

Editor's Response to Letter #87

Dear IF. BE does not oppose discussing the non-existence of Jesus. That's no problem. The question is: What are you going to use for evidence and how will it affect others. An extra-biblical topic obligates one to go outside the Book for data to use against the Bible, an approach which has little effect on true believers. Using one part of the Book against another is more effective. It's one thing for outside data to refute something within the text; it's quite another for data within to do so. Biblicists believe in no higher authority than the Bible, so external information brought to the Book, regardless of source, will be discounted. Your approach will disprove the accuracy of the Bible from an intellectually objective perspective, but will it persuade others to alter their views. You'll win the argument; but will you win people. It's hard enough doing it BE's way. However, because of the topic's acceptance, it will be discussed eventually.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #88 from RPK of Ruston, Louisiana

Dennis. For the record, I do not believe the value of your work can be overestimated. I truly believe it may have historical significance and early editions of BE will become serious collectors' items. I wish my circumstances could allow me to take a more active roll in your work. Some time ago I began a correspondence with the Jimmy Swaggart people... I want to challenge them to name one verse to which I cannot find a contradiction or at least an inconsistency. Do you think I am on firm ground?...If I publicly challenge through "Letters to the Editor" some of the Bible quoting letters to the newspapers, are you available (on a non-professional basis) as a resource?

Editor's Response to Letter #88

Dear RPK. Your compliments are only too kind. With respect to finding a contradiction or inconsistency to every verse in the Bible, this could present a problem since many statements say little of substance. For instance, I just opened my KJV to John 7:53 which says, "And every man went unto his own house." I've never been known for defending the Bible but I'd be hardpressed to find a contradiction to a statement as innocuous as that. Indeed, many verses are nothing more than questions or exclamations. Rest assured that the amount of information in our favor far exceeds any need to play Russian roulette with verses. Anytime you wish to use us a resource feel free to do so.

Letter #89 from NLS of Richmond, Indiana

Dennis. Although I'm certainly not qualified to debate with anyone over biblical verses, I sure can loan them BE and let them read for themselves.

Editor's Response to Letter #89

Dear NLS. Sounds like an excellent idea! You're doing what you can with what you have and that's all anyone can ask.

COMMENTARY

False Teachings-Many biblical teachings exercise an influence on believers not unlike that of a tranquilizer on the unsettled. Euphoria is generated at the expense of reality. It would be nice if many of the following statements were true; but, unfortunately, denying conditions is no way to cope with vicissitudes: (a) "(God-Ed.) executes justice for the oppressed (and-Ed.) gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free. The Lord opens the eyes of the blind, the Lord raises up those who are bowed down; The Lord loves the righteous; The Lord protects the strangers; He supports the fatherless and the widow, But he thwarts the way of the wicked" (Psalm 146:7-9) and "He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds" (Psalm 147:3) and "The Lord lifts up the downtrodden, he casts the wicked to the ground" (Psalm 147:6) and "O Lord, who is like thee, thou who deliverest the weak from him who is too strong for him, the weak and needy from him who despoils him?" (Psalm 35:10) and "call upon me (God-Ed.) in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee..." (Psalm 50:15). The number of oppressed, starving, blind, crippled, and fatherless people who could testify to the inaccuracy of these comments is almost limitless. Millions of sufferers have never experienced relief. (b) Equally soothing but no less erroneous are statements to the effect that the world's wicked will receive their just deserts. "Does not calamity befall the unrighteous, and disaster the workers of iniquity?" (Job 31:3 RSV) and "The Lord preserveth all them that love him: but all the wicked will he destroy" (Psalm 145:20) and "The Lord is righteous: he hath cut asunder the cords of the wicked" (Psalm 129:4) and "The violence of the wicked will sweep them away because they refuse to do what is just" (Prov. 21:7 RSV) and "it will not be well with the wicked, neither will he prolong his days like a shadow, because he does not fear before God" (Eccle. 8:13 RSV) and "There is no peace saith the Lord, unto the wicked" (Isa. 48:22). Who would not desire a world in which the worst received their due; but justice is not written on the wind, only in the acts of men. We are told "the fear of the Lord prolongs life, but the years of the wicked will be short" (Prov. 10:22) and "bloodthirsty, deceitful men will not live out half their days" (Psalm 55:23 NIV). Unfortunately, all too often the wicked seem to live forever. We are told that "if the wicked's children be multiplied, it is for the sword: and his offspring shall not be satisfied with bread" (Job 27:14). Yet, in many cases they are the last to see combat and the first to be fed. The just are deceptively told that "though the wicked heap up silver as the dust, and prepare raiment as the clay; he may prepare it, but the just shall put it on, and the innocent shall divide the silver" (Job 27:16-17). If only this were true! And we are told "the face of the Lord is against evildoers, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth" (Psalm 34:16), when Hitler and Al Capone will be remembered long after most of us have come and gone. (c) In some verses the righteous are assured aid will be forthcoming. "When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted, and saves the crushed in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all. He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken" (Psalm 34:17-20 RSV) and "Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall" (Psalm 55:22 NIV) and "...Blessed is the man who fears the Lord, who greatly delights in his commandments: His descendants will be mighty in the land; the generation of the upright will be blessed" (Psalm 112:1-2 RSV) and "The fear of the Lord leads to life; and he who has it rests satisfied; he will not be visited by harm" (Prov. 19:23 RSV) and "...we receive from him whatever we ask, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him" (1 John 3:22). In truth, anyone reasonably well acquainted with the world situation knows better. Cemeteries are filled with righteous people who lived in hope to the bitter end. (d) In many instances punishment of the wicked is directly linked to justice for the righteous: "The Lord does not let the righteous go

hungry, but he thwarts the craving of the wicked" (Prov. 10:3 RSV) and "The righteous will never be uprooted, but the wicked will not remain in the land" (Prov. 10:30 NIV) and "He who is steadfast in righteous will live, but he who pursues evil will die" (Prov. 11:19 RSV) and "If the righteous is required on earth, how much more the wicked and sinner!" (Prov. 11:31 RSV) and "O fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him have not want! The young lions suffer want and hunger; but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing" (Psalm 34:9-10 RSV) and "Trust in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart. Commit your way to the Lord, Trust also in Him, and He will do it" (Psalm 37:3-5 NASB). Again, one need only observe life to see that precisely the opposite is often the case. The righteous starve, are uprooted, die early, receive no relief on earth, and are plagued with ills; while the wicked often satisfy their cravings, live long, receive little punishment, and have fewer troubles than most. The Bible, itself, provides a good example. "And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an unright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?...So went Satan forthi from the presence of the Lord and smote Job with more boils from the the side of his foot unto his crown" (Job 2:37). No ill befalls the righteous and they are requited on earth? Job would probably consider this rather humorous. (e) "If they (kings-Ed.) hear and serve Him, They shall end their days in prosperity, and their years in pleasures, But if they do not hear, they shall perish by the sword, and they shall die without knowledge" (Job 36:11-12 NASB) and "A ruler who lacks understanding is a cruel oppressor, but he who hates unjust gain will prolong his days" (Prov. 28:16 RSV). There are far too many exceptions to these maxims to give them credence. Indeed, many of the best rulers have had the shortest, most tragic, lives. (f) "and these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name they shall cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" (Mark 16:17-18). Many believers have followed these precepts to the detriment of themselves and others. (g) "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray...Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him anointing him with oil...and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up..." (James 5:13-15). On page 6 of the Nov. 1983 issue I stated the following: "The national news media is currently reporting a case in which a fundamentalist minister will not allow his daughter to receive medical treatment for her cancerous condition because of his interpretation of the Bible, (i.e., James 5:13-15)...One need only read James to see scripture supports his position...Depending on the capabilities of medical personnel, a child could very well die because someone got hold of a Bible...My heart goes out to the child, although I fear the worse." As you might have guessed, Pamela Hamilton died recently. (h) "Blessed is he who considers the poor! The Lord delivers him in the day of trouble; the Lord protects him and keeps him alive.... The Lord sustains him on his sickbed; in his illness thou healest all his infirmities" (Psalm 41:1-3). This isn't any more accurate than that promised the righteous. It should be; but it isn't. (i) "He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favor from the Lord" (Psalm 18:22 RSV) and "She (a good wife-Ed.) does him good and not harm, all the days of her life" (Prov. 31:12 RSV). It's safe to say that millions of men could testify to the inaccuracy of these comments. (j) "But the hypocrites in heart heap up wrath; they cry not when he bindeth them. They die in youth, and their life is among the unclean" (Job 36:13-14). We can all think of hypocrites who did not die young. In fact, the longevity of some borders on the obscene. (k) "Such are the ways of all who get gain by violence; it takes away the life of its possessors" (Prov. 1:19). That somehow destiny is going to punish wrong-doers is a forlorn hope of biblicists. They just can't believe fate is not going to solve their problems, that they have to create their own remedies. (l) "My son, keep your father's commandment and forsake not your mother's teaching. Bind them upon your heart always; tie them about your neck. When you walk, they will lead you; when you lie down, they will watch over you..." (Prov. 6:20-22 RSV.) Although this should be correct, it isn't. The advice many fathers and mothers give their progeny is anything but proper. People often say that parents should "straighten out" their children when, in fact, millions can't even straighten out their own lives. Broken homes, drug and

alcohol addiction, violence, profanity, abuse, deprivation, and a host of other parental involvements show that vast numbers are unqualified to guide their offspring. Telling children to always follow their parents is no way to proceed. (m) "The FOOL hath said in his heart, There is no God, Corrupt are they, and have done abominable iniquity: there is none that doeth good" (Psalm 53:1). Believers are enthralled with this verse and although the existence of God can be debated, the performance of good works by many atheists is not subject to rational dispute. (n) "What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; and there is nothing new under the sun" (Eccle. 1:9) and "That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already has been..." (Eccle. 3:15 RSV). If there is nothing new under the sun, I'd be interested in knowing when someone walked on the moon prior to 1969 or climbed Mt. Everest prior to 1953. Moreover, how does one reconcile this with "For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth" (Isa. 65:17) and "...the Lord hath created a new thing in the earth, A woman shall compass a man" (Jer. 31:22)? (o) "A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who utters lies will perish" (Prov. 19:9 RSV) or "not escape" (Prov. 19:5 RSV). Exceptions to this are far too common for it to be taken seriously. (p) "Righteous lips are the delight of a king, and he loves him who speaks what is right" (Prov. 16:13 RSV). Thousands of subjects have been killed by their kings and rulers for stating what is right. (q) "Even in your thought, do not curse the king, nor in your bedchamber curse the rich; for a bird of the air will carry your voice..." (Eccle. 10:20 RSV). For the sake of us all; it's good that George Washington ignored this belief. - "...for there is nothing good for a man under the sun except to eat and to drink and to be merry..." (Eccle. 8:15 NASB) and "Bread is made for laughter, and wine gladdens life, and money answers everything (Eccle. 10:19 RSV). I'm not sure the playboy crowd would go that far. (s) "Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you beat him with a rod, he will not die. If you beat him with a rod, you will save his life from Sheol" (Prov. 23:13-14). "If you beat him with a rod he will not die." I should hope not! This philosophy is deplorable and opposed by most authorities in the field. Prov. 26:3 ("A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the back of fools"), Prov. 29:19 ("By mere words a servant is not disciplined, for though he understands, he will not give heed"), and Eccle. 7:3-4 RSV ("Sorrow is better than laughter, for by madness of countenance the heart is made glad. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth") belong in the same category. (t) "For bodily exercise profiteth little..." (1 Tim. 4:8). Nearly every sports and exercise program in the Nation testifies to the inaccuracy of this comment. (u) "Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to the men of skill" (Eccle. 9:11 RSV). This belongs among verses that are so inaccurate they aren't worthy of serious consideration. (v) "Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher, all is vanity" (Eccle. 12:8) and "Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities: All is vanity" (Eccle. 1:2). According to Webster's Dictionary "vanity" means futile, worthless, or idle. If so, then why do believers care about anything? They don't adhere to the logical outcome of their own teachings. (w) "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil" (Jer. 13:23 NIV) and "What is crooked cannot be made straight..." (Eccle. 1:15) and "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it" (Prov. 22:6 RSV). If these verses are true, one might just as well abolish all behavior modification programs for adults. (x) And lastly, "A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death, than the day of birth" (Eccle. 7:1 RSV). The day we die is better than the day we are born? I don't accept that for a moment and doubt many biblicists do either.

REVIEWS

On page 83 in *So the Bible is Full of Contradictions* Carl Johnson sought to reconcile John 14:27 ("Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you...") with Matt. 10:34 ("Think not that I come to send peace: I come not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father..."). He states that, "Jesus did come to bring peace to those who trust Him and

obey Him. `Therefore being justified and obey Him, the gospel message will cause hostility and strife and will set man at variance who trust and obey Him, which he seeks to prove by quoting Rom. 5:1. The latter says those And where is the evidence that Matt. 10:34 only applies to those who do not trust and obey Him? It would be nice from Johnson's perspective if such were the case; but it isn't. He concludes with, "The first reference speaks of the peace Jesus gives to His own and the second reference speaks of the persecution His followers may expect." Yet, nothing whatever is said about persecution, nor is there any reason to limit the second verse to followers only.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #90 from VT of Huron, California (Part a)

(In part 2 of the Dec. 84' commentary BE quoted Luke 12:4 ("Be not afraid of them that kill the body and after that have no more that they can do") and followed with several examples of Jesus hiding, escaping, or fleeing-Ed.) If one stops at Luke 12:4 they will not get the true meaning. The exegesis is not complete. Luke 12:5 says, "But I will make it clear to you (BAS) whom ye shall fear (KJV) the only one you need fear (PHI). Fear him, which after he hath killed hath power (the power) to cast into hell (KJV)....

Editor's Response to Letter #90 (Part a)

You have added nothing to the resolution of the problem, VT, unless you are claiming the one who has power to cast into hell is the Jews and Pharisees in opposition to Jesus. Jesus said fear "him," i.e. Satan, not fear "them." Are you saying the Jews and Pharisees had power to cast others into hell? Only if this were true could Jesus have been consistent when he escaped, fled, and hid from them.

Letter #90 Continues (Part b)

(In part 3 of the Dec. 84' commentary BE noted that Jesus said we should keep the OT commandments of loving thy neighbor as thyself and, yet, later said he was giving a new commandment. "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another, as I have loved you, that ye also love one another" (John 13:34). The question was then asked that if loving thy neighbor as thyself was an OT commandment, how could it be a new commandment-Ed.). ...Jesus made it "New" by giving to it a new standard, and a new motive; "Love one another; even as I have loved you." His love was to be shown in his death for others; such self-sacrificing love shown by his followers would be the witness to the world of true discipleship. See Charles Erdmans Expositon of the Gospel of John....

Editor's Response to Letter #90 (Part b)

You are rationalizing, VT. You mean the new love differs from the old in that we must not only be willing to, but actually, die for others? If giving one's life is the new standard, then your continued existence shows you have chosen to ignore it.

Letter #90 Continues (Part c)

(In part 7 of the Dec. 84' commentary BE asked how Luke 16:9 ("Make yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness") could be reconciled with Luke 16:13 ("ye cannot serve God and mammon-Ed.). I believe the Wycliffe Commentary is of great value here! The Lord implied that earthly property can be used to help others, whose gratitude will ensure a welcome in eternity.

Luke 16:11 says, "If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon who will commit to your trust the true riches?" The use of material wealth is a test of character. Those who cannot use it wisely do not deserve to have spiritual responsibilities entrusted to them.... I believe this is about the final word here. What else need we say?

Editor's Response to Letter #90 (Part c)

A great deal, VT, because the commentary you quote is certainly not the final word. First, by what rationale do you conclude that the Lord implied that earthly property can be used to help others, whose gratitude....? What part of the statement justifies your assumption? You even admit it isn't stated, only implied. I see nothing in the verse or context regarding helping others who gratitude will ensure a welcome in eternity. Second, as I stated in the March issue, "You also face the unenviable task of explaining how Jesus can be our moral beacon while teaching people to befriend unrighteousness." Be wary of apologetic commentaries. Most of the standard works are masterpieces of rationalization. A lot of reasonably intelligent people have spent a great amount of time, energy, and money making the irrational seem feasible. After all, if you can convince people that men rose from the dead, sticks turned into serpents, donkeys talked, and the earth stood still, you can make anything, no matter how incredible, seem true. With a reasonable degree of ingenuity and creativity, the sky's the limit.

Letter #90 Continues (Part d)

(In part 8 of the Dec. 84' commentary BE noted that Jesus said men are better than sheep, yet repeatedly called his followers sheep-Ed.). Sheep is a Jewish metaphor as yoke is a Jewish metaphor. There are many word pictures in the Bible. Originally all language was purely pictographic. What else need be said?

Editor's Response to Letter #90 (Part d)

Why do you keep asking what else need be said, VT, especially in light of the fact that you have evaded the problem. Granted it's a metaphor. Obviously Jesus didn't mean his followers were actually four-legged, furry creatures. The fact is that to equate men with sheep is an invidious and highly demeaning comparison, especially in light of traits commonly attributed to sheep. As a follower of Jesus you should be as incensed as I would be if the president referred to citizens as sheep.

Letter #90 Concludes (Part e)

(In part 9 of the Dec. 84' commentary BE noted that Jesus said that if I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true (John 5:31) and later said in John 8:14 that if he bore witness it would be true-Ed.). ...In the Jewish, Greek, and Roman law the testimony of a witness is not received in his own case.... (In John 5:31--Ed.) Jesus yields to the rabbinical demands for proof outside of himself....

Editor's Response to Letter #90 (Part e)

Jesus said his witness was not true, VT. He didn't say it was merely inadmissible. The distinction is crucial. If Jesus had said his testimony was inadmissible because Roman law required at least two witnesses, there would have been no problem. But he went further and said it was not true. If what you say is true, then he made such a poor choice of words that that, in itself, would bring into question his credentials.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #91 from MP of Tulsa, Oklahoma (Extracts from several letters)

Dear Dennis. (a) The other day I was arguing about the Flood with a student from Oral Roberts University. He conceded that the Flood may not have been worldwide, but just covered the part of the world they knew about, Mesopotamia and the surrounding region. I countered by saying that if those ancient people were mistaken about and ignorant of the nature of our planet, perhaps later people in the same cultural tradition (Jesus' Jewish contemporaries) were greatly mistaken about the nature of Jesus. If the Bible errs about the Flood, it could err about everything else. (b) I have a problem to pass along. In 1 Kings 3:12 RSV God promised to Solomon, "Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you." Does this make Solomon smarter than Jesus? - Also consider Paul's assertion that God "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4) in light of 2 Thess. 2:11-12 ("God sends upon them a strong delusion, to make them believe what is false, so that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness." (d) Biblicists maintain that we have all inherited a sinful nature from Adam, who rebelled against God and became corrupt. But we are all descended from Adam through Noah, whom the Bible describes as being "perfect" and "righteous." By the same logic, shouldn't we also have inherited Noah's perfection? (e) Hab. 1:13 says about God "Thou are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity. "Yet, according to Job 1 & 2, Satan-the very source of evil-had little trouble in visiting God. If God cannot "behold evil," why does he permit Satan to come to him? (f) I have found that when I present some really objectionable passage from the OT, a typical response is, "But that's part of the Old Law, and we aren't bound by that any more." You mean God's laws become invalid when they're old? (You might mention that the Ten Commandments are also part of the Old Law-Ed.) (g) Lastly, if the Garden of Eden was perfect before the Fall, why did it need to be tended (Gen. 2:15)?

Letter #92 from DW of South Pasadena, California

Dear Dennis. I just got around to reading your 26th issue.... Your explanation of why you focus on the Bible itself was very well written and has my strong agreement. Suggesting that Jesus could have stolen the silverware as he left was a priceless response, a very humorous counterpoint. You are right that when the opposition makes unwarranted assumptions, you should point that out, and respond on that level. If the opposition selects an outrageous position out in left field, it gives you justification for setting up on the right field foul line (especially if the audience sees you don't really plan to stay there). The more sensible readers will eventually see where a legitimate center of field is.... Good tactics.

Letter #93 from JS of Romeo, Michigan

Dear Dennis...In the sample issue I received you listed 2 Kings 2:11 (Elijah went to heaven in a whirlwind) as contradicting Heb. 9:27 (It is appointed unto all men to die once). Here, I would have used John 3:13 (No man has ever gone into heaven-a quote from Jesus Christ) instead of Heb.9:27.

Letter #94 from AW of Sacramento, California

Hello Dennis. I heard your interview over KGNR radio.... Your effort is a timely one for many viewpoints have been set forth as being the unerring words of God. There is a need for objectivity.... If your newsletter will assist in enabling people to keep an open mind then it serves a very useful function. It appears that Jesus of Nazareth knew that all that had been attributed to

Moses was not so, for on more than one occasion when referring to statements which appeared to the books attributed to Moses he said, "you have heard it was said" and again rather than attributing such statements to God he would say, "Moses said..." And in the letter to the seven churches of the revelation Jesus urged the reader to "listen to what the Spirit says to the churches" rather than urging them to read the Bible.... Also you will recall that Jesus mentioned that he would send upon his followers "the Spirit of truth" which would guide into all truth. John 14:17, 15:26, 16:13. He would likely not have spoken of doing this if all truth could have been obtained from solely reading the pages of the Bible.

Editor's Response to Letter #94

The problem I have with criticisms such as these, AW, is that although they are logical and reasonable inferences, they don't necessarily have to be true. Apparently you seem to realize as much judging from such comments as: "It appears that Jesus of Nazareth knew" and "He would likely not have spoken." Remember, biblicists give no quarter and generally expect none. They are going to challenge you on every point. If you have ever debated them, you know such encounters have all the earmarks of war. Their views and ours are light-years apart and each looks upon the other as error personified.

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COMMENTARY

Isaiah 52-53--For over 15 centuries Christians have analyzed the OT with meticulous care extracting every verse that could possibly be interpreted as a messianic reference to Jesus of Nazareth. They have injected unintended meaning into scores of verses and, in so doing, distorted sizeable portions of Scripture. As Thomas Paine aptly stated, "...I have examined all the passages in the NT, quoted from the Old, and so-called prophecies concerning Jesus Christ, and I find no such thing as a prophecy of any such person, and I deny there are any... I have given chapter and verse for everything I have said, and have not gone out of the books of the Old and New Testament for evidence that the passages are not prophecies of the person called Jesus Christ" (The Life and Works of Paine, Vol. 9, p. 206) and "The writers of the gospels state some trifling case of the person they call Jesus Christ, and then cut out a sentence from some passage of the OT and call it a prophecy of that case. But when the words thus cut out are restored to the places they are taken from, and read with the words before and after them, they give the lie to the NT" (Ibid. Vol. 9, p. 269). Among those sections of exceptional importance is Isa. 52-53. One would be hard-pressed to find an OT messianic prophecy that carries more weight with biblicists. Indeed, if it can't endure critical analysis what prophecy could. Isa. 52:13 to 53:12 is replete with verses allegedly attributable to Jesus; yet, in every instance, one can see they are inapplicable. Evidence tends to prove the servant being discussed is Israel or the Jews. In any event, it certainly isn't Jesus as the following show: (1) "Behold, my servant shall prosper (Isa. 52:13 RSV). When did Jesus prosper? How can a condition of prosperity or success be predicated of the Godhead? (2) "He shall be exalted and extolled, and be very high" (52:13). This was not fulfilled in Jesus either. His humanity was condemned to death in an inglorious manner. This verse implies he was not high and exalted before, which would be contrary to his divinity. It also contradicts Isa. 53:3 ("He is despised and rejected of men") and Isa. 57:15 which says God (Jesus) is high and exalted continually. Exaltation is not a condition he will attain. (3) "...his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men" (52:14). If Jesus was God, how could his features have suffered disfigurement and when was his visage marred more than that of all others? This verse also contradicts the alleged description of Jesus

given in Psalm 45:2 ("Thou are fairer than the children of men"). (4) "...the kings shall shut their mouths because of him" (52:15 RSV). What king ceased to speak because of Jesus? (5) "For he shall grow up" (53:2). This should have been translated, "he grew up," as is done in the RSV, which would show someone living before Isaiah was under discussion. (6) "...he had no form or comeliness that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him" (53:2). (a) Like 52:14 (See #3 above), this contradicts the description of Jesus in Psalm 45:2 and Jer. 11:16. (b) If this describes Jesus' condition at death, there is nothing singular about it, because it applies to all dead people. (7) "He is despised and rejected of men" (53:3). (a) According to 52:13, he was to be "exalted and extolled, and be very high." (b) How many people really hated Jesus as opposed to the number of tribes who hated the Jews? (8) "...a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief..." (53:3). (a) Jewish scholars claim "grief" as used here only refers to bodily ailment in Scripture. Jesus had no bodily ailment. Nowhere in the NT does it say Jesus had so much as a headache prior to the cross, nor is his death ever referred to as a sickness. (b) The Jews had no conception of a suffering Messiah. They thought of him as a king or ruler over willing subjects and subduing his enemies. (9) "...we hid as it were our faces from him" (53:3). The Jews did not hide their faces from him but condemned him many times and the Gentiles accepted him. (10) "his visage was so marred" (52:14) and "we hid," "he was despised," "we esteemed" (53:3) and "he hath borne," "smitten of God and afflicted" (53:4) and "he was wounded," "he was bruised" (53:5) and "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted" (53:6) and "He was taken and cut off" (53:8) and "he made his grave" and "he had done no violence" (53:9). All these past tense verbs show that Isaiah is referring to an earlier individual, not someone living 700 years in the future. (11) "yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted" (53:4). Jesus was smitten by men not God. Would God smite and afflict his son, Christ, especially when the two are supposedly identical? (12) "Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities" (53:4-5). (a) This refers to Israel. Prophets often designated humiliations and adversities as sicknesses and wounds. Isa. 1:5-6, Jer. 10:19, 30:17-18, 33:6-8, Lam. 2:13, and Hosea 6:1 all describe the Captivity as attended with calamities described as bruises and wounds. (b) Contrary to Matt. 8:16-17 ("...they brought unto Jesus many that were possessed with devils: and he cast out the spirits with his word, and healed all that were sick: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaias, the prophet, saying, Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses") which claims to fulfill this prophecy, 53:4-5 says nothing about casting out devils or curing sicknesses as does Matt. 8:16-17. (13) "Behold my servant shall deal prudently" (52:13). (a) There is no reason to believe that the servant referred to is Jesus. "Servant" refers to anyone who works hard for God. It is used in reference to Moses (Num. 12:7, Job 1:8), all the prophets (Amos 3:7), and all of Israel (Lev. 25:42). The servant is expressly identified with Jacob or Israel in Isa. 41:8-9, 42:19, 44:1-2, and 49:3. Judging from the context, it refers to the Jews or Jacob, God's people, not Jesus. (b) The phrases applied to Jehovah in connection with the servant ("he that formed thee" and "I have redeemed thee") suit Israel alone, not Jesus. Jehovah is often called Israel's Redeemer. (c) How could Jesus (God) be God's servant? Would it make sense to call Christ God's servant, or would a prophet call him a servant? How could Jesus (God) be termed the servant of anybody? It would be an indignity to apply "servant" to the godhead. (d) Although debatable, Jewish scholars seem to feel that "deal prudently" actually means "to acquire knowledge;" yet, how could an all-knowing God acquire knowledge as this would imply he previously lacked wisdom. (14) "he was wounded for our transgressions" (53:5). According to Christian theology, Jesus was not so much bruised or wounded for man's transgressions as he was killed. (15) "He was oppressed,...yet he opened not his mouth:...so he openeth not his mouth" (53:7). According to John 18:21-23 ("Why askest thou me? ask them which heard me, what I have said unto them: behold, they know what I said. And when he had thus spoken, one of the officers which stood by struck Jesus with the palm of his hand, saying, Answerest thou the high priest so? Jesus answered him, If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil: but if well, why smitest thou me?"), John 18:33-37 ("Then

Pilate...said to Jesus, Art thou King of the Jews? Jesus answered him, Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me?...Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am king"), and Matt. 27:46 ("Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying,...my God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"), Jesus not only opened his mouth when oppressed but was struck in the process. He even cried for help. (16) "...for he was cut off out of the land of the living" (53:8) contradicts Psalm 116:9 which says, "I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living." (17) "for the transgressions of my people was he stricken" (53:8). Yet, Jesus was supposedly stricken for all people, not just my people. (18) "And he made his grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death" (53:9). (a) When was Jesus buried with anyone? (b) When was Jesus with the rich in his death or buried with the rich? (c) This description contradicts the glorious burial predicted in Isaiah 11:10 ("And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse,...and his rest shall be glorious"). (d) Actually, in so far as Jesus is concerned, the prophecy was reversed. Jesus made his grave with the rich by being buried in the sepulchre of the rich Joseph of Arimathoea (Matt. 27:57), and was with the wicked, crucified thieves (not rich people) in his death. (19) "because he had done no violence" (53:9). John 2:15 ("And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables") and Mark 11:15 clearly prove the inapplicability of this verse to Jesus. (20) "...neither was any deceit in his mouth" (53:9). Anyone who seriously believes this refers to Jesus should read the commentaries in issues 24, 25, 26, and 27. (21) "Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him" (53:10). (a) Would God be pleased to bruise Christ, his only begotten son and equal or to put him to grief? (b) Applying this verse to Jesus would seem to prove that he did not come of his own accord to meet death. The pleasure was not in him but in the Creator. (c) If Jesus wished to save the wicked from perdition, then he assumed responsibility for his sufferings, and it is wrong to argue that God willed it. (d) And this verse is clearly in opposition to the description of God given in Lam. 3:33 ("For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men"). (22) "...when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin" (53:10). But wasn't the body of Jesus offered as a sacrifice, not his soul? (23) "he shall see his seed" (53:10). (a) Throughout the OT "seed" always meant children or physical descendants. Yet, Jesus had no children. (b) If "seed" refers to Jesus' disciples then the prophet should have written "sons" because "seed" refers to those produced by carnal acts. (24) "...he shall prolong his days" (53:10). (a) The verse means he shall live long; whereas, Jesus did not live to an old age. He died when he was approximately 33 years old. (b) Actually Psalm 55:23 is much more applicable. "But thou O God, shalt bring them down into the pit of destruction: bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days." Jesus did not live out half his days. (c) It's difficult to see how this could be applied to a divine being since the idea of longevity is inappropriate to an eternal Deity. (25) "And the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand" (53:10). Jesus has come and gone yet the world that God desires has never materialized. (26) "He shall see the travail of his soul" (53:11). I thought only the flesh of Jesus suffered, not his soul or divinity. (27) "Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great" (53:12). (a) If Jesus is not great, then who are the great? (b) When did Jesus ever divide a portion with the great? (c) Who could divide him his portion, since he is God? Who is the I? (28) "...and he shall divide the spoil with the strong" (53:12). (a) Jesus divides spoils? Would a perfectly good being be dividing spoils? Nowhere do we read that he plundered or divided spoils with the strong. (b) This verse implies Jesus was not one of the strong which would contradict John 17:2 ("As thou hast given him power over all flesh"). (29) "...he poured out his soul to death" (53:12). (a) I thought only the flesh of Jesus underwent death. (b) Jesus did not die willingly for his creatures. He feared and prayed as is shown by Matt. 26:37-39 ("And he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be sorrowful and very heavy. Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death:...and he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me..." and Matt. 27:46 ("My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"). (30) "This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord" (54:17). Here servants is plural, showing that more than one servant is referred to in Isaiah 53. (31) And lastly, immediately before Isaiah 52:13-53:12 Isaiah is predicting the gathering of

the exiles and just after Isa. 54:1 he is talking of the glorious promises descriptive of the same events. Therefore, logically, all inbetween is speaking of the same thing. The conclusion to be drawn from all the above is that if Isa. 52-53 is the strongest reference to Jesus in the OT, then the case for messianic prophecy is weak indeed.

REVIEWS

In Evidence that Demands a Verdict apologist Josh McDowell cited many OT messianic prophecies and showed how they were allegedly fulfilled in Jesus. In nearly every instance, his scholarship exemplifies what Thomas Paine alluded to earlier. Several examples are noteworthy:

- (1) On page 152 McDowell cites Matt. 21:11 ("and the multitudes were saying, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee") as a fulfillment of Deut. 18:18 ("I will raise up a prophet from among their countrymen like you, and I will put my words in his mouth and he shall speak to them all that I command him"). Several problems are created when Matt. 21:11 is viewed as a fulfillment of Deut. 18:18. (a) The latter could be applied to any one of hundreds of prophets. Why assume it's Jesus" (b) If God and Jesus are identical, why would God need to put words into Jesus' mouth or command him to do anything? In effect, he would be doing it himself. (c) McDowell neglected to mention Deut. 18:15 which refers to the same individual: ("The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a prophet from the midst of these of thy brethren like unto me, unto him ye shall hearken"). God said the Prophet will be "like unto me" whereas Jesus is supposed to be God, not like God. (d) How could "unto him ye shall hearken" apply to Jesus. The Jews did not follow him; they killed him. (2) On page 147 McDowell cited Luke 3:23, 34 ("Jesus...the son of Jacob...") as a fulfillment of Numbers 24:17 ("...there shall come a Star out of Jacob, and a sceptre shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy the children of Sheth"). How one could apply this to Jesus is difficult to imagine. (a) Jesus had no sceptre except a mock one, nor could he be considered the sceptre. (b) He did not smite the corners of Moab or destroy the children of Sheth. (c) When the Messiah comes all the Gentile nations are to fall, not just Moab and Sheth. (d) If this refers to Jesus why are the Moabites and those of Sheth singled out as a people to be conquered by him? (e) Two verses later it states, "Out of Jacob shall come he that shall have dominion, and shall destroy him that remaineth of the city" (Num. 24:19). Yet, Jesus never had dominion and never destroyed "him" or those who remained in the city. (3) On page 150 McDowell cites Matt. 2:1, 11 ("Magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem...and they fell down and worshipped Him; and opening their treasures they presented to Him gifts...") as a fulfillment of Psalm 72:10 ("Let the kings of Tarshish and of the islands bring presents; The kings of Sheba and Seba offer gifts"). Yet none of this is applicable to Jesus. (a) Where does it say the Magi were kings of Tarshish, Sheba, or Seba. Luke 2 specifically states they were shepherds abiding in the fields. (b) How could they have visited Jesus in Jerusalem when he was in Bethlehem. Imagine kings coming to visit an obscure babe in a manger! (c) What islands are east of Jerusalem? (d) McDowell omitted the next verse ("Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him") which never occurred either. (4) On page 147 McDowell cites Luke 3:23-34 ("Jesus,...the son of Isaac") as a fulfillment of Gen. 21:12 ("But God said to Abraham...through Isaac your descendants shall be named"). He conveniently ignores the fact that "descendants" is plural, not singular, and could apply to any one of a hundred people. Why assume this is a specific reference to Jesus just because he is a descendant of Isaac. (5) And on page 154 McDowell cites Matt. 27:37 ("And they put up above His head the charge against Him which read, "This is Jesus the King of the Jews") as a fulfillment of Psalm 2:6 ("but as for me, I have installed My King upon Zion, my holy mountain"). How these two are related is perplexing, indeed. Putting a king upon Zion hardly equals putting up a sign, especially when Jesus is not becoming a king but a corpse and the sign is intended for ridicule only. Moreover, "have installed" could not be referring to a future individual because it's a past tense verb.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #95 from Ken Bonnell of Los Angeles, California

(Ken sent BE a newspaper clipping in which a man asked a catholic priest the following: A sin against the Holy Spirit, mentioned in Matt. 12:31--"All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him,..." is said to be "unforgivable." I thought every sin is forgivable? The priest answered as follows..Ed.) The unforgivable sin against the Holy Spirit, mentioned by Our Lord, is interpreted to mean "final impenitence." If a person decides that she or he is so evil that not even God can forgive a sinful life, then of course, the Holy Spirit is shut off from imparting forgiveness. The "unforgiving" in such a case is on the part of the sinner and not on the part of God, for actually all sins of whatever kind are forgivable, if the sinner will but repent and confess!

Editor's Response to Letter #95

Dear Ken. The priest's answer is, of course, pure rationalization. There is nothing whatever, either expressed or implied, showing that the attitude of the person involved toward the degree of sinfulness determines whether or not a sin is forgivable. What biblical verse could one use to prove the individual rather than God determines when a sin is forgivable? To say, "if a person decides that she or he is so evil that not even God can forgive a sinful life, then, of course, the Holy Spirit is shut off from imparting forgiveness," not only limits God's powers but flies in the face of biblical teachings. The priest said this was "interpreted to mean." Indeed, it was! Pure interpretation.

Letter #96 from IF of Vacaville, California

Dear Dennis. I read your response to my letter in the April issue of BE regarding the non-existence of Jesus about 2,000 years ago. BE's purpose is solely showing the contradictions and inconsistencies of the bible? Empirically as well as scientifically, it can be shown the bible is hogwash and no one expects passages in the bible to admit it. Reasoning can also prove the falsity of that book. As an example, did Noah journey to the Arctic so that we can have the man-eating polar bears, journey to Australia for kangaroos, to Antarctica for penguins.... In like fashion Jesus is not an historical being as no Greek, Roman, or Jewish historian of the time wrote about a diety performing miracles. The gospels were written long after Jesus was supposed to have died, so how could the writers quote him verbatim?.... You are limiting yourself to biblical quotations, thereby defeating the purpose of biblical errancy--to show the absurdity of the bible.

Editor's Response to Letter #96

Dear IF. I know this is an area of great interest to you so let me restate my position by making several observations: First, BE does not focus solely on contradictions and inconsistencies in the Bible. It concentrates on any internal information having to do with the Book's validity. Inconsistencies and contradictions are only the primary element. Anytime you bring in scientific or historical data to disprove the Bible you are going to confront scientists and historians on the other side whose arguments will not be as weak as those of apologists confined to Scripture per se. For example, you said Jesus was not an historical figure because no Greek, Roman, or Jewish historian mentioned him. Surely you must realize what the opposition will say. The mere fact that historians fail to mention someone does not prove he didn't exist. One might just as well say my grandmother didn't exist because she doesn't appear in historical writings either. All one can prove, as BE intends to show eventually, is that there are no non-Christian writings of antiquity which can be accurately applied to Jesus and those often employed are readily refuted. Your

comment about the gospels would be leaped upon with equal relish, IF. You mean we can't quote George Washington verbatim because he lived hundreds of years ago? Biblicists could say the gospels are verbatim representations of what was said. They didn't say those who compiled the conversations and wrote the gospels were physically present when it occurred. Second, BE does discuss extra-biblical data occasionally. The examples you gave of the problem associated with Noah and the animals on the Ark were discussed in a prior issue. However, as with the Creation Story, BE's only attempt was to show the myriad of scientific problems one must confront if he adheres to the biblical approach. No attempt was made to disprove Creationism or the Flood Account. Why? Because as soon as I offer scientific data, opponents will do likewise and we begin matching libraries in fields very few people are qualified to discuss. And, even more important, how many really care? Third, I don't expect passages in the Bible to admit the Book is hogwash, but when two passages say something diametrically opposed, each is, in effect, asserting as much. I'm not limiting myself to biblical quotations; I'm limiting myself to that which is most relevant and persuasive to the average believer.

Letter #97 from VT of Huron, California

Greetings: your comments and opposition to the TRUTHS set forth in the Bible is (in my opinion) really UNFORGIVABLE. It is certainly unfortunate that you ever got started doing this kind of thing.... Your mentor, `ole Thomas Paine would be so PROUD OF YOU.... You don't believe the Bible is God's word, and yet you are willing to spend all your time and energy running it down.... You must get a great deal of satisfaction out of your VOCATION.

Editor's Response to Letter #97

Greetings VT. What "truths" are you referring to? Perhaps we should go through past issues of BE to find some? I'm glad you said "in my opinion" because in my opinion, and that of countless others, it's anything but unforgivable. You are correct when you say that it's unfortunate I ever got started in this. It's unfortunate for all those who project the Bible as something it most assuredly is not. I don't spend all my time running down the Bible VT, nor is this my vocation. I just feel that exposing the Bible is something that must be done. Believe me when I say I can think of many books I'd rather be reading. Scripture is often boring, monotonous, repetitious, infantile, and obscure. Many parts are so vague that one guess is as good as another as to what was meant. The fact remains, however, that it is the book for a substantial segment of the population. That's "where they are" and one can't persuade them to come to a more rational stance without first showing them the error of their ways.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #98 from MP of Tulsa, Oklahoma (Part a) Extracts from several letters Dear Dennis. Regarding Letter #87 from IF of Vacaville, California, the author seems a little confused. Apart from mathematics (my field), you cannot consistently prove negative propositions about factual matters....it's a waste of time to argue about the nonexistence of Jesus. I agree with you that it's much more effective to show biblicists that Jesus' actions and "doctrines" are less than perfect.

Editor's Response to Letter #98 (Part a)

Dear MP. Perhaps I didn't make my position as clear as I should have. I did not mean to say that discussing extra-biblical topics, such as the existence of Jesus, the history of the Canon's formation, pagan influences, etc. are a waste of time. Certainly not. For some people such arguments are quite impressive. All I said was that our efforts should primarily be directed toward those topics which are of greatest interest to the largest number of people and most

susceptible to proof. A contradiction or logical inconsistency is far more difficult for a biblicist to combat than arguments over what occurred thousands of years ago.

Letter #98 Concludes (Part b)

I attended a student Bible study in one of the dorms the other night. The topic of the night was, "Why worship God?" The leader of the group would assign each person a verse to read on that subject and then would ask him to explain it. When it came my turn, I stated that I was puzzled by the Bible's attitude toward God, since poor old Job worshipped God fervently and led a blameless life, only to be rewarded by God allowing Satan to do all sorts of terrible things to him and his family. One girl responded that we cannot judge God because we cannot see the big picture or something to that effect. I responded by asking how it was for the long-term good of Job's children to be killed by Satan with God's permission. (Here the argument threatened to turn to theodicy, but I tried to keep to the Bible). Another woman said that you cannot understand the spiritual by looking at the physical. I pointed out that Jesus made no such distinction, since he talked about mustard seeds, mountains, fig trees, coins, etc. The expression on these peoples' faces was priceless, like I was the bastard at the family reunion. We were supposed to apply the Bible to our lives, not think about it.

I'm involved with other projects also. Not that I expect to deprogram anyone, but I have been calling a Christian radio station named KXOJ. The deejays will talk to you off the air. I've argued one of them to the point that he won't talk to me any more. He says that I am doing the work of Satan. Another, a woman about my age, will still talk to me, but she seems to be an intellectual zero. When she asks me why I'm doing what I'm doing, I respond that when you cross-examine a witness on the stand, the first thing you do is check his testimony on things that can be independently verified, before you believe his extra-ordinary claims; such is my attitude toward the Bible. But she seems to be one of those emotional, feelgood Christians.

Editor's Response to Letter #98 (Part b)

Keep up the good work, MP. You are going in among them rather than taking shots at-a-distance. I know what you are going through. I do it myself. Your comment about Jesus' repeated references to material objects was rather shrewd. I can see why they were taken aback.

Issue No. 31

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COMMENTARY

Isaiah 42:1-20--Besides Isaiah 52-53 (In last month's Commentary) other sections of the OT are also extolled as prime examples of messianic prophecy. The 42nd chapter of Isaiah and Gen. 49:10-12, for example, are often quoted in messianic literature, despite their absence of any applicability to Jesus of Nazareth. Isaiah 42 couldn't be referring to Jesus for any one of several reasons: (1) "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him:..." (42:1). (a) The past tense verb shows someone living earlier is under discussion. (b) would God call Jesus his servant? (c) How could Jesus be upheld to anything or need upholding? (d) How could God put his spirit on his equal, Jesus ("I and my Father are one--John 10:30). (e) Also puzzling is how God could have a soul. (2) "he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles" (42:1). (a) In Matt. 15:24 Jesus said he was not sent but unto the lost sheep of Israel, which would exclude Gentiles. (b) In Matt. 10:5 Jesus specifically told his followers not to go to the gentiles. (c) Jesus had no authority among the gentiles. (3) "He shall not cry, nor lift

up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street" (42:2). (a) Yet, Jesus wept (John 11:35). (b) He cried aloud and lifted up his voice in public thoroughfares and open spaces. Scourging tradesmen and upsetting their tables is not a display of quietude. Matt. 27:46, 50, Mark 15:34, 37, 39, Luke 23:46, 19:41, and John 7:28, 37, 11:43, 12:44 show this verse has nothing to do with Jesus. (4) "a bruised reed shall he not break and the smoking flax shall he not quench...." (42:3). This contradicts Psalm 2:9 ("Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel") which is also applied to Jesus. (5) "He shall not fail nor be discouraged till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law" (42:4). Jesus did fail and was discouraged as Matt. 27:46 ("My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me") and John 11:35 ("Jesus wept") show. (b) He has never set judgment in the earth. (c) Extracting any degree of rationality from this verse is rather difficult since it's comparable to saying he will not fail until he has succeeded. He will fail the moment he succeeds in establishing justice. (6) "Who is blind, but my servant? or deaf, as my messenger that I sent? Who is blind as he that is perfect, and blind as the Lord's servant? (42:19). (a) Would God say Jesus is blind and deaf or more deaf and blind than others? Would God virtually denounce Jesus in uncomplimentary terms? (b) How could a perfect being be blind or deaf? (c) Would God call Jesus his servant? (7) "seeing many things, but thou observest not; opening the ears, but he heareth not" (42:20). Would God describe Jesus in this manner?

Gen. 49:10-12--Gen. 49 also contains some allegedly messianic verses which are equally invalid. (1) :The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be." (a) Apologists view Jesus as Shiloh even though the sceptre departed from Judah 600 years before Jesus was born. If Shiloh is Christ then the prophecy is false, for the king of Judah (Zedekiah) was carried away captive by Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 25:7) and all the leading Jews were taken away to Babylon, all of which took place 588 years before the birth of Christ. (b) If the sceptre continued all during the pre-Jesus period, then it still departed nearly 50 years after Jesus' death with the destruction of the temple. The sceptre did not depart from Judah when the so-called Shiloh (Jesus) came; it happened 50 years later when Jerusalem fell to the Romans. (c) During the existence of the 2nd temple there is no indication that a descendant of Judah governed Israel or Judah. (d) Authorities disagree as to an accurate translation of this verse. Some feel it should say "until he comes to Shiloh." They assert that Shiloh is not a man or a messiah. It's a place. Every time "Shiloh" appears in the OT after Gen. 49:10 it's clearly referring to a location. It was seat of the national sanctuary before it was moved to Jerusalem. Shiloh was where the national gatherings took place before Jerusalem was taken by David. (e) When did the people gather unto Jesus? (f) Gen 49:10 is ascribed to Jacob which is questionable in light of the fact that Judah did not receive the sceptre until David ascended the throne hundreds of years after Jacob lived. (2) "he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes: His eyes shall be red with wine" (Gen. 49:11-12). Verses 11 and 12 apply to the same person mentioned in verse 10. One cannot help but ask when Jesus washed his garments in wine or the blood of grapes. Jesus Disqualified--One of the most interesting aspects of messianic prophecy is the degree to which Christians have selectively employed every verse which could possibly be twisted in such a manner as to prove the messiahship of Jesus while systematically ignoring those proving the contrary. They use any verse in the OT that could be related to Jesus in a positive way but avoid all those that could just as easily be used to refute his credentials. Many disprove his messiahship better than those used to prove it. Many debunking his mission are clearer and stronger than those in support: (1) Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help" (Psalm 146:3). Jesus was called the son of man on numerous occasions. (2) "How much less man, that is a worm? and the son of man, which is a worm" (Job 25:6). Jesus often called himself the son of man. (3) "What is man, that he can be clean? Or he that is born of woman, that he can be righteous" (Job 15:14 RSV) and "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one" (Job 14:4 and "...how can he be clean that is born of a woman? (Job 25:4). The allegedly pure Jesus supposedly came

from impure and sinful Mary. Virgin or not, Mary was still a sinner under Original Sin. (4) Christians don't hesitate to apply the 22nd Psalm to Jesus but conveniently ignore verse 6 which says, "But I am a worm, and no man..." (5) The suffering servant discussed by Isaiah is supposedly Jesus yet Isaiah 42:19 says, "Who is blind but my servant? or deaf as my messenger that I sent? who is blind as he that is perfect, and blind as the Lord's servant?" (Wasn't Jesus supposedly sent as a perfect messenger from God? (6) Jesus was a man in whom many trusted and still trust; yet, the OT admonished: (a) "Cursed be the man that trusted in man" (Jer. 17:5) and "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man" (Psalm 118:8). (7) "...yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken or his children begging bread" (Psalm 37:25). Then Jesus couldn't be righteous because he was forsaken by God and many of his followers beg for bread. (8) "...the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh" (Dan. 2:11). Yet, Jesus was allegedly the God/man dwelling in flesh. (9) Jesus was called the son of man; yet, Psalm 8:4 RSV ("...what is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou dost care for him") and Psalm 144:3 NASB ("O Lord, what is man, that Thou dost take knowledge of him? Or the son of man, that Thou dost think of him?") belittle the son of man. (10) And lastly, "There is one come out of thee, that imagineth evil against the Lord, a wicked counsellor" (Naham 1:11). Jesus was called a counsellor in Isaiah 9:6.

What is Needed--We often hear from readers struggling with the question of how one can most effectively cope with religion in general and the Bible in particular. This is undoubtedly a major problem and judging from the enormous influence of both has not been adequately addressed. Indeed, the Bible's supporters dominate the scene on virtually every front. They have tremendous amounts of wealth and millions of supporters, while those at the other end of the spectrum are deficient in nearly every area but accuracy. As of now it's been a decidedly one-sided contest, although war would be a more accurate term. While the Falwells, Swaggarts, Grahams, and Robertsons marshal their forces like generals in battle, much of the opposition is either apathetic or innocuous. Biblicists not only utilize scores of radio and television stations with hundreds of regular programs but employ a national television network rivalling CBS and NBC. Thousands of inaccurate religious comments are broadcast daily without rebuttal, while opponents have almost no regularly scheduled anti-Bible programs in the entire Nation, let alone a station or network. Equally important is the fact that fundamentalists and evangelicals have many sympathizers in the media. We have had great difficulty gaining access to the airways, especially on call-in radio stations. Even though owners, managers, sponsors, producers, and hosts may not attend church on a regular basis, Ideologically speaking, they are closer to fundamentalism than BE. Getting on-th-air is difficult, obtaining a repeat performance is an accomplishment of even greater magnitude. Exceptions exist, of course, but they are clearly in the minority. Several hardworking supporters of BE have discovered as much for themselves. They have either been flatly refused an opportunity to be heard via BE or given a protracted run-around. Even when given access to the public I have often been viewed in the same light as dancing bears and sword-swallowers, a novelty act for entertainment only. Usually not much time has elapsed, however, before hosts have begun to realize they have a serious problem on their hands and poignant biblical criticisms aren't going to be destroyed with a flip of the tongue. Generally the powers-that-be shift from refuting to denying me a hearing after the programs's completed. Those who believe censorship is not widely practiced against critics of the Bible are victims of deception. They need only oppose the Bible themselves to see what will or will not happen. Ten years ago I wouldn't have believed it either. But personal experience is a potent teacher. If my performance were poor, my arguments weak, my speaking ability deficient, or my audience bored, I could easily understand why second invitations were not forthcoming. But in every instance precisely the opposite has occurred. The switchboard has nearly always resembled a Christmas tree. Supporters also have reported that BE's posters have been regularly removed.

In answer to the original question of how to oppose the Bible's influence, we would propose that a national network be created organized in a manner not unlike that of several Christian organizations. Its purpose would be to confront, debate, and contend with the opposition, especially before listeners whose views are still in a state of flux. There are millions of fence-straddlers with doubts and questions. Members would have to know the Bible's contents as well as its proponents and be fully aware of its weaknesses and relevant extra-biblical data. Training programs, institutes, conferences, etc. could be used to teach the Bible's inaccuracies and the most effective techniques by which to counter the opposition. Immense study and research would be prerequisites. But that would be easier than fulfilling the second requirement, namely, obtaining a hearing before a mass audience, especially on a repetitive basis. That's the real challenge. As long as you keep your views to yourself and read what confirms your beliefs, the problem is contained. But when you seek to convert, confront, or influence others, sparks begin to fly and opposition arises. Of necessity, members would have to make up in vocalism what they lack in numbers. Those who don't feel comfortable as debaters or educators could call stations, write letters, protest the content of programs, suggest speakers, and otherwise make their presence known. If nothing else, members could contribute funds for speaking engagements, travel, printing, phoning, postage, and other expenses. As many are aware, BE is not an abstruse, theoretical journal, but an assertive news letter operating on the offensive and geared to a mass audience. A major problem with some anti-religious publications is that they are written by academicians for academicians and miss the population in general. They often repeat the same points to those already convinced and rarely organize people in such a way as to effectively confront the fundamentalist agenda. Readers are provided numerous examples of creeping fundamentalism and the religious threat, up to and including a president who often echoes a Baptist preacher, while the real question is ignored, i.e., what needs to be done about a deplorable situation that seems to be worsening. Gathering information on a regular basis is fine; but shouldn't it be employed in a meaningful manner? Will such an organization be formed? I doubt it. Why? Because the numbers, resources, determination, and sticktuitiveness significantly exceeds that displayed by its opponents. Equally important is the fact that many people opposed to the Bible simply aren't interested in the Book. Frankly, it bores them. They can't bring themselves to read what is clearly the most important, the most influential writing in the Nation today. Their attitude is that if others want to believe such nonsense, let them. I'll just live and let live. Unfortunately, millions believe the Book and operate accordingly. They vote, influence political figures, affect the economy, impact the schools, etc. all of which touches everyone. If you believe Armageddon is coming, why oppose nuclear war or support disarmament? If you believe Paul's teachings on females, why support the women's movement? If you believe in salvation by faith rather than works, why devote your energies to the improvement of man's condition? After all, it's what you believe that's crucial, not what you do. The problem with live and let live is that the activities of the Book's adherents constantly impinge upon others, usually adversely. If only critics of religion in general and the Bible in particular weren't so conditioned to dominance by the other side! Imagine what would occur if the roles were reversed and critics had all the resources, including the media, that fundamentalists now enjoy. The response of biblicists would be anything but mild.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #99 from IF of Vacaville, California (Part a)

Dear Dennis. Your reply to my letter #96 appearing in the June issue of BE actually doesn't make sense. Scientists and historians "on the other side," meaning there are scientists and historians who can prove the truthfulness of the Gospels? Do such beings exist? How could Roman, Greek, and Jewish historians possibly fail to write about a man performing many miracles that only a supernatural could perform? Why would they ignore such a person? Would

it not be a feather in their caps to report wonders that were never done before? Historians never wrote about your grandmother because she never accomplished miracles or anything else outstanding. But you had to have your grandmother, although unknown, to be in the world, your antecedent. George Washington can be quoted because people were not as primitive as 2,000 years ago when illiteracy was 98 or 99%. Then when the gospel writers had to depend on hearsay, versions begin to vary tremendously over decades. There were certified shorthand reporters in those days. Besides, you know the gospels contradict each other....

Editor's Response to Letter #99 (Part a)

Dear IF. Clearly we both hold the Bible in low esteem. In that regard we are unanimous. The problem lies in determining the best method by which to minimize its influence. I have no problem with your arguments. They seem reasonable, but they aren't concrete, certainly not as concrete as internal contradictions and dilemmas. You ask how Roman, Greek, and Jewish historians could have failed to miss a man performing miracles. The fact is, they could have. Granted it's not probable; but it is possible. Many extraordinary events have occurred in history and historians weren't present to record them. Surely you aren't contending every momentous event throughout time has been noted by historians. My primary objection to your approach is that it provides biblicists an avenue of escape. Contradictions do also, but the escape hatch is much narrower. The problem with historical arguments is that apologists can always say, as one told me on-the-air, "That shows how much your historians know. Read mine. They know what really happened." And since none of us were alive then, it often becomes a matter of whom you want to believe. The same problem exists with respect to the George Washington situation. You admitted illiteracy then was 98 or 99% which means there were some literate people. Biblicists will simply say that it was these literate few who did the quoting. Remember, knowledgeable apologists aren't going to grant you anything. You have to fight for every point. After debating these people many times, I can vouch for their determination. Encounters have all the earmarks of a court battle between lawyers. Nearly every significant point is contested, few stipulated. If you can't prove it, you'll sometimes wish you hadn't mentioned it. Good homework is axiomatic. Incidentally, when did I say they had scientists and historians who could prove the truthfulness of the gospels? I say they had scientists and historians; I didn't say they could prove anything.

Letter #99 Concludes (Part b)

In the book "Deceptions and Myths of the Bible" by Lloyd Graham it is stated there were 16 virgin-birth saviors prior to Christ. You won't find this statement in the bible which shows this concept was prevalent amongst religion makers for centuries before this supposed Christ. An atheist needs other sources besides the Bible to refute priestcraft.

Editor's Response to Letter #99 (Pat b)

As I mentioned in a prior issue IF, I have no objection to mentioning this kind of information. I occasionally use it myself. For some individuals it's of great importance. But the weight, probability, and significance of data must be kept in proper perspective. What do you think apologists are going to say to such information? Always ask yourself: What is the opposition going to say and how easy will this be to counter? Put yourself in the opponent's head and look at things as he would. The obvious reply in this instance is that the other 16 are fakes. This would probably be followed by a litany of the miraculous deeds and messianic prophecies accomplished and fulfilled by Jesus. You, on the other hand, would be obligated to prove Jesus was no different from the rest, which would necessitate biblical data. I may be wrong and don't mean to belittle your knowledge, IF, but I don't think you have crossed swords with very many apologists, especially those of the better informed variety.

Letter #100 from RB of Sugar Grove, Pennsylvania

Dear Dennis.... To be gently critical of a comrade, a common complaint that I hear from fundies, non-fundies, and non-theists is that you are too picky about minor points, e.g. focusing on inconsistent but conceivably reconcilable scriptures so much (The solidly and hopelessly contradictory ones seem to get lost among the inconsistencies that are the more trivial ones, yet important ones nonetheless).... The thing that I really want to express here is that I think that this attitude, which is perceived by some as overly critical and dogmatic, is on psychological grounds a bit counter-productive as educational strategy. One slip-up on a minor point and your credibility suffers; then your audience is turned out. My preferred arsenal of arguments against inerrancy is compact, consisting of Biblical contradictions that have resisted my mightiest efforts at rationalizing as Devil's Advocate as well as resisted the best tries by my fundie friends. The list is growing and I find that a small barrage of a few old classics (e.g., the Matt. vs. Luke genealogies of Jesus, the Mark vs. John hour for the crucifixion or reconciling the four Gospels' accounts of Easter morning) with many more in stock, can plant a seed of thought that in time often makes an honest thinker out of a cult follower and bibliolater. (Of course, your publication's format does demand a massive barrage. Still, to some of shear immensity of your critical effort effects their minds much as too much light effects the pupil of the eye--it closes them down). We not only must seek to address a thinking audience, but must try to teach an habitually non-thinking one to learn these first awkward steps.

Editor's Response to Letter #100

Dear RB. Your thoughts are well considered and worthy of analysis. Let me make a few comments. First, although your point was tendered many issues ago by another reader, it merits another reply. Granted, BE is a technical publication and major criticisms sometimes get lost among the minor; but the problem has always been one of determining which is which. One man's blockbuster is another's trivia. So, for this reason I've decided to present everything and let readers judge and extract as they choose. BE is meant to be a resource which can be drawn from at will. Leaving something out is unwise because it might be the very point that attracts someone's attention. Second, to some extent I can see why "overly critical" may be of concern to some, but "dogmatic" is another matter. By what rationale some have come to this conclusion is difficult to surmise in light of the fact that controversy is an inseparable part of BE and biblicists are heard on a regular basis. How much chance would I have of writing in Christianity Today, Our Sunday Visitor, Christian Century, or any one of hundreds of other religious periodicals? Third, I've slipped up on points before and I'll probably do so again. Anyone seeking the perfect publication or the perfect writer had better forget about reading, period. They might as well stay tuned out. Fourth, your strategy of focusing on a few key problems is good; indeed, it's quite effective in most cases. For other encounters, however, I'd be better prepared. You'll need BE. And lastly, those who look upon BE as too much light may eventually view fundamentalism as the fire itself.

Letter #101 from CF of Easton, Pennsylvania

Dear Dennis. How can matter or gases in space that has no life somehow come alive? If you reject God creating life as we know it, and you ask for reasonable, rational answers from others, please address this question. Can you cite some scientific study that can produce life from non-living material?

Editor's Response to Letter #101

Dear CF. We receive scores of extra-biblical questions such as this. Reminds me of discussions I had while majoring in philosophy years ago. I don't remember ever mentioning God and the creation of life but I'll respond anyway. I can't cite a study such as you request, but are you prepared to say that you know scientists will never be able to produce life from non-life? Are you saying that it's impossible because man presently lacks the ability? Is your perspicacity such that you can peer centuries into the future? You're going far out on a thin limb. Since we are on the topic, let me ask you a question. This periodical is far more concerned with the Bible's validity than God's existence, but I've always wondered why God does not have to have a creator while matter does. Why couldn't matter have been the only thing existing, changing, and evolving throughout eternity? If matter must have a creator, why doesn't God? Topics such as this actually belong more in the realm of theology and philosophy than Biblical criticism.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #102 from RW of Riverside, California

Dear Dennis. In your June 1985 issue with the commentary on Isaiah 52-53 I would like to add this comment: The Ethiopian converted by Philip read from this portion: "...and like a lamb dumb before HIS shearer." And from this Philip preached Jesus to the man, etc. (Acts 8:32). But when we turn to Isaiah 53:7, we read: "...and as a sheep before HER shearers is dumb." Not a major contradiction, of course, yet one is definitely he and the other she.

Letter #103 from Mark Potts, 8510-A East 66th Pl. So., Tulsa, Ok. 74133. Several

Extracts

Dear Dennis. Since the Bible says that God is everywhere ("Do I not fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord"--Jer. 23:24), and the Holy Spirit is God, why does the Holy Spirit have to enter people? In Mark 9:23 Jesus says, "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth." And in Mark 11:24 he says, "what thing soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." Yet, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus prayed, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me." (Matt. 26:39). But he was crucified anyway! Are we to conclude from this that Jesus displayed insufficient belief to deliver him from death?

Letter #104 from John Sikos of P.O. box 443, Romeo, Michigan 48065-0443 (Part a)

Dear Dennis. Thank you once again for your back issues of BE. I've read every word of issues 1 through 28 at least twice. I must say, your sample issue does BE no justice. I did not expect an enlightening treasury of wisdom this thorough. Excellent. In at least five letters I've written so far (one of my hobbies is to correspond with religionists) I've used your works as one of my sources.... I love your continued dialogues with stubborn religionists. Letter #1 and subsequent communications from the same author are a case in point. As late as Letter #79 you still do not give up with these kinds of people. Please do not become weary of printing such debates in future editions--no matter how repetitious they become, no matter how futile your efforts may seem; repetition is one of the methods that I think eventually draws stubborn people to their first staggering steps toward rational thought. I also enjoyed the brief glimpses of the Koran and the Book of Mormon in issues #22 and #23. While these are extra-biblical topics, I believe they do have some effect on fundamentalists....I've seen many a religionist give a blank look when confronted with the fact that other books also claim to be the word of God. "Why is your book more valid than their book?" I ask. They give no answer. Once a Baptist told me: "Their story

talks about a messiah who died. Our's talks about a messiah who raised Himself from the dead.
(To Be Continued)

Editor's Response to Letter #104 (Part a)

Dear John. Your comments are very kind, although I think repetition is minimal. Your Baptist acquaintance does not know his own book which repeatedly says Jesus was raised by God. He didn't raise himself. (Acts 2:32, 3:26, 5:30, 13:30, Gal. 1:1, and Rom 8:11)

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COMMENTARY

Did Jesus Exist (Part One of a Two-Part Series)--Although BE does not normally discuss extra-biblical subjects, exceptions have been and will continue to be made. One of the most important in this regard pertains to whether or not Jesus of Nazareth was a real, live, flesh and blood individual who walked the earth approximately 2,000 years ago. If he didn't Christianity would be dealt a blow from which it could never recover. The most significant aspect of this matter is that there is no reference to Jesus of Nazareth in any non-Christian writings of antiquity. One can peruse all the great literature of that era and find nothing proving the man even existed. "There is no history written at the time Jesus Christ is said to have lived that speaks of the existence of such a person, even as a man" (The Life and Works of Paine, Vol 9, p. 271). "We know nothing certainly of Jesus Christ. We know nothing of his infancy, nothing of his youth, and we are not sure that such a person even existed" (Interviews, Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 5, p. 273. Anyone wishing to believe in the reality of Jesus will have to rely upon the New Testament and the NT alone. There is no other source. Biblicists heatedly deny this, of course, and quote many well-known Greek, Roman, and Jewish writers to prove their case. Since the question of whether or not the pivotal figure in Christianity really lived is of first magnitude in importance, each of the key apologetic quotations deserves consideration. The first and probably the most notable comes from the Jewish historian, Josephus, who allegedly said, "Now there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was the Christ, and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men among us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him; for he appeared to them alive again the third day; as the divine prophets had foretold there and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him. And the tribe of Christians so named from him are not extinct at this day" (Jewish Antiquities, Book 18, Chp. 3, Sec.3). The problems inherent in this paragraph are numerous and fatal to its credibility: (1) The alleged author, Josephus, was a devout Jew which would cause anyone familiar with the basic principles of Judaism to ask: Would a devout Jew imply that a man was not a man, that he was divine? Would he say that a man did miracles, was the Christ, and rose from the dead? And would a devout Jew say the messianic prophecies expressly referred to a man at that time? (2) The works of Josephus are voluminous and exhaustive. They comprise nearly 20 books. Whole pages are devoted to petty robbers and obscure seditious leaders. Nearly 40 chapters are devoted to a single king. Yet, Jesus is dismissed with a mere dozen lines. (3) The passage is not found in the early copies of Josephus. Not until the Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius (320 A.D.) do we come across it. This is the same Eusebius who said that it is lawful to lie and cheat for the cause of Christ: "I have repeated whatever may rebound to the glory, and suppressed all that could tend to the disgrace of our religion" (Chp. 31, Book 12 of Prae Paratio Evangelica). (4) The early Christian fathers such as Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen were acquainted

with what Josephus wrote and it seems reasonable to conclude that they would have quoted this passage had it existed. Apparently Eusebius was the first to use it because it didn't exist during the 2nd and 3rd centuries. Chrysostom often referred to Josephus and it's highly unlikely he would have omitted the paragraph had it been extant. Photius did not quote the text though he had three articles concerning Josephus and even expressly stated that Josephus, being a Jew, had not taken the least notice of Christ. (5) Neither Justin in his dialogue with Trypho, the Jew, nor Origen against Celsus ever mentioned this passage. Neither Tertullian nor Cyprian ever quoted Josephus as a witness in their controversies with Jews and pagans and Origen expressly stated that Josephus, who had mentioned John the Baptist, did not recognize Jesus as the messiah (*Contra Celsum*, I, 47). (6) The famous historian Gibbon claims the passage is a forgery as do many theologians. (7) The passage interrupts the narrative. Immediately before it Josephus tells of a rising of the Jews due to bitter feeling at the conduct of Pilate, and its bloody suppression by the ruling power. The words immediately following the passage are: "Also about this time another misfortune befell the Jews" and we are told of the expulsion of the Jews from Rome by Tiberius on account of the conduct of some of their compatriots. What is the connection between the reference to Jesus and these two narratives? That there must be some connection if Josephus wrote the passage about Jesus goes without saying in view of the character of the writer. Josephus was always careful to have a logical connection between his statements and from a rational standpoint there is no occasion whatever to put the passage about Jesus in the connection in which we find it. (8) The language of this passage is quite Christian and most of the passage is blasphemous from the Jewish perspective. (9) Josephus nowhere else mentioned the word Christ in any of his works, except in reference to James, Jesus' brother (*Antiquities*, Book 20, Chp. 9,1). (10) And lastly, the Arabic translation of the text, which many consider more accurate, is: "At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. And his conduct was good, and (He) was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and the other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned Him to be crucified and to die. And those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that He had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion and that He was alive; accordingly, He was perhaps the Messiah concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders." The texts are markedly different in that: (1) The 1st says he was the Christ, while the Arabic text says perhaps he was. (2) The 1st says he appeared to them the 3rd day; the 2nd say, they reported that he had appeared. (3) The 1st says he was dispensing truth with pleasure; the 2nd says nothing about dispensing truth. (4) The 2nd account never implies that he was anything other than a man. (5) And finally, the 2nd account says his conduct was good, while the 1st says he was a "doer of wonderful works," which could be interpreted as miracles.

A second major historian whom apologists often quote to justify their belief in an historical Jesus is the Roman Seutonius (77-140 A.D.) who said, "Since the Jews constantly made disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he (the emperor, Claudius) expelled them from Rome" (*The Life of Claudius*, Sec. 25.4). This couldn't refer to Jesus either because (1) The name in the text is not "Christus" but "Chrestus," which by no means is the usual designation of Jesus. It was a common name, especially among Roman freedman. Hence, the whole passage may have nothing whatever to do with Christianity. (2) Surely no one will contend that Christ was inciting riots at Rome 15 years after he was supposedly crucified at Jerusalem. And why would Jews be led by Jesus to begin with? (3) This passage contains no evidence for the historicity of Jesus, even if we substitute "Christus" for "Chrestus." Christus is merely the Greek-Latin translation of messiah and the phrase "at the instigation of Christus" could refer to the Messiah generally, and not at all necessarily to the particular messiah, Jesus, as an historical figure. (4) "Chrestus" was not only a familiar personal name, it was also a name of the Egyptian Serapis or Osiris, who had a large following at Rome, especially among the common people. Hence "Christians" may be either the followers of a man named Chrestus, or of Serapis. Historians know what evil repute the Egyptian people, which consisted mainly of Alexandrian elements, had at Rome. While other foreign cults

that had been introduced into Rome enjoyed the utmost toleration, the cult of Serapis and Isis was exposed repeatedly to persecution. The lax morality associated with their worship of the Egyptian gods and the fanaticism of their worshippers repelled the Romans, and excited the suspicion that their cults might be directed against the State. (5) Vopiscus said, "Those who worship Serapis and the Christians,.... They are a turbulent, inflated, lawless body of men." Is it not possible that the reference to Chrestus and the Christians has been too hastily applied to Christ and Christians? The "Christians," who were detested by the people for their crimes,...., are not Christians at all, but followers of Chrestus, the scum of Egypt, the apaches of Rome, a people on whom Nero could very easily cast the suspicion of having set fire to Rome. The month's third and final author used to prove Jesus existed is Pliny the Younger. In his correspondence with the Emperor, Trajan (around 113 A.D.) which is concerned with the question of how Pliny, as Proconsul of the province of Bithynia in Asia Minor (modern Turkey), was to treat the Christians, Pliny said, "I have laid down this rule in dealing with those who were brought before me for being Christians. I asked whether they were Christians; if they confessed, I asked them a second and a third time, threatening them with punishment; if they persevered, I ordered them to be executed.... They assured me that their only crime or error was this, that they were wont to come together on a certain day before it was light, and to sing in turn, among themselves, a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and to bind themselves by an oath--not to do anything that was wicked, that they would commit no theft, robbery, or adultery, nor break their word, nor deny that anything had been entrusted to them when called upon to restore it.... I therefore deemed it the more necessary to extract the truth by torture from two slave women whom they call deaconesses. But I found it was nothing but a bad and excessive superstition.... the sacred rites which had been allowed to lapse (by them--Ed.) are being performed again, and flesh of sacrificed victims is on sale everywhere, though up till recently scarcely anyone could be found to buy it." Why apologists quote this passage is hard to understand: (1) It proves nothing in regard to the existence of Jesus, but only affirms the existence of Christians. (2) If the passage is referring to Christians, then it is also saying Christians sold the flesh of their sacrificial victims. (3) Roman laws accorded religious liberty to all. Before Constantine there was not a single law opposed to freedom of thought. (4) Trajan was one of the most tolerant of Roman emperors. (5) Pliny is universally conceded to have been one of the most humane of men. That Pliny would have tortured two women is highly unlikely. The person and character of women in Pagan Rome were held in high esteem. (6) The letter implies Bithynia had a large Christian population which is improbable at that early date. (7) The passage implies Trajan was not acquainted with Christian beliefs and customs even though Christians were quite prominent in his capital. (8) For Christians to be found in so remote a province as Bithynia before acquiring notoriety in Rome is unlikely. (9) Pliny says they sing a hymn to Christ as to God which Christians in Pliny's time would consider blasphemous since Jesus was no more than a man to them. His divinity was not established until 325 A.D. (10) This letter is found in only one ancient copy of Pliny. (11) The German literati, the most learned, say the epistle is not genuine. (12) The genuineness of this correspondence of Pliny and Trajan is by no means certain. The tendency of the letters to put the Christians in as favorable a light as possible is too obvious not to excite some suspicion. For these and other reasons the correspondence was declared by experts to be spurious even at the time of its first publication in the 16th century. (13) The undeniable fact is that some of the first Christians were among the greatest forgers who ever lived. This letter was first quoted by Tertullian and the age immediately preceding him was known for fraudulent writings. Tertullian and Eusebius, the people in favor of the passage's genuineness, were by no means the most reliable sources.

REVIEWS

On page 83 in Evidence that Demands a Verdict apologist Josh McDowell provided another quote from antiquity that is often submitted: "...As therefore Ananus was of such a disposition, he

thought he had now a good opportunity, as Festus was not dead, and Albinus was still on the road; so he assembled a council of judges, and brought before it the brother of Jesus the so-called Christ, whose name was James, together with some others, and having accused them as law-breakers, he delivered them over to be stoned"(Antiquities, Josephus, 20.9). But McDowell failed to prove this passage specifically referred to Jesus of Nazareth or that the James mentioned was the brother of Jesus of Nazareth. James and Jesus were common names then. Moreover, the earlier quote by Josephus says, "He was the Christ." Now he is "the so-called Christ." Which represents the real Josephus? If this James is the brother of the Jesus of Nazareth, why would he have been stoned while Jesus was allegedly crucified?

On the same page McDowell quotes Seutonius who said, "Punishment by Nero was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition" (Lives of the Caesars, 26.2). Again, the presence of followers of Jesus no more proves he existed than the existence of believers in Zeus proves he existed.

On page 84 McDowell offers a very weak letter written by a Syrian named Mara Bar-Serapion to his son Serapion in which is stated, "...What advantage did the men of Samos gain from burying Pythagoras? In a moment their land was covered with sand. What advantage did the Jews gain from executing their wise King? It was just after that that their kingdom was abolished." McDowell neglected to mention that the Jews only assisted in the death of Jesus according to the Bible and Jesus was never a king over them. So how could he have been the king discussed? On page 82 McDowell quotes Lucian of Samosata who said, "...the man who was crucified in Palestine because he introduced this new cult into the world..." Yet, many people have paid the supreme sacrifice for introducing new cults. Why assume it's Jesus? And lastly, on page 83 McDowell quotes the unreliable Tertullian who stated, "(The emperor--Ed.) Tiberius accordingly, in those days the Christian name made its entry into the world, having himself received intelligence from the truth of Christ's divinity, brought the matter before the senate, with his own decision in favor of Christ. The senate, because it had not given the approval itself, rejected his proposal. Caesar held to his opinion, threatening wrath against all the accusers of the Christians" (Apology, V. 2). McDowell then admitted that, "some historians doubt the historicity of this passage." A reasonable degree of intellectual honesty would have brought forth the admission that nearly all historians doubt its authenticity. We are supposed to believe that Caesar Tiberius, himself, forced upon the Roman senate a belief in the divinity of Jesus.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #105 from CF of Easton, Pennsylvania (Part a)

(In reference to the discussion of Isa. 53:8--"...for he was cut off out of the land of the living"--in June's Commentary, CF says--Ed.). Dear Dennis. If the servant of Isaiah 53 is the Jews as you suggest then how do you explain this servant being "cut off from the land of the living"--Isa. 53:8. If the Jews were cut off, why are they still here?

Editor's Response to Letter #105 (Part a)

Dear CF. Where did I suggest the Jews were the Suffering Servant under discussion? That is a Jewish belief, not mine. I said it wasn't Jesus. I never said, nor do I know, who it was.

Letter #105 Continues (Part b)

You also said in Letter #30 "Nowhere in the NT does it say Jesus had so much as a headache prior to the cross...." You wrote this in reference to Isa. 53:3 "unacquainted with grief." I would

like to ask you something. Would you be willing to allow yourself to be blindfolded and struck repeatedly and walk away without a headache? The face of Jesus was struck in this manner--Luke 22:63-64. This would be a good test of your faith or non-faith. Editor's Response to

Letter #105 (Part b)

Letter #30 was written a long time ago, CF, and has nothing to do with Jesus having a headache. I think you meant Issue #30, Sec. 8. Luke 22:63-64 says, "And the ones that held Jesus mocked him, and smote him. And when they had blindfolded him, they struck him on the face...." Why do you assume he was repeatedly struck on the face? Many people have been hit in that manner without getting a headache. Why do you assume that's a necessary outcome? I have been hit in the face several times and not received a headache. The only version I have that says he was even struck in the face is the King James. In any event, you missed my point. "Prior to the cross" meant prior to those events immediately related to the trial and subsequent treatment of Jesus, not to the actual nailing of his hands and feet. I'm well aware of the biblical account of the mistreatment that immediately followed his conviction.

Letter #105 Concludes (Part c)

Is it also true that you were not allowed to set up a booth at an atheist convention?

Editor's Response to Letter #105 (Part c)

Yes, BE has not only been denied space for a booth but refused permission to advertise in atheist periodicals. That's ironic because Christianity Today, Christian Century, Commonweal, and other Christian journals have reviewed our literature and also denied us an opportunity to advertise. Although perplexing, apparently some atheists view BE as religious while many of the religious view us as atheistic. The latter have been quite vituperative.

Letter #106 from IF of Vacaville, California

(In last month's dialogue IF asserted that extra-biblical topics should be accorded greater importance in BE and historical evidence should be used against the Bible's supporters--Ed.) Dear Dennis. In your reply in July's BE you say many extraordinary events took place in history and historians weren't present to record them. Please educate us as to the extraordinary events historians never recorded. Tell us about hearsay events that have come down to us without having historians partaking. Yes, I believe every momentous occasion was recorded by historians. Do you know any occasions that were not noted by them?...I know that bible apologists are very determined but determination doesn't make for the truth. How could the gospel writers quote Jesus verbatim decades after he was supposed to have died and some of the writers weren't even born into the world? Whom were they quoting? On what satisfactory authority?...If the 16 virgin birth saviors prior to Christ were fakes why can't Jesus' virgin birth also be fake? Jesus in the gospels was never quoted saying he was born of a virgin. His mother never told him? Amongst my friends discussion of religion is taboo. They are church going people or synagogue going. They want a God even if one never existed. They want that invisible crutch to lean on light years away....

Editor's Response to Letter #106

Dear IF. Several of your points deserve comment. First, are you seriously contending every momentous event in history has been noted by historians? How could this be possible in light of the fact that the earth alone, according to most scientists, is approximately 4 billion years old, while man has only been present approximately 1 million years, 1/4,000th of the time.

Moreover, historical records are a relatively recent phenomenon in man's existence and certainly many events viewed by early man were not recorded for posterity. Your argument reminds me of the philosophical problem we discussed in college: If a tree fell in the forest and nobody was present to hear it, was there a noise? The answer is, of course, yes. Man's presence isn't a prerequisite for events to occur. I can't relate events unrecorded by historians any more than I can prove the tree made a noise; but I'd be foolish to believe otherwise. Second, you have repeated an earlier assertion to the effect that Jesus couldn't be quoted verbatim decades after he was supposed to have died. As I mentioned in reference to George Washington, it's quite feasible. Why do you insist on making this an impossibility? And third, Jesus' virgin birth could easily be a fake too. We agree. But as I mentioned before, apologists would probably follow this with a litany of biblical deeds performed by, and prophecies fulfilled by, Jesus, which would set him apart from the others.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #104 Concludes from Last Month (Part b)

...From experience, Dennis, I can tell you that the religionists, especially the fundamentalists and pentecostals, slowly but surely cutting up the Bible is the ONLY method that will edge them step-by-step toward reality. All the talk about it being absurd that God has "always existed" and felt bored and decided to create an earth to play with etc., have no effect on these people. Trying to exalt humanism and materialism do no good either as these religious types have already been programmed not to respond favorably. Only going to the Bible and opening it and not being afraid to use it works.... I once had a religionist declare that I must "prove" that logic and human reasoning are more reliable than the inspired word of God. How can we deal with these people, who I'm sorry to say were made this way by others (parents, churches) through no fault of their own?... Christians teach that you must believe on FAITH. As a radio preacher once said, "Faith is the Evidence." (He repeated himself four times consecutively). Since there is NO evidence, one must put one's faith in the scriptures. Faith is the ONLY evidence. (Another pearl of doublethink! I wonder if Hearsay is Proof too.)... After words like these are pumped into the heads of innocent mortals, it is not difficult to see why religionists insist on holding firm stubbornly when confronted with rational people like us... After all it's only Satan trying to deceive me, they think.... Almost from the start children brought up in this kind of setting learn to filter all facts through religious muddlement. If reality contradicts the Bible, then reality is wrong.... And since science by definition does not deal with spiritual matters, it cannot challenge the Bible. So why listen to science? I have seen the above kind of "thinking" steal many people away from the world of normal men. A watch they say implies a watch maker. (They use scientific terminology to convince themselves of the validity of their own statement). The earth "implies an earth maker. So, I ask: "Does God imply a God-Maker?"

Letter #107 from FG of East Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Dear Dennis. Thanks for #31. I have an editorial question. Why not type BE double column? It is easier to read and reference.... You said, "What is Needed" (pages 2 & 3) and I find it lucid and compelling. Do you have any idea, however, of the magnitude of the herculean labor you propose? You must undo almost all the religious right has done in the past 7 years--and against the sympathies in government. (The Federal bureaucracy has been stocked with fundamentalists for several years now....

Editor's Response to Letter #107

Dear FG. Both of your points are will taken. I haven't used the doublecolumn approach because it would be more difficult to type and reduce the amount of information given. I could also pull in the margins and have more divisions between sections and paragraphs, but that, too, would reduce the body of information. If more pages were added then costs would rise, as would also be true if word-processors, printers, and other devices were employed to improve BE's appearance. I know the mechanical aspects of the publication could be enhanced, but the bottom line has always been money and time. I'm not wealthy, nor am I becoming so. You are also correct in regard to what I suggested in last month's What is Needed? Great effort would be required to undo, not 7, but many years of inculcation. I haven't seen any current program that's any more than a mild irritant to religionists in general and fundamentalists in particular, but I'd be willing to listen to any ideas you may have.

Letter #108 from JG of Chicago, Illinois

Dear Mr. McKinsey.... I enjoyed your article on how the problems of the influence of the Bible and religion in general should be addressed. I thought I'd comment on your ideas and share a few of my own thoughts with you.... Atheists, agnostics, humanists, and other freethinkers must stop the philosophical hairsplitting and ideological debate and unite.... The trouble is that freethinkers are by their very nature tolerant and reasonable. Dennis, you are so right in describing the "let others believe in that nonsense if they want to" attitude. If only freethinkers would wake up to the fact that right-wing Christianity is a psycho-social disease.... It is a threat to the basic assumptions and ideals of a pluralistic democracy and has no place in the 20th century; it should be destroyed like the cancer that it is. And I must say BE is as good a form of "chemotherapy" as I've seen.... (In regard to appearing on the radio--Ed.) there is in our nation an unspoken but all-pervading law that it is unacceptable to offend anyone's preconceptions.... I don't think it is so much a question of mass media folks being "closer to fundamentalism than BE"; I think it's more a question of their collective tendency to broadcast to the least common denominator to avoid offending anyone.

Editor's Response to Letter #108

Your last point may be correct, JG, but I'm still inclined to believe otherwise.

BIBLICAL

ERRANCY

Issue #33 Editor: Dennis McKinsey

Sept. 1985

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

COMMENTARY

Did Jesus Exist (Part Two of a Two-Part Series)-- Except for Josephus probably no writer of antiquity has been more relied upon by apologists to prove the existence of Jesus than the Roman historian, Tacitus. In the Annals he related the measures taken by Nero to lessen the suffering brought about by the great fire in Rome in 64 A.D. as well as remove its traces and, then allegedly made the following statements: "But neither the aid of man, nor the liberality of the prince, nor the propitiations of the gods succeeded in destroying the belief that the fire had been purposely lit. In order to put an end to this rumor, therefore, Nero laid the blame on and visited with severe punishment those men, hateful for their crimes, whom the people called Christians. He from whom the name was derived, Christus, was put to death by the procurator Pontius Pilate in the reign of Tiberius. But the pernicious superstition, checked for a moment, broke out again, not only in Judea, the native land of the monstrosity, but also in Rome, to which all conceivable horrors and abominations flow from every side, and find supporters. First, therefore, those were arrested who openly confessed; then, on their information, a great number, who were not so much convicted of the fire as of hatred of the human race. Ridicule was passed on them as they died; so that, clothed in skins of beasts, they were torn to pieces by dogs, or crucified, or committed to the flames, and when the sun had gone down they were burned to light up the night. Nero had lent his garden for this spectacle, and gave games in the Circus, mixing with the people in the dress of a charioteer or standing in the chariot. Hence there was a strong sympathy for them, though they might have been guilty enough to deserve the severest punishment, on the ground that they were sacrificed, not to the general good, but to the cruelty of one man." (Annals XV, 44). The number of problems associated with this paragraph are almost too numerous to mention: (1) It is extremely improbable that a special report found by Tacitus had been sent earlier to Rome and incorporated into the records of the Senate, in regard to the death of a Jewish provincial, Jesus. The execution of a Nazareth carpenter would have been one of the most insignificant events conceivable among the movements of Roman history in those decades; it would have completely disappeared beneath the innumerable executions inflicted by Roman provincial authorities. For it to have been kept in any report would have been a most remarkable instance of chance. That the founder of Christianity was put to death under Tiberius by the procurator Pontius Pilate must have been discovered in the same archive which, according to Tertullian, also said the sun was darkened at midday when Jesus died. (2) The phrase "multitudo ingens" which means "a great number" is opposed to all that we know of the spread of the new faith in Rome at the time. A vast multitude in 64 A.D.? There were not more than a few thousand Christians 200 years later. (3) Death by fire was not a form of punishment inflicted at Rome in the time of Nero. It is opposed to the moderate principles on which the accused were then dealt with by the State. The use of the Christians as "living torches," as Tacitus describes, and all the other atrocities that were committed against them, have little title to credence, and suggest an

imagination exalted by reading stories of the later Christian martyrs. (4) The Roman authorities can have had no reason to inflict special punishment on the new faith. How could the non-initiated Romans know what were the concerns of a comparatively small religious sect, which was connected with Judaism and must have seemed to the impartial observer wholly identical with it. (5) Suetonius himself says that Nero showed the utmost indifference, even contempt in regard to religious sects. Even afterwards the Christians were not persecuted for their faith, but for political reasons, for their contempt of the Roman state and emperor, and as disturbers of the unity and peace of the empire. What reason, then can Nero have had to proceed against the Christians, hardly distinguishable from the Jews, as a new and criminal sect. (6) It is inconceivable that the followers of Jesus formed a community in the city at that time of sufficient importance to attract public attention and the ill-feeling of the people. (7) The victims could not have been given to the flames in the gardens of Nero, as Tacitus allegedly said. According to another account by Tacitus these gardens were the refuge of those whose homes had been burned and were full of tents and wooden sheds. It is hardly probable that Nero would have incurred the risk of a second fire by his living torches. (8) According to Tacitus, Nero was in Antium, not Rome, when the fire occurred. (9) The blood-curdling story about the frightful orgies of Nero reads like some Christian romance of the Dark Ages and not like Tacitus. Suetonius, while mercilessly condemning the reign of Nero, says that in his public entertainments Nero took particular care that no lives should be sacrificed, "not even those of condemned criminals." (10) It is highly unlikely that he mingled with the crowd and feasted his eyes on the ghastly spectacle. Tacitus tells us in his life of Agricola that Nero had crimes committed, but kept his own eyes off them. (11) Some authorities allege that the passage in Tacitus could not have been interpolated because his style of writing could not have been copied. But this argument is without merit since there is no "inimitable" style for the clever forger, and the more unusual, distinctive, and peculiar a style is, like that of Tacitus, the easier it is to imitate. Moreover, as far as the historicity of Jesus is concerned we are, perhaps, interested only in one sentence of the passage and that has nothing distinctively Tacitan about it. (12) Tacitus is assumed to have written this about 117 A.D., about 80 years after the death of Jesus, when Christianity was already an organized religion with a settled tradition. The gospels, or at least 3 of them, are supposed to have been in existence. Hence Tacitus might have derived his information about Jesus, if not directly from the gospels, indirectly from them by means of oral tradition. This is the view of Dupuis, who wrote: "Tacitus says what the legend said." In 117 A.D. Tacitus could only know about Christ by what reached him from Christian or intermediate circles. He merely reproduced rumors. (13) What does it matter whether or not Tacitus wrote this passage? He could only have received the information, a hundred years after the time, from people who had told it to others. It doesn't matter, therefore, whether or not the passage is genuine. (14) In no other part of his writings did Tacitus make the least allusion to "Christ" or "Christians." (15) Tacitus is also made to say that the Christians took their denomination from Christ which could apply to any of the so-called Christs who were put to death in Judea, including Christ Jesus. (16) The worshippers of the Sun-god Serapis were also called "Christians." Serapis or Osiris had a large following at Rome especially among the common people. (17) The expression "Christians" which Tacitus applies to the followers of Jesus, was by no means common in the time of Nero. Not a single Greek or Roman writer of the first century mentions the name. The Christians who called themselves Jessaeans, Nazoraeans, the Elect, the Saints, the Faithful, etc. were universally regarded as Jews. They observed the Mosaic law and the people could not distinguish them from the other Jews. The Greek word Christos (the anointed) for Messiah, and the derivative word, Christian, first came into use under Trajan in the time of Tacitus. Even then, however, the word Christos could not mean Jesus of Nazareth. All the Jews without exception looked forward to a Christos or Messiah. It is, therefore, not clear how the fact of being a "Christian" could, in the time of Nero or of Tacitus, distinguish the followers of Jesus from other believers in a Christos or Messiah. Not one of the gospels applies the name Christians to the followers of Jesus. It is never used in the New Testament as a

description of themselves by the believers in Jesus. (18) Most scholars admit that the works of Tacitus have not been preserved with any degree of fidelity. (19) This passage which could have served Christian writers better than any other writing of Tacitus, is not quoted by any of the Christian Fathers. It is not quoted by Tertullian, though he often quoted the works of Tacitus. Tertullian's arguments called for the use of this passage with so loud a voice that his omission of it, if it had really existed, amounted to a violent improbability. (20) Eusebius in the 4th century cited all the evidence of Christianity obtained from Jewish and pagan sources but makes no mention of Tacitus. (21) This passage is not quoted by Clement of Alexandria who at the beginning of the 3rd century set himself entirely to the work of adducing and bringing together all the admissions and recognitions which pagan authors had made of the existence of Christ Jesus or Christians before his time. (22) Origen in his controversy with Celsus would undoubtedly have used it had it existed. (23) There is no vestige or trace of this passage anywhere in the world before the 15th century. Its use as part of the evidences of the Christian religion is absolutely modern. Although no reference whatever is made to it by any writer or historian, monkish or otherwise, before the 15th century (1468 A.D.), after that time it is quoted or referred to in an endless list of works. (24) The fidelity of the passage rests entirely upon the fidelity of one individual (first published in a copy of the annals of Tacitus in the year 1468 by Johannes de Spire of Venice who took his imprint of it from a single manuscript) who would have every opportunity and inducement to insert such an interpolation. (25) In all the Roman records there was to be found no evidence that Christ was put to death by Pontius Pilate. If genuine, such a sentence would be the most important evidence in pagan literature. How could it have been overlooked for 1360 years? (26) And lastly, the style of the passage is not consistent with the usually mild and classic language of Tacitus.

Concluding Comments on the Existence of Jesus--What else, then, can be said about the historicity of Jesus? (1) Many writers, such as Renan, have attempted to write his biography but failed, failed because no materials for such a work exist. (2) If Jesus was an historical person, how is it that not only does the Talmud never mention him but Paul's Epistles do not tell a single special fact about the life of Jesus? Read the other Epistles of the NT. Nowhere in any of the early Christian documents do we find even the slenderest reference to the mere man Jesus, the historical personality as such, from which we might infer that the author had a close acquaintance with him. His life, as described in the gospels, seems to have been entirely unknown to the authors. His speeches and sayings are hardly ever quoted and where this is done, as in the Epistle of James or the Book of Acts, they are not quoted as sayings of Jesus. (3) What can Josephus or Tacitus prove? They could at the most merely show that at the end of the 1st century not only the Christians but their traditions and Christ-myth were known in Rome. When the latter originated, however, and how far it was based on truth, could not be discovered from Tacitus or Josephus. (4) And finally, it should be mentioned that some writers are notable for what they didn't say about Jesus: (a) Philo was born before the beginning of the Christian era and lived until long after the reputed death of Christ. He wrote an account of the Jews covering the entire time that Christ is said to have existed on earth. He was living in or near Jerusalem when Christ's miraculous birth and the Herodian massacre occurred. He was there when Christ made his triumphal entry in Jerusalem. He was there when the Crucifixion with its attendant earthquake, supernatural darkness, and resurrection of the dead took place--when Christ himself rose from the dead. Yet, these events were not mentioned by him. (b) Under the reign of Tiberius the whole earth, or at least a celebrated province of the Roman empire, was allegedly involved in a preternatural darkness of three hours. Yet, Seneca and Pliny the Elder, who recorded all the great earthquakes, meteors, comets, and eclipses they could find and who lived during the period of Jesus, failed to mention the event. (c) Justus of Tiberius was a native of Christ's own country, Galilee. He wrote a history covering the time of Christ's reputed existence. This work perished, but Photius, a Christian scholar and critic of the 9th century, was acquainted with it and said, "He

(Justus) makes not the least mention of the appearance of Christ, of what things happened to him, or of the wonderful works that he did" (Photius, Bibliotheca, Code 33).

Jesus and Other Gods--Christians contend all of the following pre-Christian sun-gods are mythological: Hercules, Osiris, Bacchus, Mithra, Hermes, Prometheus, Perseus, and Horus. Yet, all: (1) allegedly had gods for fathers and virgins for mothers; (2) had their births announced by stars and celestial music; (3) were born on the 25th of December (Solstice); (4) had tyrants trying to kill them when they were infants; (5) met with violent deaths; and (6) rose from the dead.

Why BE Exists--Nearly every time the editor of BE has appeared on the radio callers have asked two basic questions: Do you believe in God and why are you doing this? As these queries are undoubtedly of concern to some, they need to be addressed. With respect to the first, BE takes no position on the existence of God. It is not a topic with which we are involved. Possibly this means we are agnostics as some have alleged. If so, it's not a consciously thought out position but more one by default. Rationally analyzing a tangible writing that is clearly affecting the lives of millions is of much greater concern. The second question is generally answered in the following vein: Thousands of people throughout this Country are giving an essentially one-sided presentation of the Bible. People are hearing all the pros and none of the cons, all the positives and none of the negatives. As of now it's been a decidedly lop-sided affair. How can people rationally and objectively analyze anything when given only one side of the picture? Someone, somebody, some group needs to travel the land and give a more balanced description of the Bible. Someone needs to expose the negative aspects so a more sensible perspective is possible. BE tries to fill the void by teaching a kind of Sunday-School-in-Reverse, by telling people all the things they should have heard in Sunday School but didn't. Only via this strategy can a truly accurate assessment materialize. For millions to hear only one side of a story is dangerous, especially when religion or politics are involved. If, after hearing both points of view to an equal degree, they still wish to follow the Bible, then so be it. That's their decision to make. But attorneys for the plaintiff and the defendant should have their say before a judgment is rendered.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #109 from VT of Huron, California (Part a)

Dear Assistant Editor of BE. The challenge from Dennis McKinsey is to prove the point like an attorney in court. Heb. 11:1 ("Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen") is about all you are going to get as far as God's written Word is concerned.... this one verse and it alone is sufficient to prove the case.... How can I believe with perfect assurance?...Read the verses again if you have any doubt. (Heb. 11:3--"THROUGH FAITH we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things that were seen were not made of things that do appear?").... We can accept (lay hold on) or we can reject this declaration. This fact was a statement made, a declaration given. Perhaps no further PROOF will be given you. No additional declaration need be given.

Editor's Response to Letter #109 (Part a)

Dear VT. Surely you must realize you have failed to prove your point. How can faith be proof? You mean anything becomes true as long as I have faith that it's so? You mean that if I believe I'm omnipotent I really am? You mean that if I sincerely believe the god, Zeus, exists, then he really does? Remember, you said "faith is the evidence," the evidence of things not seen. That means faith, in effect, is proof. Faith, alone, is sufficient. To believe makes it true. The sky's the limit once you start down this road. In effect, anything anyone seriously believes becomes reality. The only limitation involved are the imaginations of millions. You said, "this one verse

and it alone is sufficient to prove the case." How have you proved your case like an attorney in court? If Heb. 11:1 "is about all you are going to get as far as God's written word is concerned," then you aren't going to get very far. You say the verses provide "perfect assurance" to those with doubt. I've read them many times and never had any doubt minimized. Your concluding comment that "no additional declaration need be given" means that the verse is true simply because the Bible says so. In other words, anything the Bible says, regardless of evidence to the contrary, which flies in the face of nearly every point made by BE over the last 3 years. You have chosen to ignore a veritable mountain of data showing the Bible is anything but inerrant. "My mind is made up, don't confuse me with the facts," comes into play when mere belief is taken as proof.

You said, "the fact was a statement made, a declaration given. Perhaps no further PROOF will be given you" and made two errors in the process. First, it's not a fact, it's a belief and there's a big difference. I've repeatedly argued this point with Mormons, Baptists, and others. They just can't seem to separate "fact" from "belief." They operate on the theory that believing something makes it so and fail to realize belief is not evidence. Mere assertions or statements in any book prove nothing. There is a real world out there that our thoughts and beliefs must conform to. It's not going to adapt to us; we must conform to it. We must learn its rules and regulations in order to survive; it's not going to learn ours. And to the extent that we ignore, fail to comprehend, or drift away from the real world, "out there," to that extent we enter the realm of neuroses, paranoidias, and other mental illnesses. To quote the famous psychiatrist, Dr. Carl Jung, "I have treated many hundreds of patients. Among those over 35, there has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life." Learning how the world operates and changing our behavior and beliefs accordingly is what science, logic, and rationality are all about. Second, your comment that "perhaps no further PROOF will be given you" begs the question. What PROOF? There is merely your belief that you have in your possession an inerrant book authored by a supreme being--a book replete with problems you choose to ignore. Is your need for something to believe in, something to hold on to, that strong, VT? Are you insecure? Judging from your letters you seem to be a decent, reasonably intelligent fellow. I would ask that you not put yourself in a position worthy of pity. With your abilities you don't need faith to lean on; you can do it yourself.

Letter #109 Continues (Part b)

Heb. 11:1--NOW FAITH is the substance of things.... We learn in this chapter that unbelief is the worst sin anyone can commit. God has a remedy for every sin except the state (sin) of unbelief.... Now many people don't find faith a very satisfactory way and feel like the little girl who, when asked to define faith, said, "Faith is believing what you know ain't so." They look at it like it is to take a leap in the dark.... When that is what it means to a person, they do not have faith, because faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen"--which means faith rests on a foundation.

Editor's Response to Letter #109 (Part b)

Where does the 11th chapter of Hebrews say unbelief is the worst sin anyone can commit, VT? I think you embellished the text somewhat. The only unpardonable sin I can think of is related in Matt. 12:32 which says, "...but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come" (See also: Luke 12:10). Faith isn't so much believing what you know ain't so as believing what you ain't proved. And until it's substantiated the only foundation involved is quicksand.

Letter #109 Concludes (Part c)

...In a very real sense faith is only the instrument through which we receive salvation. Christ saves and not something we do on our own. Yes, we certainly believe in works. But works is a product of salvation.... Salvation is a free gift. We can do nothing to purchase it. We receive it by FAITH. Works follows the believers. ...the Bible doesn't teach salvation by works.... The Bible does not attempt to prove God. The Bible is written to TEACH, INSTRUCT, AND ADMONISH. It is not a book of apologetics. The OT has Christ on most every page. Some see this and some cannot.

Editor's Response to Letter #109 (Part c)

(1) You say Christ saves and not something we do on our own. Yet, according to Christian ideology you must accept Jesus as your savior. Isn't that doing something? In fact, you are initiating the act of salvation. Jesus doesn't save you; you save yourself by accepting him. You caused the saving, not he. It isn't a gift but something you earned by your own act. (2) You say we can do nothing to purchase it; yet, precisely the opposite is true. You must purchase it by doing something. (3) You say works are a product of salvation. If so, then those claiming to have been saved are guilty of deception because they all continue sinning. I've never met one even close to perfection. (4) As shown in the 3rd Issue of BE your comment that the Bible does not teach salvation by works is diametrically opposed to many verses. You might want to read it. (5) I couldn't agree with you more that the Bible does not attempt to prove God. That's just the problem; it doesn't attempt to prove much of anything. Assertions are made and you either accept them or you don't. (6) And finally, people don't see Christ on most every page of the OT; they impose him on most every page. They start with the assumption he's there and proceed to distort verses as expediency dictates. You might want to read BE's discussion of messianic prophecies and those to come.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #110 from LG of Oxnard, California

Dear Dennis....I agree that the only way to confront fundamentalists and evangelists is to attack them directly at the source of their misguided beliefs. Trying to present scientific evidence to a group of people who don't have sufficient educational background is futile.

Letter #111 from BF of Louisa, Kentucky

Dear Dennis. In receipt of your Issue 32, excellent as always. Glad you are letting down the bars a bit in handling extra-biblical issues, such as alleged contemporary references to Jesus, etc. These areas do help us amateur BE activists. A bit of nitpicking on the last issue. Note correct spelling of Suetonius and on page 2, 2nd paragraph, line 6, freedmen, not singular; and quote mark needed on page 4, after "abolished," 4th line....

Editor's Response to Letter #111 Dear BF. Proofread as we may; sometimes they slip through.

Letter #112 form MN of Danvers, Illinois

Dear Dennis. As a reader of all 30 of your issues I want to congratulate you on a job well done. Although I have not always agreed with some of the points that you have made in individual arguments, I am in whole-hearted agreement with your strategy of confronting the biblical literalists with evidence from their own primary (really solitary) source. With that in mind, I would like to recommend to both you and your readers a book that I just recently purchased and read. It is entitled Beyond Fundamentalism by James Barr. The approach of this book is similar

to your in that Professor Barr is severely critical of biblical literalists and uses the scriptures themselves to point out the fallacies of the fundamentalist position. ...He cites two such cases which would be sufficient to completely undermine the fundamentalist claim for both the infallibility of the scriptures as well as the infallibility of Jesus himself. Both cases involve Jesus making errors when referring to what are now considered OT scriptures. The first is found in Mark 2:25-26 when Jesus relates a story from 1 Sam. 21:1-6. The story involves the high priest Ahimelech. But Jesus incorrectly calls the high priest Abiathar (who happens to have been Ahimelech's son). The second case can be found in Matt. 23:35 where Jesus is talking about the death of Zacharias as related in 2 Chron. 24:20-21. The only problem with Jesus' recounting of this story is that he mistakenly refers to Zacharias as the son the Barachias when he is really the son of Jehoida. Personally, I find these two easily-verified biblical errors especially powerful arguments against not only literalism but also the infallibility of both the scriptures and Jesus himself. There seems no way the fundamentalists can explain these discrepancies and also maintain their theological position regarding the nature of the Bible.

Editor's Response to Letter #112

Dear MN. You selected two good arguments one could present to defenders of the Bible. They are, indeed, potent and only two among scores available. It's important to note, however, that fundamentalists and literalists are not the only defenders of the Book. Religious liberals and others of like persuasion often extol its reliability through reliance upon a less direct approach. Finding Adam and Eve, six days of Creation, the Flood, Jonah's whale, and many other aspects of Scripture hard to swallow they tend to embellish and allegorize profusely by reading meanings into statements and events and relying heavily upon symbolism and figurative interpretations. Consequently, BE does not refer to apologists as fundamentalists or literalists. Many of the Book's staunchest supporters are in neither category. "Biblicists" is the preferred term because anyone defending the Bible or giving credence to its contents is covered, regardless of philosophical inclination.

Issue #34 Editor: Dennis McKinsey

Oct. 1985

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

COMMENTARY

Biblical Geography (An Historical Bible Atlas May Be Needed)--Biblical geography, like biblical science and math, has too many inaccuracies to be viewed as part of the inerrant word of a perfect being. One need only view relevant accurate maps of that era to see notable examples are not hard to find: (1) "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born king of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east,...." (Matt. 2:1-2). Since the wise men were east of Jesus, how could an eastern star or a star east of them tell them anything? (2) "Then

returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey" (Acts 1:12). The inaccuracy of this comment lies in the fact that Olivet, the Mount of Olives was just outside the wall of Jerusalem near the Temple, hardly a day's journey. (3) "And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim,...." (John 3:23). Nearly all critics agree there is no such place near salim. (4) "Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, through the region of the Decapolis" (Mark 7:31 RSV). The geographical knowledge of Mark's author is questionable in that it's hard to imagine going from Tyre to the Sea of Galilee by passing through Sidon, much less the region of Decapolis. Sidon is to the north of Tyre and the Sea of Galilee while Decapolis is to the south of Tyre and the Sea of Galilee. This assertion was made by Mark when there were no coasts of Decapolis, nor was the name so much as known before the reign of the emperor Nero. (5) "Again the devil taketh him up into an exceedingly high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world,...." (Matt. 4:8). How could anyone see the whole world from one spot, even the known world at that time? (6) "For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt" (Josh. 2:10) and "By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned" (Heb. 11:29) and "Pharoah's chariots and his host hath he cast into the sea: his chosen captains are also drowned in the Red Sea" (Ex. 15:4) and "But the Egyptians pursued after them, all the horses and chariots of the Pharoah, and his horsemen, and his army, and overtook them encamping by the sea, beside Pi-hahiroth, before Baal-zephon" (Ex. 4:9) and (Ex. 14:22). The Bible repeatedly says the Israelites crossed the Red Sea when they fled Egypt. Yet, they crossed at Baal-sephon which is more than 100 miles north of the Red Sea. If anything, they crossed the Gulf of Suez, although a map of the Exodus in Westminster's Historical Maps of Bible Lands shows them crossing even north of the Gulf of Suez near Lake Balah. (7) "And it came to pass that when Jesus had finished these sayings, he departed from Galilee, and came into the coasts of Judea beyond the Jordan" (Matt. 19:1). The Jordan River being the eastern boundary of Judea, no "coasts of Judea" existed beyond it. The coast of Judea is the Jordan. (8) "And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted and became into four heads. The name of the first is Pison: that is it which compasseth the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold;.... And the name of the second river is Gihon: the same is it that compasseth the whole land of Ethiopia and the name of the third river is Hiddehel; that is it which goeth toward the east of Assyria. And the fourth river is Euphrates" (Gen. 2:10-14). The geography of all this makes no sense. There is no Middle East river that divides and becomes the four rivers mentioned. (a) Havilah is a desert area southwest of Saudi Arabia, residing next to the Red Sea. There is no river encompassing the region. Indeed, one would be hard-pressed to find any river. (b) The Gihon river is apparently the Nile because it encompasses "the whole land of Ethiopia." Yet, the Nile is nowhere near the alleged location of the Garden of Eden. (c) This geographical presentation makes the Nile and the Euphrates branch from the same river. (d) It sounds as if Eden is the entire Middle East since Ethiopia and the Euphrates River are Linked together. (e) What river has ever left the Garden of Eden area and parted into four rivers? (9) "And they came over unto the other side of the sea, into the country of the Gadarenes (or Gerasenes or Gergesenes--Ed.)" (Mark 5:1). How could this occur? Gadara and Gerara are both miles from the sea. They do not border it. (10) "The same came therefore to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus" (John 12:21). Bethsaida is in Gaulonitis, not Galilee. (11) "And leaving Nazareth (on the western side of the Jordan--Ed.), he came and dwelt in Capernaum (also on the western side of the Jordan--Ed.), which is upon the sea coast in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim: That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet, saying, The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by way of the sea, beyond Jordan,...." (Matt. 4:13-15). Zebulon and Nephtali are not beyond the Jordan or across the Jordan. They are on the western side of the Jordan, not the eastern. Moreover, Capernaum is within the borders of Nephthalim but not those of Zebulon. (12) "These things were done in Bethabara beyond Jordan, where John was baptizing" (John 1:28). Contending that Bethabara is an interpolation, the scholar Geihie says, "The most ancient

manuscripts read Bethany instead of Bethabara, but no site of that name is now known on the Jordan." The RSV says "Bethany" not "Bethabara." Bethany was a suburb of Jerusalem and was not beyond the Jordan. (13) "Now when Jesus had heard that John was cast into prison, he departed into Galilee; and leaving Nazareth he came and dwelt in Capernaum,...." (Matt. 4:12-13). If this says Jesus left Nazareth and entered the province of Galilee to arrive in Capernaum, then the geography is poor. Nazareth is as much in Galilee as is Capernaum. If he left Nazareth and went to Capernaum, then he remained in Galilee, since that's the province in which both reside. (14) "And I answered, 'Who art thou, Lord?' And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest" (Acts 22:8). (a) "Why would he be called Jesus of Nazareth when he was born in Bethlehem, which is far from Nazareth? (b) The Jews had every right to reject Jesus as the Messiah since he said he was from Nazareth which is in Galilee. As Scripture says, "Shall Christ come out of Galilee? Hath not the scripture said, That Christ cometh of the seed of David and out of the town of Bethlehem (which is far south of Galilee--Ed.), where David was?" (15) "Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, as I promised to Moses, From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates...shall be your territory" (Josh. 1:3-4 RSV). Israelite territory has never extended to the Euphrates River.

Questions of Ask--From time to time we all have contacts with the Bible's supporters and a few well-chosen questions can often have significant influence. In order to avoid queries which are generally ineffective, the following are offered as those which seem to have some effect: (1) Why are we being punished for what Adam did and why must women bear children in pain because of what Eve did, especially in light of Deut. 24:16 and other verses? (2) How could Adam and Eve have sinned since they were made perfect? The usual reply that they had free will is of no substance. They can have all the free will desired, but if they chose to sin then they weren't perfect. (3) Christians claim that in order to be saved you must accept Jesus as your savior. If so, then how are babies who die in infancy, the mentally infirm, those who lived long before Jesus, and those who lived in the New World before missionaries arrived, saved, and how could God be just if he condemned people because of where or when they were born. Don't let them escape via Romans 1 and 2. Belief in God and good works does not save. Only belief in Jesus. If belief in God and inherently knowing the good is all that's required, then many non-Christians are included. (4) How could Noah (Gen. 6:9) and Job (Job 1:1) have been perfect if all have sinned (Rom. 3:23)? (5) How could Paul have said we are saved through faith in Jesus when Jesus himself repeatedly said good works are the prerequisite? (6) Ask people if they believe. The answer is nearly always yes. Then ask if they would be willing to drink arsenic or handle deadly snakes since Mark 16:18 says, those who believe shall take up serpents and drink any deadly thing with impunity. (7) How can Num. 23:19 and 1 Sam. 15:29, which say God does not repent be reconciled with Ex. 32:14 and 1 Sam. 15:35 which say he does? (8) How can Ex. 33:20 and John 1:18 which say no one has seen God's face be reconciled with Gen. 32:30 and Ex. 33:11 which say the opposite? (9) How can the Resurrection be of such importance when many others rose before Jesus? (10) How can Jesus be our perfect savior when he made many false and deceptive statements? John 7:8-10 (going to the feast), Luke 23:43 (with me in paradise today), Matt. 5:22 (ye fools), and Mark 8:34 (take up a non-existent cross) are good ones to use (Note also the Commentaries in Issues 2, 24, 25, 27, and 28) (11) How can the Bible be the epitome of morality and virtue when it used profanity such as that found in 2 Kings 18:27, Ezek. 23:20-21, and Song Sol. 5:4. (12) How can the various accounts of the Resurrection be reconciled? (13) Ask women how they can support the Bible in light of the demeaning status accorded them in 1 Cor. 11:3,9, Eph. 5:22-24, and other appropriate verses. (14) And how can Jesus, who is allegedly God, talk to God the Father and yet only one God exists? Don't let biblicists escape with the rationalization that there is only one God but three persons. All of the above are good opening questions and should have some effect on most respondents.

Who Killed Jesus?--For nearly 2,000 years many Christians have held Jews responsible for the death of Jesus. Ironically, they fail to realize that if their assertion is true they have proved Jesus to be a false prophet because he twice prophesied his death at the hands of Gentiles, not Jews. They need only read Mark 10:33-34 ("And they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles. And they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him:....") and Matt. 20:19 ("And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him:....") to see they have refuted their own leader. Who, then, did kill Jesus according to the NT? Well, that depends on which gospel you are reading and in John's case, which verse. Since the narratives are too long to quote verbatim a synopsis of each is appropriate. Matthew says Roman soldiers aided by the multitude with some support from the chief priests, scribes, and elders were responsible (Matt. 27:24-44). Mark attributes his death to Roman soldiers aided by some chief priests directing the people and some scribes (Mark 15:11-31). Luke says the multitude, some chief priests, rulers, and soldiers were all involved (Luke 23:1-37). John (verses 19:15-18) is the only gospel clearly saying the Jews (the chief priests) crucified him ("Pilate saith unto them, shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar. Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led him away...) to Golgotha--Ed.) where they crucified him"). Yet, five verses later (#23) John says Roman soldiers were responsible ("Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus..."). No doubt Peter and Paul contributed to the confusion and helped generate anti-Semitic sentiment through such comments as those found in Acts 10:39)"And we are witnesses to all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree") and 1 Thess. 2:14-15 ("...even as they have of the Jews: Who killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets") respectively. Majority vote would hold that Jesus was killed by Roman soldiers working in conjunction with some scribes and Jewish priests leading a multitude.

A Suggested Study Program--From time to time we are asked how one should study and analyze the Bible. Good Question! In order to criticize any writing one must first read it and in order to criticize effectively one must know the contents well. Unfortunately, the Shakespearian English of the most widely accepted version, the King James, ranges from difficult to incomprehensible in far too many instances. People understandably become discouraged while trying to plow through all those "begats" in Genesis. Years ago we surmounted this obstacle by buying three key books--The Layman's Parallel Bible, Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, and Westminster's small booklet entitled Historical Maps of Bible Lands. The first contains four major versions of the Bible--the King James, the Revised Standard, the Modern Language, and the Living Bible--in parallel columns. A newer version is less reliable because the NIV replaced the Modern Language. The following procedure was found to be quite effective and is offered to anyone interested. Pick up the Layman's Parallel Bible and begin reading the KJV, the most difficult but the most important version. If the text is obscure, then read the Revised Standard which is clearer but not as widely accepted. Unfortunately, the RSV is in the 4th column and should be in the 2nd. If the text is still vague, then read the Modern Language which is even clearer and more modernistic but farther from the King James. Unfortunately, the Modern Language is in the 2nd column and should be in the 3rd. If all else fails, turn to the least reliable but easiest to read version, the Living Bible, which isn't really a version but a poor paraphrase. Start at Gen. 1:1 and read to the end of Revelation. No doubt months will be involved but that's what is needed. Read for yourself and don't consult commentaries and other works which tell you how to view the narrative. Approaching the Bible with an uncluttered, unindoctrinated outlook devoid of pre-conceptions and expectations is of first magnitude in importance. Indeed, it's the key to effective critical analysis. Once the Book has been sufficiently mastered, commentaries and other apologetic works, which are nearly always nothing more than rationalizations, justifications, and obfuscations, can be viewed in proper perspective and effectively dealt with. It's important to observe the Bible through your own eyes, not those of others. One should not only devise an

effective mechanism by which to read the Bible but create a system by which verses, data, and comments can be quickly retrieved for comparison with other parts of the Book. That's mandatory. Reading the Bible is of little use if verses cannot be recalled for comparison and analysis. That's where Strong's Exhaustive Concordance comes in. The key word is "exhaustive." Strong took every word in the KJV of the Bible and listed all the verses containing that word. So, one need only remember one word in any verse to find that verse. Remembering an entire verse is difficult but many can recall at least one word; and that's all that's needed. It provides one of the best, if not the best method, by which to arrange and retrieve biblical information in a systematic and orderly fashion. With an exhaustive concordance you can classify relevant biblical data without having to remember the Bible verbatim. With an exhaustive concordance, the Layman's Parallel Bible, a thin red ink pen for marking-up the latter, and a small booklet of biblical maps such as Westminster's Historical Maps of Bible Lands, one is ready to read, analyze, compare, and arrange the entire Book in a meaningful manner. The Editor of BE found this method to be highly effective. Hopefully others will obtain similar results.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #113 from RM of Annapolis, Maryland (Part a)

Dear Dennis.... The two errors made by Jesus in Mark 2:25-26 (Jesus calls the high priest Abiathar--Ed.) vs. 1 Sam. 21:1-6 (The high priest is actually Ahimelech--Ed.) and Matt. 23:35 (Jesus calls Zacharias the son of Barachias--Ed.) vs. 2 Chron. 24:20-21 (Zacharias is actually the son of Jehoida--Ed.) are not powerful arguments against scriptural infallibility as expressed by MN in Letter #112, Issue 33 but rather support the Bible's accuracy. After all, if Jesus walked this earth as a man, he would also error as a man. However, if Jesus is sinless, then it must be a sin to error.

Editor's Response to Letter #113 (Part a)

Dear RM. Three aspects of your analysis merit comment. First, your opening statement is a virtual admission that Jesus erred. Remember, Jesus is both God and man simultaneously, the God/man, and unlike all other men is perfect. How can a perfect being be mistaken as to facts? How do you know what he says is true if you once admit some of his comments are false? It's the same problem you have with the Bible itself. How do you know what's true if you admit certain parts are false? On that point the fundamentalists are correct. If you once admit that a comment by Jesus or the Bible is fallacious, the entire structure is brought into question. That's why firm believers defend every jot and tittle with such tenacity. The founder of Methodism, John Wesley, was correct when he said, "If there be any mistakes in the Bible, there may as well be a thousand. If there be one falsehood in the Book it did not come from the God of truth." Second, you said that "the two errors made by Jesus...support the Bible's accuracy." How's that again! You'll have to talk long and hard to explain that one, RM. The Book has two significant errors which you don't deny. And that proves its accuracy? Third, what has sinlessness to do with the issue? We are discussing the much broader topic of perfection. Was Jesus perfect? Is the Bible inerrant? You ask, "after all, if Jesus walked this earth as a man, he would also err as a man." According to theology Jesus was a perfect being. So how could he have erred? You state that "if Jesus is sinless then it must not be a sin to err" which is another way of saying that Jesus does not sin but Jesus erred; therefore, his erring does not mean he is sinning. Yes, but it would mean he was imperfect and that's what we are discussing. Surely you aren't saying sinlessness is the same as perfection in all areas, many of which have nothing to do with morality? An interesting corollary to this whole issue is how Jesus can be perfect in light of Matt. 19:17 ("And he, Jesus, said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is God"),

John 14:28 ("...for my Father is greater than I"), and Luke 13:32 ("...and the third day I shall be perfected") which clearly show Jesus viewed himself as less than perfect.

Letter #113 Concludes (Part b)

BE issue #33, page 2, just before (18), states, "It (the name Christian) is never used in the New Testament as a description of themselves by the believers in Jesus." Surely the writer of Acts was a believer, and Acts 11:26 states, "And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." Acts 27:28 says, "Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." Paul then says that he wished everyone was of such as he. In 1 Peter 4:11-16, the text is about Jesus Christ. In verse 16, it states that god is glorified by the suffering of Christians. Surely the writer is a believer in Jesus.

Editor's Response to Letter #113 (Part b)

With all due respect, RM, I don't think you closely read what I said, namely, "Not one of the gospels applies the name Christian to the followers of Jesus. It is never used in the New Testament as a description of themselves by the believers in Jesus." The key phrase has been underlined. Apparently you consulted a concordance and looked up every biblical verse containing the words "Christian" and "Christians." We both know the KJV has only three such verses, none of which are in the gospels: Acts 11:26, 1 Peter 4:11-16, and Acts 26:28, which you incorrectly listed as Acts 27:28. I don't think you closely read the verses either, RM. Acts 11:26 says, "And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch." "Were called!" Called by

others. Where does it say they called themselves Christians? Acts 26:28 says, "Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian." Agrippa wasn't a follower or believer in Jesus. Moreover, "themselves" is plural while Agrippa is one person. And lastly, 1 Peter 3:16 says, "yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed. Where in this verse do the followers of Jesus refer to themselves as Christians? Even if a man were suffering as a Christian, that does not necessarily mean he is referring to himself as a Christian. It could very easily be a title or, even, epithet applied by others. If we assume this is a title applied by the author of 1 Peter and grant your assumption that he was a believer in Jesus, the fact remains that he was only one man.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #114 from John Sikos, P.O. Box 443, Romeo, Michigan 48065-0443

Dear Dennis.... I am currently arguing with a baptist preacher from Romeo and I am saying that the Bible claims Saturday is the true and correct Sabbath. You seem to agree with me on page 2 of Issue #18. This baptist brings up Rom. 14:5 ("One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind," for his side (as I expected). If you could help me, I'd appreciate it!

Editor's Response to Letter #114

Dear John. That's one of their favorite verses, although it flies in the face of a mountain of evidence to the contrary. There is nothing in scripture to justify changing the sabbath from Saturday to Sunday. The Bible only refers to Sunday, the first day of the week, 8 times and none of these have anything to do with making Sunday the sabbath. By allowing anyone to determine for himself when the sabbath should be honored, Paul, in effect, rewrote part of the OT which clearly and repeatedly says Saturday is the sabbath. If your baptist friend is going to rely on

Rom. 14:5, then you might ask him if an individual can pick any day of the week as his sabbath. If he says he can then you might ask how this is honoring the sabbath. All that individual is honoring is a sabbath or, to be more precise, a day which he chooses to call the sabbath. You might also look up the word "sabbath" in your concordance and note every verse showing Saturday, the 7th day, and not Sunday, the first day, is the sabbath. Show them to him and if he remains unconvinced, use my itemized refutation of the main "Sunday verses" on page 2 of the 18th issue. If he is still unpersuaded, then wait for my discussion of Paul, the Deceptive Disciple in some future issues and a far more extensive listing of the reasons Sunday can't be the sabbath. In the meantime you might consult some Seventh-Day Adventist literature. Probably no organization has studied this issue more closely than the Seventh-Day Adventist Church and the Adventists have issued some excellent free pamphlets on the topic. You could read them while waiting. I wouldn't recommend much else of theirs, however.

Letter #115 from MR of Richmond, Virginia

Dear Dennis. My daughter...teaches Sunday School where there are several millionaires sitting with us in class. She has lost her faith in this "religion of any kind" since reading my copies of BE, but still teaches once a month. She does a good job of it too as she points out things here and there from your paper. I am saving all my BE papers to keep for all my friends and relatives to read as I keep them on the table in full view. I take them with me at times. I agree with you 100% and just wish I could have read this stuff fifty years ago. Keep up the good work. I'm doing what I can to spread this truth. I was so glad to hear you on our WRVA talk show but I lost faith in religion at least a year before I heard you.... A lot of European countries have found out that religion is a fake and an anesthesia for the masses. People in power can control the religious groups. Keep them poor.

Editor's Response to Letter #115

Dear MR. Letters such as yours warm the cockles of my heart. Knowing I'm reaching people is a great motivator. Sometimes one gets weary climbing a mountain and your comments provide a welcome boost. If the class continues, I hope your daughter remains the teacher. It's better she do it than someone less enlightened.

Letter #116 form PA of Santa Rosa, California

Dear Dennis. I have been doing some study on the 10 commandments and the teachings of Jesus. Even though he says man is to keep the commandments, he himself seems to have violated most of them and taught others to do as well. According to Matt. 5:19 Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, says anyone teaching against or breaking the commandments is bad; yet, Jesus did not follow his own advice. #1 (Ex. 20:3)--Thou shalt have no gods before me. Jesus put himself before god when he said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me" (John 14:6). See also John 6:44 where "no man can come to Jesus except the Father draw him"). #4 (Ex. 20:8)--Remember the sabbath day to keep it holy. Jesus and his disciples plucked and ate corn on the sabbath and Jesus said, "The sabbath was made for men and not men for the sabbath" (Mark 2:23-28). #5 (Ex. 20:12)--Honor your father and mother. Jesus told others to honor their father and mother to gain eternal life (Mark 10:17-22) and yet to be a disciple of Jesus a person must violate this commandment according to Luke 14:26. #7 (Ex. 20:14)--Thou shalt not commit adultery. In the OT anyone guilty of adultery was condemned to death and when a woman taken in adultery was brought to Jesus he let her go without condemning her even though she did not repent and ask forgiveness (John 8:3-11). #8 (Ex. 20:15)--Thou shalt not steal. Jesus taught a parable about a man who found a treasure in someone else's field and rather than tell the owner about it, he hid it and bought the field (Matt. 13:44). This seems like stealing

to me. #9 (Ex. 20:16)--Thou shalt not bear false witness (lie). In John 7:8-10 Jesus said he wasn't going to the feast and then as soon as the others left, he went to the feast in secret. #10 (Ex. 20:17)--Thou shalt not covet. Jesus taught a parable about a merchant who saw a pearl and coveted it so much that he sold all he had and bought it (Matt. 13:45-46)l. This is a quick history of a few violations....

Issue #35 Editor: Dennis McKinsey

Nov. 1985

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

COMMENTARY

Prophecy (Part One of a Four Part Series)--The Commentaries in Issues 3 and 10 discussed a topic near and dear to the heart of most believers in the Bible, namely, prophecy. Biblicists rely heavily upon the alleged perspicacity contained therein to demonstrate the Book's divine origin and reliability, while discounting evidence to the contrary. In light of the immense importance many attach to this subject, a concluding in-depth analysis is warranted. For our purposes, biblical prophecies can be grouped into three broad categories: (1) those which were incorrectly fulfilled, i.e., fulfilled in a manner different from that predicted; (2) those which have never occurred (a group too large to discuss in toto), and (3) NT references to non-existent OT prophecies. A critique of all three should begin with the third category as it is the smallest and most easily covered: (1) "As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, 'Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, who shall prepare thy way' (Mark 1:2 RSV)." There is no such prophecy in Isaiah. (2) "And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, 'He shall be called a Nazarene (Matt. 2:23)." As was noted on page 3 of the 3rd Issue, "He shall be called a Nazarene does not exist in the OT. There is no such prophecy." Judges 13:5 ("For, lo, thou shalt conceive and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb") is not applicable because: (a) A Nazarite was not identical to an inhabitant of Nazareth; (b) Acts 24:5 ("...a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes") shows that a Nazarene was actually a member of a sect, not a resident of Nazareth; (c) and the man referred to was Samson, not Jesus. Moreover, Jesus was never called a Nazarene. (3) "then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value; And gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me (Matt. 27:9-10)." There is no such statement in the Book of Jeremiah. Jeremiah 32:8-9 ("...Then I knew that this was the word of the Lord. And I bought the field of Hanameel my uncle's son, that was in Anatoth, and weighed him the money, even seventeen shekels of silver") doesn't apply because: (a) Matthew says 30 pieces of silver were involved while Jeremiah says 17 shekels of silver; (b) Jer. 32:9 says Jeremiah alone bought the field, while Matthew says "they" bought the field, and (c) Matthew is discussing blood money that was not approved by God or allowed in the treasury (Matt. 27:5-8), while that in Jeremiah was approved by God (Jer. 32:8, 14-15).

The second major category is composed of those prophecies which were incorrectly fulfilled: (1) "And he (God--Ed.) said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them 400 years" (Gen. 15:13) and "God spake on this wise, That his seed should sojourn in a strange land; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat them evil 400 years" (Acts 7:6) versus "Now the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, was 430 years" (Ex. 12:40). According to prophecy the Israelites were to be in bondage for 400 years, not 430. (2) "And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him saying,....And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession...." (Gen. 17:3, 8) and "For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever" (Gen. 13:15) and (Ex. 32:13) versus "And he (God--Ed.) gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his (Abraham's--Ed.) foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to his for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child" (Acts 7:5) and "These (Abraham's descendants--Ed.) all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off...." (Heb. 11:13). Neither Abraham nor his descendants ever received the land that was promised. The prophecy failed. (3) "Behold therefore, I will gather thee unto thy fathers, and thou shalt be gathered into thy graves in peace" (2 Kings 22:20). The prophetess, Huldah, predicted that Josiah would die in peace. Yet, 2 Kings 23:29-30 ("In his days Paraoah-nechoh king of Egypt went up against the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates; and King Josiah went against him; and he slew him at Megiddo, when he had seen him. And his servants carried him in a chariot dead from Megiddo, and brought him to Jerusalem and buried him....And the people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah, and anointed him, and made him king in his father's stead") shows this didn't occur. (4) "All the men who set their faces to go to Egypt to live there shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence; they shall have no remnant or survivor to live in Egypt. In Alexandria they established a cultural center in the 1st century A.D. (5) "...thou (the city of Tyre--Ed.) shalt be built no more...." (Ezek. 26:14) and "For thus saith the Lord God; When I shall make thee (Tyre--Ed.) a desolate city like the cities that are not inhabited; when I shall bring up the deep upon thee and great waters shall cover thee;....and shall set thee in the low parts of the earth,...that thou be not inhabited;....I will make thee a terror, and thou shalt be no more: though thou be sought for, yet shalt thou never be found again,...." (Ezek. 26:19-21) and "The merchants among the people shall hiss at thee (Tyre--Ed.), thou shalt be a terror, and never shalt be any more" (Ezek. 27:36) and (Ezek. 28:19). In other words, Tyre will be destroyed and never rebuilt. But, as the following verses show, Tyre existed throughout NT times and still exists today. "And from thence he arose, and went into the borders of Tyre and Sidon,...." (Mark 7:24) and "And again, departing from the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, he came unto the sea of Galilee,...." (Mark 7:31) and "Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon..." (Acts 12:20) and (Acts 21:3, 7, Matt. 15:21, 3:8). (6) "And of Naphtali he said, O Naphtali, satisfied with favour, and full with the blessing of the Lord; possess thou the west and the south" (Deut. 33:23). Naphtali received a district in the north of Palestine but none in the south or west. (7) "...and thou (Abraham--Ed.) shalt be a father of many nations" (Gen. 17:4). Only 4 nations appear to have descended from Abraham: the Jews, Ishmaelites, Midianites, and Edomites. (8) "And Joshua burnt Ai, and made it an heap for ever, even a desolation unto this day" (Joshua 8:28). People live at Ai now and continued to live there after the prophecy. As Nehemiah said, "The men of Bethel and Ai, an one hundred and twenty three" (Neh. 7:32). (9) "Thus saith the Lord, Write ye this man (Coniah--Ed.) childless, a man that shall not prosper in his day: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David and ruling any more in Judah" (Jer. 22:20) versus "And Josias begat Jechonias (Coniah--Ed.)" (Matt. 1:11 in the genealogy of Jesus) and "He (Jesus--Ed.) shall be great, and shall be called the son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David:..." (Luke 1:32). According to the prophecy in Jer. 22:30 Coniah would have no descendants sitting upon the throne of David and ruling in Judah. Jesus was a descendant of Coniah according to Matt. 1:11 and will eventually sit upon the throne of David according to Luke 1:32. The moment Jesus sits upon the throne of

David, the prophecy in Jer. 22:30 will become false. (10) "Therefore wild beasts shall dwell with hyenas in Babylon, and ostriches shall dwell in her: she shall be peopled no more for ever, nor inhabited for all generations. As when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighbor cities, says the Lord, so no man shall dwell there, and no son of man shall sojourn in her" (Jer. 50:39-40) and "Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all. And the voice of harpers, and musicians...shall be heard no more at all in thee; and no craftsman...shall be found any more in thee..." (Rev. 18:21-22). The destruction of Babylon was prophesied in both the OT and the NT. Yet, at no time has Babylon been uninhabited. People lived there during NT times, (Matt. 1:11, 12, 17, Acts 7:43, 1 Peter 5:13) and continue to do so today. Moreover, hyenas and ostriches have never been the dominant inhabitants of Babylon. (11) "For thus saith the Lord; David shall never want a man to sit upon the throne of the house of Israel;...." (Jer. 33:17) and "...I have sworn unto David my servant, Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations" (Psalm 89:3-4) and "Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David. His seed shall endure for ever and his throne as the sun before me. I shall be established for ever as the moon, and as a faithful witness in heaven" (Psalm 89:35-37, 1 Chron. 17:12, 14) and (2 Sam. 7:13, 16). God said there would always be a Davidic king. Yet, the Davidic line ended with Zedekiah; there was no Jewish (Davidic) king for 450 years. Not until the Hasmoneans (Maccabeans) established a new dynasty with their King Aristobulus, was the Davidic line restored. Since the end of the Hasmonean dynasty there has never been a king of the Jews. No descendant of David is now ruling in the Middle East.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #117 from VT of Huron, California

(Part 2 in last month's Commentary quoted Acts 1:12 ("Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey") and then, said, "The inaccuracy of this comment lies in the fact that Olivet, the mount of Olives was just outside the wall of Jerusalem near the Temple, hardly a day's journey"--Ed.). Greetings; I'm not going to comment on all the points under Biblical Geography. In my small library there are some two or three books that cover most all the subject matter in Issue No. 34. For a quickie I'll comment on (2) Acts 1:12. Any good COMMENTARY will explain "A Sabbath Day's Journey...." It was less than one mile. Dr. Howard Hanke in his book Bible Survey states it was some 2,000 cubits or about 2/3 of a mile!... The Sabbath Day law was in the rabbinical ordinance. It just possibly had its origin in the MOSAIC PERIOD, when the Israelites were not to leave camp to gather manna on the sabbath. Anyone could travel from Jerusalem to the mount called Olivet without breaking this ordinance.... You see there is a very logical answer to the statement regarding the SABBATH DAY'S JOURNEY...Perhaps you need to let your readers know of your error at this point. Most all of your statements can be answered by just about anyone who would take the time and the effort to check with most any good commentary....I will concede that when a person is really not interested in TRUTH so much as they are of CONTROVERSY, they will not listen or take time to understand. (At this point VT proceeded to denounce secular humanism--Ed.).

Editor's Response to Letter #117

Greethings VT. If your're correct, then, there aren't very many good Commentaries around because I checked eleven of the most prominent and only 4 even discussed the problem. Wycliffe, Wesleyan, and Jamiseson-Fausset said a Sabbath Day's Journey is 2,000 cubits or 3,000 feet while Clarke said it's 7 1/2 furlongs. Yet, none of the four cited a Jewish source to substantiate their position. Clarke quoted Book 20, Capter 8, Sec. 6 in the Jewish Antiquities of Josephus to the effect that the Mount of Olives "lay over against the city and at the distance of

five furlongs" which proves nothing. You stated the "Sabbath Day law was in the rabbinical ordinance." Could you provide chapter and verse. I consulted the Socino Edition of the Talmud and couldn't find any rabbinic ordinance or rule clearly stating a Sabbath Day's Journey is 2,000 cubits. Jewish sommentators in the Erubin and Pesahim of the Talmud refer to a tradition of 2,000 cubits, but can you relate an actual ordinance to that effect? I know of none, but I could have overlooked it. If you can provide an ordinance from the Mishnah, as opposed to opinions and beliefs from the Gemara (a Jewish commentary), I'd withdraw section 2 from last month's Commentary. Your evidence, however, must come from a Jewish source. From experience I've concluded that Christian commentaries are primarily rationalizations permeated with dishonest scholarship. Keep in mind that we are relying on extra-biblical information to determine the length of a Sabbath Day's Journey. The latter is mentioned only once in the entire Bible and nowhere is a definition given. Since the problem under discussion is found in the Book of Acts, Christians, not Jews, are obligated to provide an explanation. And in order to resolve dilemmas of this nature they have often relied upon the time-honored technique of referring to some extra-biblical writing they claim exists to prove their point. Can you cite one rabbinic ordinance that specifically states a Sabbath Day's Journey is 2,000 cubits long? Self-serving apologetic commentaries aren't sufficient, if, indeed, they are anything. The source must be original, not second hand or hearsay. Incidentally, VT, truth has a much higher priority at BE than controversy. Indeed, it's regretable the latter is mandatory. Unfortunately, winning battles requires firing bullets, And while we are on the topic of truth, would you please not insert three dots (...) randomly throughout your letters since reprinting gives readers the impression parts of your material are being omitted when there is nothing there. I'd also like to hear from those two or three books in your library.

Letter #118 from Ken Bonnell of Los Angeles, California (Part a)

Dear Dennis. Regarding "Biblical Geography" you err in item 2. "A Sabbath

Day's Journey" is not the distance a person can go in one day, but that walk which is permitted on the sabbath without violation of the commandment to rest on that day. It is quite short, almost 1,000 yards. (Ref. Webster's "Unabridged" Dictionary)

Editor's Response to Letter #118 (Part a)

Dear Ken. Webster probably got his information from Christian commentaries. In any event, you might note my prior response to VT.

Letter #118 Continues (Part b)

(Part 4 in last month's Commentary quoted Mark 7:31 RSV ("Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went through Sidon to the Sea of Galilee, through the region of the Decapolis") and said "...its hard to imagine someone going from Tyre to the Sea of Galilee by passing through Sidon, much less the region of the Decapolis.... This assertion was made when there were no coasts of Decapolis,...."--Ed.). The RSV translators screwed up about Jesus' journey into pagan territory.... Your criticism of the word "coasts" refers, of course, to the KJV, and you're right there. In the trip to Lebanon, Jesus is following the example of Elijah (1 Kings 17), and his "Syrophoenician" woman is a "Zarephathian."

Editor's Response to Letter #118 (Part b)

Although we disagree on one point Ken you are to be thanked for noticing a discrepancy. In regard to the former, how was the journey of Jesus a repetition of that of Elijah in 1 Kings 17?

Elijah went from Gilead to the brook Cherith to Zarephath while Jesus went from Tyre to Sidon to the Sea of Galilee. They not only went in opposite directions but weren't even in the same area except for Elijah's trip to Zarephath. The discrepancy you noticed lies in the fact that I should have quoted the KJV rather than the RSV because the word "coasts" only appears in the former. My original criticism was that there were no coasts of Decapolis. Incidentally, you mentioned 1 Kings 17 which has a geographical error that could have been discussed in last month's Commentary. Verse 3 in the RSV says "Depart from here and turn eastward, and hide yourself by the brook Cherith, that is east of the Jordan." The Standard Bible Atlas (1959) of the Standard Publishing Company and Boardman's Atlas clearly show the brook Cherith is west of the Jordan just north of the Dead Sea.

Letter #118 Continues (Part c)

(Part 8 in last month's Commentary quoted Gen. 2:10-14 to the effect that a Middle East river divides into the four rivers mentioned--Ed.). Four rivers do have their sources close to each other in the Anatolian highlands of Turkey: The Euphrates; the Tigris--the biblical Hiddekel; the Kizil, probably the biblical Pison, which empties into the Black Sea on the shore of Colchis where Jason found the Golden Fleece; the Arak river borders the Caucasus which is probably the "land of Kush" which the translators have confused with Ethiopia here (Gen. 2:13). The Arak was Gihon.

Editor's Response to Letter #118 (Part c)

To say that I am dismayed at your analysis, Ken, is an understatement. The degree to which it deviates from what I have come to expect from your letters is considerable. Apparently you have accepted some kind of apologetic literature and the concomitant errors. First, Gen. 2:10-14 says a river went out of Eden and divided into four rivers which has nothing to do with four rivers having their sources close to each other. Some of the rivers you mention have their source in the same general region, but what has that to do with emerging from the same river? Second, you state one was "the Kizil, probably the biblical Pison, which empties into the Black Sea on the shore of Colchis where Jason found the Golden Fleece." Upon what basis do you equate the two? Not only does "probably" imply you are unsure, but the text states the Pison river encompasses Havilah, an area in present-day Saudi Arabia and far from the Anatolian Highlands. What river has ever flowed through Saudi Arabia and emptied into the Black Sea? Moreover, the Kizil river doesn't empty into the Black Sea in or near Colchis but much farther east. Jason and the Golden Fleece? Now we are really into mythology. Third, how could you possibly conclude "the Caucasus was probably the land of Kush which the translators have confused with Ethiopia? Every map I've ever seen has shown Kush to be the ancient name of Ethiopia. Visualizing any connection with the Caucasus is a real challenge, since they are well over a thousand miles apart. By using the word "probably" you must admit you're speculating. If translators mistakingly called Ethiopia, rather than the Caucasus, the "land of Kush," then there are literally hundreds of confused scholars out there, because the KJ, the RS, the Modern Language, and many other versions equate Ethiopia with Kush, as do scores of cartographers.

Letter #118 Concludes (Part d)

Now back to Matt. 28:1. It's KJV contains an internal contradiction. Can your readers find it!

Editor's Response to Letter #118 (Part d)

I may be wrong, Ken, but let me guess. Matt. 28:1 (KJV) says, "In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week,...." The sabbath, like all Jewish days, runs from

sundown to sundown. How, then, could it begin to dawn, how could morning begin at the end of the sabbath? You can tell me if I've erred; my feelings have adjusted over time.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #119 from Mark Potts, 8510-A, East 66th Place S., Tulsa, Oklahoma 74133

(Part a) Dear Dennis. I got the Oct. issue of BE recently and I want to discuss a few technical points with you....(After mentioning a possible error associated with a Sabbath Day's Journey which has already been covered, Mark continues--Ed.). Secondly, I'd like to see a fuller development of your objection to Rom. 1 and 2 as an answer to the question of what happens to people who never hear about Jesus, which I call the Pagan Problem. I've read this difficult passage very carefully in several versions, and nowhere does Paul explicitly say that ignorant Pagans get "saved" by believing in God and obeying morals. Rather, Paul asserts that pagans are "without excuse" (1:20) regarding knowledge of God, and that the (Jewish) law is "written in their hearts" (2:15). So the pagans apparently know about God and morality, but where does it say they can enter simply by being nice? Paul's explanation is like saying you know you have a certain disease (sin), but don't know that a cure (salvation) exists. Rom. 2:6-10 might be stretched to mean that pagans who unwittingly lead good lives get saved, but how could a baby, a paralytic, or a quadruple amputee perform good works under unevangelized conditions?

Editor's Response to Letter #119 (Part a)

You have covered the topic quite well, Mark, and focused upon the key phrase (without excuse." I would make only one modification. Apologists seem to be saying Paul is contending you have a disease (sin) and have been provided with a cure you can choose to employ. But they neglect to mention it isn't Jesus. As I read Rem. 1:18-20 Paul is only saying God and his characteristics can be learned from nature and things around us so that those who claim not to know God or right from wrong are "without excuse." I doesn't say that is sufficient. Apparently you agree.

Letter #119 Continues (Part b)

Thirdly, I have a minor problem to pass along. In Rom. 14:14 Paul with his usual bombast declares, "I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean." Here Paul not only contradicts numerous assertions about uncleanness in the OT, but also conflicts with his other assertion in Eph. 5:5 that "no...unclean person...hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God." Nothing is inherently unclean, Paul says, yet he doesn't hesitate to label other people unclean.

Editor's Response to Letter #119 (Part b)

You might encounter some trouble with this one, Mark. Rom. 14:14 says nothing is unclean of itself. Apologists could allege that of itself mean inherently; that doesn't mean people can't become unclean later. You have to anticipate their response to avoid being embarrassed.

Letter #119 Concludes (Part c)

A friend of mine says Christians have "the peace that preventeth all understanding." Perhaps you could devote an issue of BE to finding the right buttons to push when you are debating with an

obtuse biblicist. It's not enough to know the right questions to ask and the right verses to quote; you need to know effective techniques for face-to-face deprogramming.

Editor's Response to Letter #119 (Part c)

We couldn't agree more, Mark. People are quite different and what alters some has little effect on others. That's why I suggested several issues ago that a national organization of knowledgeable biblical critics be created to, among other things, meet periodically and compare notes on the most effective techniques by which to deprogram the opposition.

Letter #120 from JJM of Center Line, Michigan

Dear Mr. McKinsey. Keep up the good work with BE. I find the letter sections particularly instructive--each of your answers is a miniature lesson in argumentation....

Letter #121 from Jack Trimpey of LOTUS PRESS, Box 800, Lotus, California 95651 Dear Dennis. Your sample copy of BIBLICAL ERRANCY was most interesting and I will subscribe for a year. Your approach to the deplorable problem of religiosity is articulate and scholarly, but at the same time sensitive to the feelings of compulsively religious persons. Your publication is an excellent one for people who are attempting to grow by overcoming religious faith, and you place within reach easy-to-understand information for those who want to grow. Your stimulation of the readers' mirth response is as deft as a physician striking for the patella knee reflex. No response--big problem. The letters you print, especially the testimonials from ex-christians, are priceless, and I hope to see more of them. We have all heard countless insipid tales from saved ones telling about how splendid it is to wield supernatural power in their daily lives; so it is truly exciting to read about someone who has miraculously overcome the mental disorder of religious faith, such as DB of Ontario, California. I suggest that you open direct communication between your readers. I, for example, would be delighted to exchange some letters with DB of Ontario, California. Could you start a bulletin board for correspondence, or perhaps forward letters?

Editor's Response to Letter #121

Dear Jack. Your letter is one the most gracious and insightful ever received by BE. We do try to be sensitive to the feelings of even the most ardent apologists which accounts for the noticeable absence of demeaning humor and derogatory comments. With respect to DB's testimonial, he might contact you himself after reading this issue. As far as opening up a bulletin board or forwarding letters is concerned, I can assure you that these are only a few of the projects we've been considering. We'd like to: duplicate and distribute tape recordings of radio appearances, create a complete index of every subject discussed in BE, videotape speeches and forward copies to public access channels, create a bibliography of writings recommended as supplemental readings to BE with a short synopsis of each, give all the bureaucratic work that goes with increased subscriptions to others so more time can be devoted to research, compile a list of promising talk-show hosts and stations throughout the Nation, and obtain sufficient funds to buy a computer, a printer, and videotape equipment for producing BE and my own programs. Those are only some of the activities we'd like to initiate, but time and money are needed. Rest assured, Jack, we have big plans at BE.

Issue #36 Editor: Dennis McKinsey

Dec. 1985

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

Prophecy (Part Two of a Four Part Series)--Last month's Commentary began listing those prophecies which were fulfilled in a manner different from that predicted and this month's Commentary will continue that enumeration: (12) "And Hazor shall be a dwelling for dragons, and a desolation for ever; there shall no man abide there, nor any son of man dwell in it" (Jer. 49:33). People never stopped living in Hazor and continue to do so. (13) "Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom" (Matt. 6:28) and "he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the Kingdom of God come with power" (Mark 9:1, Luke 9:27). These prophecies show Christ's coming was to occur during the life of then existing persons. Yet, when did the Kingdom of God come with power? Second Peter 3:8 ("But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day") can't be invoked to escape from the problem because Jesus repeatedly stated that his contemporaries would see his return. All of them have long since passed away and people still await the Kingdom of God. (14) "But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven" (Matt. 26:63-64, Mark 14:61-62). The high priest never saw the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven. (15) God told Isaiah to promise Ahaz that Rezin and Pekah would not harm him. "And in the days of Ahaz the son of Uzziah, king of Judah, Rezin the king of Syria and Pekah the son the Remaliah the king of Israel came up to Jerusalem to wage war against it, but they could not conquer it...and the Lord said to Isaiah, "Go forth to meet Ahaz,...and say to him, `Take heed, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint because of these two smoldering stumps of firebrands, at the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria and the son of Remaliah. Because Syria, with Ephraim and the son of Remaliah, has devised evil against you, saying, Let us go up against Judah and terrify it, and let us conquer it for ourselves,...thus says the Lord God; It shall not stand, and it shall not come to pass" (Isa. 7:1-7). Yet, Ahaz and his forces were slaughtered by Rezin and Pekah. "Wherefore the Lord his God delivered him (Ahaz--Ed.) into the hand of the king of Syria; and they smote him, and carried away a great multitude of them captives, and brought them to Damascus. And he was also delivered into the hand of the King of Israel, who smote him with a great slaughter. For Pekah the son of Remaliah slew in Judah an hundred and twenty thousand in one day, which were all valiant men;...." (2 Chron. 28:5-6). God's promise (the prophecy) failed. (16) According to Ezekiel, Tyre will fall to Nebuchadnezzar and be destroyed by him. He will plunder Tyre's riches. "For thus saith the Lord God; Behold I will bring upon Tyre Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, a king of kings.... He shall slay with the sword thy daughters in the field:...and with his axes he shall break down thy towers...he shall slay thy people by the sword, and thy strong garrisons shall go down to the ground. And they shall make a spoil of thy riches...." (Ezek 26:7-12) and "All they that know thee (the king of Tyre--Ed.) among the people shall be astonished at thee: thou shalt be a terror, and never shalt thou be any more" (Ezek. 28:19). Yet, Nebuchadnezzar did not take Tyre or make a spoil of its riches. His 13 year siege failed. He took the outworks but the town was on an island and remained impregnable. "Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon made his army labor hard against

Tyre; every head was made bald and every shoulder was rubbed bare; yet neither he nor his army got anything from Tyre to pay for the labor that he had performed against it. Therefore thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will give the land of Egypt to Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon; and he shall carry of its wealth and despoil it and plunder it; and it shall be the wages for his army. I have given him the land of Egypt as his recompense for which he labored...." (Ezek. 29:18-20 RSV). Tyre was not conquered by Nebuchadrezzar, so God gave him Egypt as compensation. No historian either Greek or Phoenician mentions Tyre being taken, plundered, and destroyed by Nebuchadrezzar. Alexander the Great actually conquered Egypt 240 years later. (17) "And the sword shall come upon Egypt, and great pain be in Ethiopia, when the slain shall fall in Egypt, and they shall take away her multitude, and her foundations shall be broken down. Ethiopia, and Libya, and Lydia, and all the mingled people,...shall fall with them by the sword.... And they shall know that I am the Lord, when I have set a fire in Egypt, and when all her helpers shall be destroyed.... Thus saith the Lord God; I will also make the multitude of Egypt to cease by the hand of Nebuchadrezzar King of Babylon. He and his people with him, the terrible of the nations, will be brought to destroy the land; and they shall draw their swords against Egypt, and fill the land with the slain. And I will make the rivers dry,...and there shall be no more a prince of the land of Egypt: and I will put a fear in the land of Egypt....And I will set fire in Egypt" (Ezek. 30:4-16) and "thus saith the Lord God; Behold, I am against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and will break his arms,... And I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and will disperse them through the countries. And I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon, and put my sword in his hand: but I will break the Pharaoh's arms,... I shall put by sword into the hand of the king of Babylon, and he shall stretch it out upon the land of Egypt" (Ezek. 30:22-26). (a) The multitudes of Egypt have never been taken away or dispersed among other countries. (b) Ethiopia, Libya, and Lydia never fell along with Egypt. They never fell to a common destroyer. (c) A large conflagration never occurred in Egypt. (d) Nebuchadrezzar never destroyed the land of Egypt. (e) A prince continued to rule in Egypt long after Nebuchadrezzar. (f) The rivers of Egypt were never made dry and (g) None of the evils which Ezekiel said Nebuchadrezzar would bring upon Egypt ever occurred. (18) "It (Egypt--Ed.) shall be the basest of the kingdoms; neither shall it exalt itself any more above the nations: for I will diminish them, that they shall no more rule over the nations" (Ezek. 29:15). Yet, in the 1820's Egypt took over and ruled the Sudan. (19) "And Babylon,...shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there. But wild beasts of the desert shall lie there;...and satyrs shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces: and their time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged" (Isa. 13:19-22) and "...but thou (Babylon) shall be desolate for ever, saith the Lord....to make the land of Babylon a desolation without an inhabitant" (Jer. 51:26, 29) and (Jer. 51:37, 43, Isa. 13:20). (a) There has never been any time since Isaiah that Babylon was uninhabited or desolate. (b) Arabians still visit there. (c) Shepherds still make their fold there. (d) Babylon has never been known for its dancing satyrs and dragons in the palaces. Since satyrs are mythological creatures, the prophecy could never have been fulfilled anyway. (e) Apparently Babylon's days have been prolonged since it still exists, and has continued to do so for over 2,000 years. (20) "Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (Matt. 5:17-19). Yet, one jot and one tittle did pass from the law before all was fulfilled. Indeed, Paul all but abolished any reliance upon the Old Law and Jesus ignored many maxims. (21) "Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled" (Matt. 24:34). Jesus made this statement after listing a wide assortment of events that were to occur. Yet, the Son of man has not come like lightning shining from the east to the west, and all the tribes of the earth have not seen him coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. Nor has he sent his angels with sounds of a trumpet gathering the elect from all parts of the world. The sun has not become darkened; the moon has not failed to give its light, and the

stars have not fallen from heaven. Nearly 2,000 years have passed and this prophecy has never occurred, although Jesus strongly stated it would materialize in the lifetime of his generation. (22) "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live" (John 5:25). The hour is coming and now is. "And now is" shows the dead were to hear Jesus' voice and become alive at that time. (23) "The stranger that is within thee (Jews--Ed.) shall get up above thee very high; and thou shalt come down very low. He shall lend to thee, and thou shalt not lend to him: he shall be the head, and thou shalt be the tail" (Deut. 28:43-44). According to this prophecy Jews would be borrowers and not lenders. If Jews had always been in debt instead of being great money-lenders, Christians would hale this as a great prophecy instead of the failure it is.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #122 from BW of Federal Way, Washington

Dear Mr. McKinsey. You are absolutely right. The Bible can't be explained by reason! I can't figure out a lot of things that are in the Bible. Some things can be proven historically, etc. but where is the proof that all the spiritual aspects are true? I just don't understand. However, I also don't understand a lot of Einstein's theories, but I believe them because they seem to work. I also believe the Bible because when I try its principles they seem to work quite nicely. Maybe I'm looking through rose colored glasses but I happen to like the idea of a Hero who saved me from who knows what. I also like the idea of living forever in a place called heaven. It just all seems like a lot of fun to me and I know I'm enjoying having a relationship with Jesus. I know you probably think I'm silly, ignorant, not willing to face the facts, and on and on. I just have one question for you. If it's wrong what will happen to me? I will live a happy and satisfied life and take my chances of dying like a dog (no afterlife). I guess I really have two questions for you because here's the second one. If you are wrong what will happen to you?

Editor's Response to Letter #122

Dear BW. At least on one point you are to be commended. You didn't send us an apologetic response teeming with rationalizations, prevarications, and obfuscations seeking to prove black is white. You cut through the usual rhetoric and went straight to the heart of the matter. Tossing reason aside, you candidly admit that you believe the Bible because you "like the idea of a Hero who saved me from who knows what" and "the idea of living forever in a place called heaven." Unfortunately, BW, truthfulness is of far less importance to you than happiness and contentment. But if you are correct and accuracy and reliability are of no real importance, then people might just as well believe anything that creates good feelings. That this would leave millions vulnerable to every snake-oil salesman imaginable goes without saying. I don't know if you have children, BW, but, if so, is that what you want for them. Several years ago the slogan, "If it feels good do it" was making the rounds and biblicists were offended by the implicit immorality contained therein. Now you're telling us "If it feels good, believe it. Don't worry about the absence of reason or evidence." Secondly, you say you believe the Bible "because when I try its principles they seem to work quite nicely." I'm not sure what principles you're referring to. The powers which are supposed to accrue to believers and those who pray often fail to materialize, while its moral teachings can be found in many religious books. I don't blame you for qualifying your remark by saying they "seem to work." Only someone blind to reality would say they are quite reliable. Thirdly, if your comment that "I know I'm enjoying having a relationship with Jesus" is sufficient justification for belief, then others could justify their relationship with drugs, alcohol, cults, and the occult because they, too, are enjoyable to many. Goodness, healthfulness, and truthfulness are not substantiated by pleasure. Fourthly, your closing synopsis of Pascal's Wager is considerably weaker than you realize. Understandably, its

influence is strongest on those who have lived in a Christian dominated society. You might want to read the Commentary on Pascal's Wager in Issue #22. Essentially, all you are saying is that wisdom lies in believing and not taking chances. But it's not that simple. Believe what? Do you know how many different religious beliefs there are? Following your logic, to really be safe one would have to accept them all, which is impossible since many are mutually exclusive. Why should we assume that only Christian teachings could be valid? Fifthly, some Christian beliefs will bring damnation to their adherents according to other religions. Muslims, for example, hold that belief in the Trinity is a sure path to perdition. How can you be sure they are wrong? Aren't you gambling? You ask, "If I'm wrong what will happen to me?" According to many others you are wrong and plenty is going to happen to you. In fact, even within Christianity scores of sects and denominations have long since written off the others. Without even knowing the Christian group or tenets to which you adhere, I can assure you that more than one denomination has already written you off as hopelessly lost. How do you know they are wrong? And you accused me of gambling! Sixthly, the Bible attributes acts to God that can only be described as appalling, including killing, deceiving, causing adultery, ordering killings, playing favorites, practicing injustice, punishing many for the acts of one, and ordering cannibalism. (A much more extensive list is on page 5 of the third issue). What would be your feelings toward a book describing you in such a manner, BW? If God hasn't done anything to you so far, could it be he is just letting you hang yourself and on the Judgment Day in which you believe you're going to discover just how angry he has been from the beginning? Remember, you, not I, champion these characterizations. And lastly, you said, "I will live a happy and satisfied life and take my chances of dying like a dog (no afterlife)." You have even chosen to ignore the teachings of your own book which says your fate is comparable to that of a dog. "For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of the beasts is the same; as one dies so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage (pre-eminence--KJV) over the beasts; for all is vanity. All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to the dust again. Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast does down to the earth?" (Eccle. 3:19-20 RSV). You can't begin to cover all the bases, BW, so the only sensible alternative is to adopt that to which the overwhelming preponderance of the evidence leads.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #123 from Rev. DFS of Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Dear Mr. McKinsey...I look forward to your publication every month and always find it interesting and enjoyable. One small suggestion. Could you keep the borders (esp. the right) more even to allow room to three-hole punch them without chopping through words. I punch them so I can keep them all together in a three-ring binder. Although only in the discussion stages right now I am looking into the possibility of having a weekly radio program. It would be 15 or 30 minutes long and on about 100 radio stations scattered around the nation. At first it will be taped. Later, at least once in a while it will be live with an 800 number call-in feature. This will probably be a quarterly hour program. It will be a religious program, but it will be non-Christian and a good percentage of shows will be along the lines of your letter--an honest, open-minded discussion of the Bible. I would like to know if you'd be interested in being a fairly frequent guest, or even occasionally a guest host. We will cover all expenses and be willing to pay reasonable fees. We could even give your publication ad time or promotional consideration. This is still in the very early stages and this inquiry, of course, is informal.

Editor's Response to Letter #123

Dear Rev. DFS. I'd be more than happy to appear on any program at any time of your choosing. Just call or write. In the past, I've asked readers to contact their local radio stations, especially

those with call-in programs, for possible appearances by BE. Your comment on the right margin of BE is well taken. Recent reductions in print size have sought to alleviate a problem caused by trying to put too much information into too small an area.

Letter #124 from JG of Oak Park, Illinois

Dennis...As I am writing, I am watching the John Ankerberg Show. Dr. Walter Martin, a Baptist polemicist and another trinitarian fundie are debating two United Pentecostals who are anti-trinitarian fundies. Unfortunately, the trinitarian fundies won. If I were to debate Dr. Martin solely on the Trinity, I'm afraid I'd lose or perhaps draw. I could score devastating blows on history and philosophy but he'd win decisively on Greek scholarship, because I don't know Greek. Dennis, can you come up quickly with an anti-trinitarian argument that could beat any Christian trinitarian, even a smart fundie like Martin or a Ph.D. Jesuit or Dominican theologian?.... Since the vast majority of Christians are trinitarians, a fool-proof anti-trinity argument would be a great rhetorical device for any freethinker.

Editor's Response to Letter #124

Dear JG. You have focused upon one of Christianity's cardinal beliefs. The core of the apologetic argument in this regard is that there is only one god but three separate and distinct persons. Each is god, yet there is only one god. Trinitarianism is an impossible concept to grasp, comparable to that of believing in a black white horse. Your best strategy is to pen them down to specific details. How can god on earth talk to god in heaven or out there somewhere and, yet, only one god exist? Most Christians aren't even aware a problem exists. So you must first explain the imbroglio that's involved and, then, show why escape isn't an option. Both are important. After debating this issue on several occasions and recently spending over 5 hours with a couple of ministers and laymen from the Church of Christ, I've concluded the word "trinitarian" is useless and little more than doubletalk. If anything, Christians are tritheists, not trinitarians. They believe in three gods under the guise of three persons. They seek to make the Godhead a separate being when it's nothing more than an all-encompassing rubric such as "mankind." Spending your time showing biblicists they can't even conceive of what they are trying to describe is more profitable than trying to understand the belief yourself. Anyone attempting to visualize a black white horse is going to waste a lot of time. Clergymen often try to project the Trinity as a mystery beyond mere mortal powers which should be believed while not understood. Of course it's not a "mystery," which is nothing more than a euphemism, but an impossibility. Debating this issue is imprecise because the concept is so muddled, even for its proponents. If you discuss the topic with some apologists, JG, which I'd recommend, let me know what they say. There is no better way to develop an effective approach. Your quest for an effective strategy is to be complimented. That's precisely what others should be doing. No program to counter biblicists on their own turf exists and that's a major reason they have dominated the scene for so long. They've had a kind of privileged sanctuary to which to flee. Comfortable in the belief they have truth, and nothing but, they have never known a serious challenge in their own arena. If we turn on the floodlight of reality and enter the cave of darkness, some inhabitants are bound to leave or move closer to the exit as the light approaches. Have no doubt about that. Questions about what one should say to various apologetic positions are of crucial importance and always welcome. I may not have the best answer, because we are all learning, but I'll try. Incidentally, I saw the Ankerberg Show you mentioned. Many combative apologists resemble hired guns in the Old West. Removing threats to the territory is their primary concern and that's why we need more knowledgeable firepower. Are you sure the trinitarians won the debate? Remember, Ankerberg controls the videotape and decides what is broadcast. I'd recommend viewing the entire program before deciding. Christian broadcasts are even less reliable than Christian commentaries. Do you really believe starving Ethiopians are the primary recipients of all those donations? You don't

have to be an auditor to know that when no policing apparatus, governmental or otherwise, is monitoring where millions of dollars are going and from whence they are coming, the opportunities for deception and corruption are multitudinous.

Letter #125 from Mark Potts, 8510-A East 66th Place South, Tulsa, Oklahoma 74123

Dear Dennis. Here is a mini-editorial for BE. Biblicists would have us believe the following: (1) In the beginning God created a perfect man and woman. But they became corrupt. (2) God sent the Flood to destroy wickedness in the earth. But the people after the Flood are just as bad as the ones before. (3) God gave us his Law through Moses. But following the Law can't save us. Now, according to the biblicists, God has devised a "plan of salvation" which we must accept. Given their description of God's success record, what basis do we have for assuming this latest scheme will work? Incidentally, I want you to evaluate the following argument. Biblicists have told me that Matt. 19:16-21 (salvation by works) just applies to the man whom Jesus is addressing and no one else. If that's the case, then John 3:1-21 just applies to Nicodemus and no one else. Similarly, Acts 16:30-31 applies only to Paul's jailer, while Rom. 10:9 applies only to the Christians in Rome for whom Paul wrote this letter. If salvation advice is directed toward a specific person, how do you tell if these spiritual instructions apply to one person or to everybody? A local preacher has been jailed recently for contempt-of-court. His church runs a day-care center, and he refuses to apply for state licensing, since that would be recognizing an authority other than Jesus. But his actions are plainly unbiblical since according to Rom. 13:1-7 the civil authorities receive their power from God....

Editor's Response to Letter #125

Dear Mark. Your constantly improving ability to critique the Bible provides good evidence that training programs (courses, seminars, institutes, etc.) need to be created, especially for the young, to teach people how to expose the Bible in every forum possible. Thousands of knowledgeable analysts could provide the balance this Country so sorely needs.

Letter #126 from JH of Visalia, California

Dear Dennis. You made a point that occurred to me some time ago. I asked a Fundamentalist preacher what saves a person from hell. And he said, "accepting Jesus as your savior." In that case, all those who never heard of Jesus (including those who lived and died before he was born) never had a chance to be saved. Which brings me to a more general question: what exactly is the virtue of believing in something? Or the wickedness of not believing in it? For that matter, what is the virtue of a virgin birth? On the same score, if one is saved by "faith" and belief, then heaven will have in it the pious sadists of the Middle Ages and "born again" criminals; while in hell will be the benign intelligence of people like Darwin, Freud and Russell.... Just some thoughts of my own. I really like your newsletter, and I'm glad you put it out. I find it exciting and informative. Also I'm very impressed by your thorough knowledge of the Bible and the deft way you use it.

Letter #127 from MM of Wyckoff, New Jersey

Dear Sir: I read your newsletter, every word, and enjoyed it very much.... Are you a non-profit, tax deductible religious publication? Your stuff should be put in bus and plane stations, public libraries, and maybe C-n Science Reading Rooms.

Editor's Response to Letter #127

Dear MM. BE is non-profit but, as yet not tax deductible.

Letter #128 from RA of Albany, Oregon

Dear Dennis. A great series! I shall venture some comments later on. I wouldn't change a thing about your format, if I were you. (Except, maybe, to charge us 7 or 8 dollars a year instead of 6 dollars!)

EDITOR'S NOTES: (1) Point of clarification: Although extra-biblical topics are not normally discussed in BE, they are by no means totally excluded. Indeed, not only would drawing a definite line of demarcation be quite difficult but some topics and information outside the Bible clearly impinge on the Book's validity. The Bible is the nucleus about which conversation flows, but we have never hesitated to include subjects such as the historicity of Jesus, the scientific problems associated with the Flood, and biblical geography when they are directly relevant to biblical errancy. (2) Several prominent leaders of atheist and humanist organizations have been using profanity, scandalous humor, and other vulgarisms in speeches, writings, and talk-show appearances throughout the Nation. BE wishes to divorce itself from such behavior in no uncertain terms. We find it not only personally repugnant but tactically irrational. The typical religious stereotype of those in what is loosely called the freethought movement is that of people engaged in immorality and license. Reprehensible conduct of this nature can only buttress their suspicions and provide ammunition to biblicists. The primary reason activities of this kind should be avoided is that they have no place in a decent environment.

Issue No. 37

Jan. 1986

COMMENTARY

In Feb. 1984 BE (#14) instituted a policy of periodically devoting an entire issue to letters from readers and, in view of the tremendous number available, has decided to resume that program before continuing a discussion of prophecy.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #129 from Mark Potts, 8510-A, East 66th Pl. So., Tulsa, Oklahoma 74133

(Part a) Dear Dennis. Exodus 16:29 RSV ("The Lord has given you the sabbath, therefore on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days; remain every man of you in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day") might have some bearing on the "Sabbath Day's Journey" problem.

Editor's Response to Letter #129 (Part a)

Dear Mark. You are correct. It shows there could never have been a legal Sabbath Day's Journey to begin with according to the Old Law and re-enforces what I told VT on page 3 of Issue #35, namely, "You stated the Sabbath Day law was in the rabbinical ordinance. Could you provide chapter and verse....Jewish commentators...refer to a tradition of 2,000 cubits, but can you relate an actual ordinance to that effect?" If such an ordinance exists then it's contrary to the Old Law, as would be a tradition. VT recently sent a letter listing more Christian commentaries defining a Sabbath Day's Journey but he's never provided a rabbinical ordinance. No topic since "the voice of the turtle" many issues ago has generated more adverse comments, but there's no need to belabor the issue further until chapter and verse from Jewish law are shown.

Letter #129 Concludes (Part b)

Regarding the prophesied destruction of Tyre (#5 on page 2 of Issue #35), apologists might argue that the modern city with the same name is not the same "Tyre" condemned by Ezekiel. When the Five civilized Indian Tribes were relocated to Oklahoma, they brought a lot of their place names with them, so there's a "Miami," Oklahoma, for instance. Czech immigrants brought the place name "Prague" to this state, also; so the modern "Tyre" may be an instance of the same type.

Editor's Response to Letter #129 (Part b)

Contending there are several cities, regions, people, and geographical features (mountains, rivers, deserts, etc.) with the same name is a common apologetic ploy, Mark. One can easily understand why since it's about the only escape possible in many instances. But because this tactic is available is no reason we should not present problems and let readers judge for themselves if biblicists are rationalizing. Christians have spent a great deal of time and money devising responses to every argument made in BE and all other freethought publications, but that is certainly no reason to give them free reign by failing to expose dilemmas. With respect to your specific example, I know of only one Tyre in the Bible. Can they provide proof for another?

Letter #130 from VT of Huron, California (Part a)

(In Part 13 of last month's Commentary we quoted Matt. 16:28--"Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom"--and Mark 9:1 and said, "These prophecies show Christ's coming was to occur during the life of then existing persons. Yet, when did the Kingdom of God come with power?"--Ed.). Greetings: Matt. 16:28 really belongs with chapter 17 (which starts by discussing the Transfiguration--Ed.) because the account of the TRANSFIGURATION of Jesus explains what he meant when He made this statement. Read 2 Peter 1:16-18 ("For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty...for we were with him on the holy mountain.") to get a better understanding of this scripture. This scripture was fulfilled when Jesus Christ was glorified on the Mount of Transfiguration with three of His disciples looking on. The transfiguration was a miniature picture of the kingdom and Simon Peter confirms this for us! You don't have to understand everything you read, just accept it and realize that God had a reason for it. We were not around to tell God how to do it, so He did it HIS WAY. Now two thousand years later we come into the picture and ask WHY. Well, He didn't ask us did HE? We will just have to TRUST or REJECT His word. Isn't it something how some of us want all the little details answered?....

Editor's Response to Letter #130 (Part a) Greetings. Apparently you have consulted a Christian commentary, VT, because your answer reflects the typical apologetic response which emanates from writings of that nature and is equally flawed. First, before discussing the Transfiguration in Matt. 17:1-5 let's read the last two verses of the prior chapter which describes Jesus' coming: "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works. Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom" (Matt 16:27-28). The next few verses describe what happened at the time of the Transfiguration "And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain apart. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his garments became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah talking with him....lo, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, `This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased'" (Matt. 17:1-5 RSV). (a) Matt. 16:27 says the Son of man "shall come"; whereas, Jesus didn't come from somewhere to Peter, James, and John. He was with them all along and, in fact, took them up the mountain. (b) Jesus was supposed to come with angels and they aren't even mentioned in the Transfiguration account. (c) When did Jesus "reward every man according to his works" at the time of the Transfiguration? Nothing is said about rewarding anyone. (d) Jesus was to come "in his kingdom." Yet, his kingdom isn't mentioned in the Transfiguration account either. (e) According to the same narrative in Mark 9:1 the kingdom was to "come with power." Yet, the events surrounding the Transfiguration elicit no exceptional display of power. Second, you stated "the Transfiguration was a miniature picture of the kingdom." With all due respect, VT, what kind of argument is that? Jesus said the kingdom, itself, was coming, not a preview of coming attractions. Either the kingdom came or it didn't. And what about all the events related in other verses that were suppose to attend his coming? Thirdly, you stated that "two thousand years later we come into the picture and ask WHY" when our real questions are how and when. And lastly, you allege that "some of us want all the little details answered" when the time and circumstances of the Second Coming are hardly little details. To some apologists, any criticism, regardless of topic or validity, is a little detail. What do you consider a big detail?

Letter #130 Continues (Part b)

(In Part 14 of last month's Commentary Jesus was quoted as telling a high priest that he would see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power and coming in the clouds of heaven. The

priest did not see this before he died--Ed.)....perhaps the KJV does not render the very best for us here. The Riess translation says, "The time has come when you will see.... The NEB says, "From now on you will see.... The Berkeley Version says, "shortly you will see.... and there are a dozen more versions one could read at this point. I like to have a number of versions to help when I come to a difficult passage. I'm sure you feel the same way....

Editor's Response to Letter #130 (Part b)

How have these versions abolished your dilemma, VT? They don't differ materially from the KJV. Jesus told the priest he would see something which didn't occur.

Letter #130 Concludes (Part c)

(In Part 12 of last month's Commentary we quoted Jer. 49:33 to the effect that "Hazor shall be a dwelling for dragons and a desolation for ever; there shall no man abide there, nor any son of man dwell in it--Ed.) Liberty Bible Commentary (Jerry Falwell's creation--Ed.) says on page 1513 that..."Hazor was not the city of northern Palestine, but the desert region east of Palestine. The name may also be used collectively of the permanent villages in the area." The Commentary has more to say regarding Hazor. One thing I learned from a trip to Israel is that there are a number of places that are of the same name. On page 691...the Wycliffe Bible Commentary says, The kingdom of Hazor, NO that should read The Kingdoms of Hazor. This can hardly refer to the great city of Hazor in northern Palestine, for here it is used as a desert area....Now as to dragons...it is my personal belief that there was simply not another word that would interpret the word used in the original.... I believe it is rather superfluous to continue on with answers. After all there would be no need for BE if you didn't challenge the Bible. I believe you are doing a grave injustice to people that read BE. There are many out there will let you do their thinking. They are just looking for something to hang their FRUSTRATIONS on....

Editor's Response to Letter #130 (Part c)

You are making mistakes so fast it's difficult to keep up, VT. (1) I never said Hazor was a city in northern Palestine, so why do you imply as much? (2) If Hazor is the desert region east of Palestine then your case becomes even weaker, because that's the modern state of Jordan which is widely populated and has never been "a desolation" in which "no man abides." You'd do better to try to restrict Hazor to as small an area as possible, such as a city or town. In the final analysis whether Hazor is a town in northern Palestine or the region east of Palestine does not matter because both are populated today and refute the prophecy. Incidentally, I consulted two historical atlases of that area and neither shows a desert area east of Palestine called Hazor. What atlas are you using? (3) Do you realize you refuted your case and proved mine by quoting Falwell's version to the effect that, "the name may also be used collectively of the permanent villages in the area." The prophecy was that Hazor would be a desolation for ever and no man would live there. Now you are admitting it's composed of permanent villages. You accused BE's readers of letting others think for them when that's precisely what you have done by uncritically accepting explanations given by commentaries without analyzing the ramification involved. (4) No point was made in last month's Commentary with respect to dragons, VT, so why did you even mention the topic. You are hitting a strawman and your "personal beliefs" in that regard aren't of evidential value anyway. (5) Your comment that "there would be no need for BE if you didn't challenge the Bible" is patently erroneous. As long as the Bible exists there will always be a need for BE's modus operandi. (6) You accuse readers of BE of seeking "something to hang their frustrations on" when the primary frustrations most of them have arise from dealing with people who reason more with their hearts than their heads. (7) As far as letting others do one's thinking

is concerned, I can assure you that most subscribers to BE are more than capable of thinking for themselves.

Letter #131 from DW of South Pasadena, California (Part a)

Dear Dennis. I still find the letter section interesting although the main Commentary seems to be focusing on minor quibbles that are hard to follow. For an example of the problem that I'm having with the Commentary recently, consider the start of Issue #34. (1) "For we (the wise men from the east) have seen his star in the east...." Could not "in the east" refer to the place from which the star was seen? And (2) is unconvincing without demonstration of how far a "Sabbath Day's Journey" is, which many readers pointed out was probably not as you had implied. As for (3), that a 2,000 year old city (Aenon--Ed.) is now unknown is not that surprising. In (4), again modern knowledge of ancient geography and the translation of names is not good enough to say that a discrepancy means that the author from his own time and place is mistaken. I could go on in this vain, but we both know I am not pre-disposed to be a Biblical apologist--yet if a devout atheist like myself can spot loopholes, the well-conditioned evangelical should be able to rationalize away whatever grain of truth your alleged contradictions may contain.

Editor's Response to Letter #131 (Part a)

Dear DW. You consider yourself an atheist but have written in an apologetic vein in this part of your letter, so I feel compelled to respond as would be normal under the circumstances. (1) The "minor quibble" argument has surfaced again. As I've stated before, what's minor to one is major to another. You and I may consider something major which others consider trivial and vice versa. That's why I've chosen to present all I have and let others pick and choose as they desire. Trying to second-guess the values of others is uncertain at best. Present what you consider a "major quibble" with respect to the entire Bible, DW, and some biblicists will accuse you of pettiness. To some of them any criticism is petty, period. I gave some questions to ask in an earlier issue because they seem to have the greatest effect on the largest number. But some people are beyond reaching. Did you ever try to present a rational argument to an irrational mind. It's like reasoning with the intoxicated. (2) I don't see why the points mentioned were hard to follow as they seem clear enough. With respect to the specifics of Issue #34, let me say the following: (a) If "in the East" refers to the position of the men rather than the star, then it should have been translated to say something like, "while we were in the East we saw." BE wants people to hear errors of this nature, listen to the explanations provided, and, then, judge for themselves whether biblicists are rationalizing. We certainly aren't going to refrain from exposing problems simply because apologists have an explanation for everything, including all the arguments presented by atheists, humanists, and other members of the freethought movement. (b) As far as the Sabbath Day's Journey is concerned, most critics of BE have latched onto this example and failed to address the other geographical problems mentioned. This is typical of their general strategy--seize the point where the best case seems possible, give so much emphasis that people are left with the impression the entire superstructure rests on this one point, and minimize everything else. (c) As far as the 2,000 year old city is concerned, we are dealing with a question of error, not a contradiction, as is true of most extra-biblical discussions. We stated that, "Nearly all critics agree there is not such place (as Aenon--Ed.) near Salim." If biblicists choose to ignore what scholars have noted and accept your explanation, then so be it; that's their choice. They can also deny the theory of evolution because it's a theory. But people have a right to know what the evidence shows and scholars say. You feel it's not surprising that a 2,000 year old city is now unknown and minimize archeological evidence to the effect that such a city never existed. One might just as well say that Atlantis or any other mythological kingdom existed because they are also found in ancient literature. What the preponderance of the evidence shows is worth mentioning, or are you going to accept what the Bible says at face value? (d)

With regard to Jesus going from Tyre to the Sea of Galilee by passing through Sidon and Decapolis, readers need only consult historical atlases to see for themselves what the evidence shows. If they want to accept rationalizations for factual questions, that's their prerogative. (3) As far as "the well-conditioned evangelical" rationalizing away "whatever grain of truth your alleged contradictions may contain" is concerned, DW, are you saying they would be immune to criticisms because they can develop "elucidations"? Penning apologists down and exposing their justifications and prevarications is crucial to BE and, as I stated earlier, every problem can be "explained." But the real question is: How do their "answers" appear to the Bible's supporters and millions of observers tending in that direction?

Letter #131 Continues (Part b)

Perhaps it is asking too much for the 30-odd issues of a periodical to come up with striking internal contradictions for an ages old faith. You've already covered most if not all of the obvious and impressive contradictions in earlier issues, and anyone not affected by them will not be swayed by anything which follows either. Yet perhaps you can continue to chip away. By the scientific method, it would be absurd to accept a theory just because there were no internal contradictions, which is only a necessary but not a sufficient criteria of truth. Even if there were no internal evidence against fundamentalist Christianity, since its proponents have marshalled no convincing evidence for it (hearsay being inadmissible), there is no basis for belief.

Editor's Response to Letter #131 (Part b)

First, far more than 30 issues are needed to cover the Bible's problems, DW. Some of your comments seem to reflect earlier Christian inculcation to the effect that the Bible is not as assailable as BE contends. Second, not only may biblicists be more affected by points in future issues, but supporters of BE may find points to come more to their liking in future dialogues. You have made a rush to judgment. Thirdly, just the number of letters and writings for and against the Bible that merit analysis could fill volumes. Fourth, your last point is quite accurate and should be directed to the Book's proponents since many seem to believe that if they can somehow reconcile all the problems validity will be substantiated.

Letter #131 Concludes (Part c)

...once one realizes the Bible is not the word of God, one should go on to establish a positive philosophy of life and not worry much about that book. That approach is obviously outside the scope of BE's calling. I'm finding the goals of (several groups are mentioned--Ed.)...of much more interest than debating fundamentalists. But I wish you good luck at freeing more minds from the myths of Biblical inerrancy, and I'll keep reading BE to see what luck you are having.

Editor's Response to Letter #131 (Part c)

You have touched upon one of the most divisive issues in the freethought movement, DW. Do we directly confront and challenge the supporters of religion and the Bible or do we go our own way by setting a good example and developing a positive philosophy and let them go theirs? The approach of the freethought organizations you mentioned is contrary to that of BE's. This Country is composed of millions of people whose support for the Bible ranges all the way from lukewarm to fanatical. In numbers and wealth their dominance is overwhelming and easily proven. One of their spokesmen alone, Jimmy Swaggart, has a yearly budget far in excess of that of all freethought groups and publications combined. The disproportionate relationship between the forces is tremendous and that's why television exudes so many people who belong in the Middle Ages. We are told to turn off the set or change the channel if we don't like the program,

but isn't it about time they started changing the TV, not us. Even the government buttresses them. If I was told I would no longer be taxed or subject to financial audits while my neighbor continued as before, that would be positive assistance, not just hands off. Atheist, humanist, and other freethought publications have provided more than enough proof to show the partition between church and state more closely resembles a back door screen than a wall. This situation must be altered. Establishing a positive philosophy of life is commendable, but what follows? What do you do with it? Do you rest on your laurels and hope religionists will follow your example? How could that happen when they don't even know you are an atheist? In effect, the status quo would remain as before with biblicists dominating the scene. Two crucial questions must be faced by all freethought organizations: (1) Why should religionists, biblicists, and apologists come to the freethought movement when they are convinced they already have the truth and (2) why should these same groups listen to anything the freethought movement has to offer when they have been taught from infancy that atheism, humanism, agnosticism, etc. are works of evil? To some they are the devil incarnate. The only way to dispel people of these illusions is to go on the offensive, which few freethought organizations and publications are willing to do. Some even admit their reluctance. But, the fact is that a major reason the Bible is so all-pervasive is that millions of its supporters have taken their case to others. Missionaries have traveled the world and converted millions as Christian dominance in Latin America demonstrates. Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses have not become rapidly growing sects by sitting at home praying the world will see the wisdom of their ways and beat a path to their door. Aggressive proselytization is their hallmark. Your tactics of adopting a "positive philosophy of life" actually amounts to nothing more than assuming a defensive posture, i.e., accepting conditions as they are, and is doomed from the beginning. You don't win on the defensive. Most freethought organizations and publications are not significantly converting people to their point-of-view but only picking up those who have rejected religion and/or the Bible for reasons of their own. Members of the religious/biblical community must be re-educated from the ground up. Most have been programmed from birth and it's up to us to deprogram. Although important, battles over prayer in the schools, nativity scenes, "In God We Trust" on the currency, etc. are essentially secondary. As long as people believe the Bible is God's word, conflicts of this kind will continue unabated and remain an understandable by-product. Once people no longer believe the Bible or have their allegiance to it dramatically shaken, their interest in these secondary issues will naturally fade. That's why BE teaches a kind of Sunday-School-in-Reverse. Our program is one of going back to the basics, starting over, and exposing all the facts that should have been heard in Sunday School but weren't. But we can't do it alone. You mentioned "luck," but that's not what matters. Thousands of knowledgeable people willing to put in the needed time and effort are what count. Serious and intense effort over many years in a protracted struggle are mandatory. Anti-religious humor, denunciations of the religious mentality, exposures of corrupt ministers or popes, and comparable tactics are subordinate, not superficial, and easily countered. Your statement with respect to fundamentalism missed the mark, DW. BE doesn't exist to debate fundamentalists. Millions of people in this Country are not fundamentalists or atheists but lie somewhere on the long spectrum inbetween. The common denominator is that nearly all support the Bible to some degree. BE merely seeks to debate those most supportive of the Book while all others observe, so views can be sharply delineated and many may be moved further from the Bible by having their faith weakened. Converting a fundamentalist in a dialogue is of far less importance than influencing the audience. Many people have no strong views one way or the other but are just listening. Your poignant letter deserved an extended reply.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #132 from John Sikos, P.O. Box 443, Romeo, Michigan 48065-0443

Dear Dennis. In your response to Letter (#32 Issue 13) you declared (accurately) that Easter is "not within the Bible and is not really germane to this publication." Then in the following issue critical letter #40 pointed out that the word "Easter" does not appear in Acts 12:4 of the KJV. To answer that you cited the RSV, NASB, NIV and an assortment of other versions of Acts 12:4 which do not use "Easter." I feel the readers of BE should have an explanation for this. The fact is that the original Greek word used in Acts 12:4 was "Pascha" which means Passover. The KJV translators erred when they translated "Pascha" into "Easter." It is rather humorous to note that the same word "Pascha" was translated correctly as "Passover" in the KJV of Matt. 26:2, 17-19, Mark 14:12, 1 Cor. 5:7 and many others. Only in Acts 12:4 did the KJV translators FAIL. They were inconsistent and wrong!

Letter #133 from JH of Visalia, California

Dear Dennis. Thank you for sending me the sample copy of your BE. I enjoyed it, although it annoyed me that you capitalized biblical words, e.g., savior, book, resurrection, etc. I was very pleased and surprised to find that you...look sensibly at Christianity and the Bible. I wrote a 48 page book called "Common Sense" in which I did a very similar thing to what you do so well. However you do it much better than I did because you know a lot more about the Bible than I do. It is obvious that you've actually read the thing. And never having been a Christian, I'm sure you see through this much more quickly and easily than I would. I was thoroughly inculcated with this nonsense from the day I was born. All of your ideas that I read are blatantly obvious. Were the Bible not such a sacred and hush-hush subject (even you capitalize biblical words), it would be silly to anyone who read it...

Editor's Response to Letter #133

Dear JH. Your letter is most gracious but one point needs to be discussed. The biblical terms you mentioned are capitalized not out of any respect or obeisance to the Bible but simply because they are proper nouns and their capitalization facilitates reading. As I told an acquaintance some time ago, refusing to capitalize these terms is about as effective and puerile as refusing to eat dinner with or shake the hand of a biblicist. American and Soviet leaders detest each others ideas, but they meet, eat, and joke together constantly. Imagine Gorbachov and Reagan refusing to even shake hands because each considers the other the epitome of evil!

Issue No. 38

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COMMENTARY

Prophecy (Part Three of a Four Part Series)--Last month's issue interrupted a listing of biblical prophecies that were incorrectly fulfilled and this month's Commentary will renew that enumeration: (24) "But I (Jesus--Ed.) say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the son of man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist" (Matt. 17:12-13) and "he sent, and beheaded John in the prison" (Matt. 14:10). Jesus did not die "likewise" as did John the Baptist who was beheaded. (25) "The Virgin of Israel is fallen: she shall no more rise" (Amos 5:2) versus "Again I will build you, and you shall be built, O virgin Israel! Again you shall adorn yourself with timbrels, and shall go forth in the dance of the merrymakers" (Jer. 31:4 RSV). As these prophecies contradict each other, one of them can not be fulfilled. (26) "In thee (Abraham--Ed.) shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:3) and "in thine seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 22:18, 26:4) and "in thee

(Jacob--Ed.) and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 28:14). All the nations of the earth have not been particularly blessed in Abraham, in Jacob, or in their descendants, the Jews. Christians claim that Christ fulfilled this prophecy by giving Christianity to the world (See: Acts 3:25-26 and Gal. 3:8-9). But this assumes Christianity has been a blessing whereas history shows much to the contrary. Even supposing, for argument's sake, that Christianity is a blessing, the prophecy remains unfulfilled. The Chinese, the Hindus, the Jews, and, in fact, the larger part of the globe's population don't believe in Jesus. The household strife which he promised, and the national and religious strife of which it was the type can hardly be described as blessing all families of all nations. (27) "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (Mal. 4:5). (a) Elijah never came. If John the Baptist is Elijah as Jesus says in Matt. 11:12-14 and Matt. 17:12-13 ("But I say unto you, That Elijah is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that he spoke unto them of John the Baptist"), then when did the great and dreadful day of the Lord occur? Moreover, John the Baptist becomes a prevaricator as he said he was not Elijah in John 1:19-21 ("And this is the record of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, Who art thou? And he confessed, and denied not; but confessed, I am not the Christ. And they asked him, What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, NO"). (b) John the Baptist said he was not Elijah who was to come, Jesus does not say he is the Elijah who is to come ("...Some say that thou art John the Baptist: Some Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ,...And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou Simon Barjona...."--Matt. 16:13-17), no one else claims to be Elijah, and no one is designated as such. Therefore, the prophecy appears to have failed. (28) "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse (Mal. 4:5-6). Regardless of who is Elijah "who was to come," present and past world conditions proved he failed to bring fathers and children together. The prophecy that he would "turn the heart of the children to their fathers" did not materialize. As Elijah did not come, Jesus fulfilled the prophecy in a very easy fashion by declaring that John the Baptist was the "Elias which was for to come" (Matt. 11:14), even though the "great and dreadful day" which Elijah was to herald never arrived. (29) "And they asked him (Jesus--Ed.) `Why do the scribes say that first Elijah must come?' And he said to them, `Elijah does come first to restore all things.... But I tell you that Elijah has come, and they did to him whatever they pleased, as it is written of him" (Mark 9:11-13). This prophecy landed wide of the mark. What did John the Baptist restore? Nothing! (30) "For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly, so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt. 12:40). That was the prophecy, but Mark 15:37 ("and Jesus cried with a loud voice, and gave up the ghost") and Mark 15:42 ("And now when the evening was come, because it was the preparation; that is the day before the sabbath") show that Jesus died on the day before the sabbath, which is Friday, while Mark 16:9 ("Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week....") and Matt. 28:1 ("In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene....") show that he rose sometime on Saturday night or Sunday morning. Friday afternoon to Sunday morning does not encompass three days and three nights. (31) "And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to mock, and to scourge, and to crucify him!...." (Matt. 20:19) and "...they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him to the Gentiles: And they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him!.." (Mark 10:33-34 and Luke 18:32-33) versus John 19:14-18 RSV ("...He--Pilate--said to the Jews, `Behold your king!' They cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him! Pilate said to them. Shall I crucify your King? The chief priests answered, We have no king but Caesar. Then he handed him over to them to be crucified. So they took Jesus,...to the place...called in Hebrew Golgotha. There they crucified him,...." According to the prophecy Jesus was to be killed by the

Gentiles, not the Jews. (32) "And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things...and be killed, and after three days rise again" (Mark 8:31). Jesus died and was buried on a Friday evening. He rose sometime during Saturday night or Sunday morning. "After three days" means that he should have arisen after three days had passed, not a day and a half. (33) "Jesus said, Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life" (Mark 10:29-30 RSV). Many people have given up everything for the gospel's sake but have failed to receive "now in this time" such items as houses and lands. Jesus' prophecy, his promise, failed. Moreover, receiving retrospective motherhood in wholesale quantities would be more unbelievable than the Virgin Birth. (34) "And Jesus said unto him (the thief on the cross--Ed.), Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43). This prophecy by Jesus could not have been kept unless Christ went to heaven that day, in which case he could not have been buried three days and three nights. His prophecy in Matt. 12:40 (See: #30 above) would have failed. (35) "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand" (John 10-27-28). Yet, the following show they were plucked out of his hand: "While I was with them in the world, I have kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition...." (John 17:12) and "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils" (1 Tim. 4:1). Paul and Peter appear to have discussed what would happen to those who accepted Jesus and later rejected him. "For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation.... He that despised Moses' law died without mercy.... Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God...." (Heb. 10:26-29) and "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them" (2 Peter 2:20-21). (36) "And Jesus answered them saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified....And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (John 12:23, 31-32). This prophecy failed because although supposedly lifted up Jesus is far from having drawn all men to him. Much of mankind has never even heard his name. Moreover, most men will not be drawn to Jesus according to Matt. 20:16 ("So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen"). (37) "And Joshua spake unto the house of Joseph, even to Ephraim and to Manasseh, saying, Thou art a great people, and...thou shalt drive out the Canaanites, though they have iron chariots, and though they be strong" (Joshua 17:17-18) versus Judges 1:27-29 ("Neither did Manasseh drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shean and her towns, nor Taanach...but the Canaanites would dwell in that land. And it came to pass, when Israel was strong, that they put the Canaanites to tribute, and did not utterly drive them out. Neither did Ephraim drive out the Canaanites that dwelt in Gezer; but the Canaanites dwelt in Gezer among them"). Not only did Ephraim and Manasseh fail to drive out the Canaanites as prophesied but so did Israel. (38) "And the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt....And I am come down...to bring them up out of that land unto a great land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey" (Ex. 3:7-8). Palestine was neither a good land nor a large one. Far from being a land which might poetically be described as flowing with milk and honey, it is, and must have been within historic times, a barren and a desolate land in the main. In size it was little larger than tiny Wales. Of course the Jews were infatuated with their own land, but this is no reason why other people should accept their patriotic illusions as facts. (39) "Then answered Amos and said to Amaziah...thus saith the Lord; Thy wife shall be a harlot in the city, and thy sons and daughters

shall fall by the sword, and thy land shall be divided by line; and thou shalt die in a polluted land" (Amos 7:14, 17). (a) Amaziah's son Uzziah succeeded him on the throne and died a leper (2 Chron. 26:21-23) so at least one son was not slain by the sword. (b) Amaziah himself was slain at Lachish (2 Kings 14:19) in the land of Judah (Josh. 15:20, 39) a territory which at least was less polluted than any other in the age of the prophets. (40) "Wherefore, behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from city to city" (Matt. 23:34). What prophets, wise men and scribes did Jesus personally send out who were persecuted, scourged, killed, and crucified? (41) "When thou (Cain--Ed.) tillest the ground it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength: a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth" (Gen. 4:12) versus "And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod...and he builded a city...." (Gen. 4:16-17). Instead of becoming a vagabond as was predicted, Cain took a wife, built a city, established a line of descendants and seemed to lead a settled life. (42) "And God said unto Abraham, as for Sarah thy wife...I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations" (Gen. 17:15-16). Apparently the only nation descended from Sarah was the Jewish one. (43) "While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat,...shall not cease" (Gen. 8:22) versus "And the famine was over all the face of the earth,..." (Gen. 41:56) and "...the dearth was in all lands" (Gen. 41:54). (44) "There shall come a Star out of Jacob, and Scepter shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth" (Num. 24:17). Christians say this is a remarkable prophecy of Christ, but Christ has no scepter except a mock one; and he did not smite the corners of Moab or destroy the children of Sheth. (45) "The weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice's den" (Isa. 11:8) and "the unicorn shall come with them,...." (Isa. 34:7) and "Babylon...satyrs shall dance there...and dragons" (Isa. 13:19-22). Seeing that cockatrices (serpents hatched from cock's eggs), unicorns, satyrs, and dragons are purely imaginary creatures, it is difficult to see how these prophecies could ever be fulfilled. Those who think Isaiah was speaking figuratively should read the context. (46) "...and I will dry up her sea, and make her springs dry. And Babylon shall become heaps, a dwellingplace for dragons,...." (Jer. 51:36-37) versus "For I will rise up against them, saith the Lord of hosts, and cut off from Babylon the name, and remnant...saith the Lord. I will also make it a possession for the bittern, and pools of water:...." (Isa. 14:22-23). These prophecies have not only never occurred but can't even agree on what is to happen. One says Babylon's springs and sea will dry up; the other says Babylon will become pools of water and the possession of a water bird, the bittern.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #134 from DB of Dayton, Ohio

Dear Dennis. Please renew my subscription for another year. Your publication continues to be one of the few I know of which actively seeks to balance the anti-intellectualism of our Christian culture, and as such I highly value it.... Now in the spirit of open-minded and unmalicious debate which you encourage a few words on our response to JG's letter (#124) with regard to the concept of the trinity. JG asked how to out-argue those who believe in the trinity and you replied, in what I took to be the key sentences, Thus--"spending your time showing biblicists they can't even conceive of what they are trying to describe is more profitable than trying to understand the belief yourself. Anyone attempting to visualize a black white horse is going to waste a lot of time." Such words are troubling to me because they seem to reduce the realm of possible truth to that which we can conceive, in the sense of "picture in your minds." Since I believe it is as impossible to picture in our minds massless particles as it is a black white horse, it follows--using your criteria--that such cannot exist. Neither can anything which is simultaneously a wave and a particle. Yet physicists believe in both, the first being the neutrino and the second light. Somewhat similarly, mathematicians deal with orders of infinities, in the belief that not all infinities are equal, even though I cannot picture infinity in my mind, nor easily comprehend

how a series of such things may be unequal. I have heard of no one-mathematicians included-- who say they can clearly picture these ideas. While I trust there are good reasons for believing in physics and higher math and doubting the reality of the trinity it seems clear that those you gave J.G. cannot be among them. Promoting such a criteria seems to risk turning people against not only trinitarianism but much which might well constitute the greatest scientific achievements of the human mind.... The methods you advocate to dissuade biblicists from belief in the trinity I'm afraid would work as well, in biblicists hands, on me--and on most of us--regarding science...I suggest you develop a refutation of the trinity using the Bible itself rather than extra-biblical arguments. I am not an expert on the Bible, but having been educated to its numerous, verifiable, and ludicrous errors in so many areas be BE, I trust it is well within your power to develop such a refutation. Is the trinity even conceptualized as such in the Bible or is it merely one more barnacle religious leaders have fastened to it?... I think it more than likely that the trinity can be made to self-destruct and the resort to arguments based on one's ability to picture things avoided. If you still disagree, why not just deny the possibility of God Himself--since we can't really conceive of such a being...?

Editor's Response to Letter #134

Dear DB. Your point is well-taken and revolves around the question of what is the best method by which to expose the invalidity of the Trinity to the largest number of people. The phrase "they can't even conceive" should have been explained more precisely. Conception is not possible because the Law of Contradictions is violated, i.e., something can't be one and non-one, i.e., two, in number at the same time. If there is one God there can't be two and if there are two gods there can't but just one. When Jesus, who is god, talks to God out there somewhere, that's two gods, not one. Massless particles and something being a wave and a particle simultaneously are not analogous, as they do not involve something being A and non-A. Massless particles would only be a real contradiction if particles by definition were mass. Or are you saying physicists and mathematicians have repealed the Law of Contradiction? In high school algebra we worked with the square roots of minus numbers which no one can visualize. Nevertheless, we did work with them. Most people are not as technically minded as you and for those, such as yourself, I should have said, "they can't even conceive of something being A and non-A simultaneously. God is perfect. Jesus says he is not perfect. Therefore, Jesus can't be God. Christians say there is one God but provide conversations in which non-one, i.e., two, gods participate. Either there is one god or two but not both. You suggested an intra-biblical approach to the Trinity would be profitable but there are verses, such as Matt. 28:19 and 1 Peter 1:2, which could be used by trinitarians. One could argue these verses do not necessarily demonstrate equality but would that really convince the opposition. That's not to say one can prove the Trinity from the Bible but only that contrary data from the Book is not as solid as one would like either. The inconsistent nature of the Book in this regard is shown in the fact that both sides can find verses to support their position. There is nothing wrong with your strategy, DB. In fact, we hope eventually to highlight the salient verses. The issue is basically one of determining which approach would be more persuasive to the largest number.

Letter #135 from RHG, Executive Vice President of the John Ankerberg Show

(In letter #124 in Issue #36 JG stated that two trinitarians defeated two anti-trinitarians in a debate about the Trinity on the John Ankerberg Show. Since the host, John Ankerberg, is a trinitarian and decides what is broadcast, BE suggested the entire program be viewed before deciding who won--Ed.) Dear Mr. McKinsey. One of our viewers has sent along a copy of Issue #36 of BIBLICAL ERRANCY. I am familiar with your publication, and I'm sure you are aware that there are many points on which you and I would disagree. Let me comment, however, on your statement on Page 5 of the issue referred to concerning the "Trinitarian Debate" which we

have produced and aired. I am enclosing for you the full transcript of that series. It represents the entirety of the discussion as taped. The allegations that the Ankerberg Show somehow "doctored" the material to our advantage are unfounded. One final note. I do appreciate your recommendation to your viewer that the entire program be viewed before deciding. I share your cynicism about certain broadcasts that are distributed in the name of "Christianity." I do commend your effort to give some of us at least the benefit of the doubt. By the way, our mutual "follower" has suggested that you might be interested in appearing on our program. I'm not ready to extend an invitation, but I would certainly welcome any materials from you which in your judgment best represent your position and the evidence in support of that position. Who knows? Our friend might have his way after all.

Editor's Response to Letter #135

Dear RHG. I appreciate receiving your transcript and carefully read all 87 pages. As far as I'm aware approximately 20 pages (57-77) of dialogue were never aired and, interestingly enough, some of the most relevant conversation is contained therein. On page 59 the primary anti-trinitarian spokesman, Sabin, told Ankerberg that, "it's plain to see that you're not impartial." To this Ankerberg replied, "I'd like to ask the folks here to show if in fact the deck is stacked. How many folks belong to the United Pentecostal Church (of Sabin--Ed.). Would you put your hands up" (Page 61). Later, on page 73 Sabin stated, "...some of the audience could be sympathetic with us. They came at their own expense. But the host of the show is not sympathetic with us. The one that determines the format, the questions that are asked, the sequence of the questions, and so on, and calls the end of it at the appropriate time after Walter Martin (the primary trinitarian spokesman--Ed.) has had his last say, that person is not sympathetic with us. And if I had to make a choice, I'd rather have the host with me than the audience because they are not participating." Ankerberg responded to the effect that, "I don't know any other host that would have sat here and let you say what you said and let you continue at my expense." To this Sabin replied, "John, we don't know what part of this program will be aired." And Ankerberg responded, "It will all be aired just the way you said it. Just as I told the friends that are sitting around me, 'What you see is what you get'." Apparently some of the actual participants in the program viewed the situation as did BE and judging from the dialogue our concerns were justified. From personal experience I can vouch for the truth of Sabin's comment to the effect that a sympathetic or neutral host is of crucial importance. Ankerberg said it would all be aired. As far as who actually won the debate is concerned, the transcript shows each side asked questions the other couldn't really lay to rest. But, then, that's to be expected from an inconsistent book.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #136 from Mark Potts of 8510-A East 66th Place South, Tulsa, Oklahoma

74133

Dear Dennis. I have some apologetic problems for you to consider. The other night at work I was discussing the Bible with some co-workers. I brought up a few of the standard problems, and got some responses I found hard to counter. (1) Why can't we be saved by works as Jesus instructed in Matt. 19:16-21? The response was that Jesus tailors his message to each individual, so this passage applied only to that particular man. So I asked, "You mean the 'plan of salvation' isn't the SAME for everyone? I also contrasted this passage with Acts 16:30-31 ("And--Paul's jailor--brought them out, and said, Sirs what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved"), and asked if Paul's jailor was the ONLY one to be saved by faith. Incidentally, if Paul really were in jail, he was condemning himself in Rom. 13:1-7

when he said the civil authorities are ordained of God and not to be resisted. (2) What happens to people who never get to hear about Jesus? The initial response was, "There are no such people," but when I brought up some obvious historical facts, the apology changed to "It doesn't matter" and "God has it all worked out." (3) How could everyone be corrupt when the Bible attributes perfection to Noah, Job, and the parents of John the Baptist? One of the participants--my boss--explicitly denied the Bible said these people were perfect. I didn't have the Book handy to show him his error, but imagine if I had, he would have denied the literal meaning of the appropriate passages. I gave it my best shot, Dennis. What would you have done differently? It's almost like trying to communicate with autistic children. These people are almost insensitive to the influence of words and ideas. What are your comments?

Editor's Response to Letter #136

Mark, Mark, remember what you are dealing with. You have directed some poignant questions to people who have probably been to hundreds and hundreds of church meetings (Sunday School, services, Mass, etc.) over a period of several decades. They have been thoroughly indoctrinated to believe the Bible is truth par excellence and have probably never heard a word to the contrary. Then, on to the scene you come with questions striking at the core of their most cherished beliefs. Surely you don't expect them to change after 50 or 60 minutes of conversation when they have spent hundreds of hours hearing the opposite? Moreover, biblicism got to them first and convincing someone he has been going down the wrong path for decades is rather difficult to say the least. What you must do is deprogram in precisely the manner they were programmed. You must present some arguments, give them time to ponder their merits, provide more information later and again allow them time to ponder. This process must be repeated over many weeks if not months. The real problem is getting people to return because their interest begins to decline as their faith begins to waiver. That's why we need radio and TV appearances, public speakers, debates, and other methods by which to reach wide audiences. Defenders of the Bible will feel compelled to come forth when they see the Book being exposed on a repetitive basis. Years ago I repeatedly called a fundamentalist minister on a call-in radio program and asked questions he found unnerving. I finally challenged him to an on-the-air debate which he accepted before his audience but later rescinded off-the-air on the grounds that "there was nothing in it for him." The responses you received were not "hard to counter" but quite weak in fact. You may have given it "your best shot," Mark, but far more than one is required. You have embarked upon a long, arduous struggle against big money, entrenched traditions, strong beliefs, and large numbers. Day after day after day one must return to the fray. It's like chopping down a Redwood. Instead of relying upon one massive blow, you chip, chip, and chip again until the behemoth begins to totter. You are going to be insulted, denounced, called names, prayed for, threatened with hell, have your integrity and motives impugned, and, at times, demoralized. You'll be told your efforts are hopeless, you're doing the devil's work, and your soul's damned. And these are only some of the adversities one can expect. Believe me, I know. For me, however, the sense of purpose and accomplishment is far greater. Remember what Truman said about the heat in the kitchen. Keep asking questions and eventually you'll notice a change in some people. But you must give them time to think. After all you are asking them to change imbedded beliefs and nobody is going to do that overnight. Patience and persistence are axiomatic.

EDITOR'S NOTE: (a) We apologize for the typos in last month's issue and mistakenly labelling it Jan. 1985. That's what happens when you're rushed. (b) We'd like to thank those who have voluntarily aided BE financially since money is the oil that keeps the machinery rolling. We now have the largest number of subscribers ever and the number continues to grow.

Mar. 1986

COMMENTARY

Prophecy (Part Four of a Four-Part Series)--A third and final category of prophecies, besides those which never existed or were incorrectly fulfilled, are those which have never materialized. Some biblicists, such as those in the Church of Christ with whom the editor of BE recently debated, contend all the prophecies in the OT have already been fulfilled. If so, one can't help but ask when the following occurred: (1) "In the same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates" (Gen. 15:18). Israelite territory has never extended to the Euphrates and it's questionable whether it has extended to the Nile. (2) "The burden of Damascus, Behold, Damascus is taken away from being a city, and it shall be a ruinous heap" (Isa. 17:1). The Encyclopedia Britannica says Damascus is one the oldest cities in the world, has been continuously inhabited, and is the only city in Palestine that has never been completely destroyed. (3) "In that day shall five cities in the land of Egypt speak the language of Canaan, and swear to the Lord of hosts; one shall be called, The city of destruction" (Isa. 19:18). Five cities in Egypt have never learned to speak Hebrew or any other language from Canaan. (4) "So shall the king of Assyria lead away the Egyptians prisoners, and the Ethiopians captives, young and old, naked and barefoot, even with their buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt" (Isa. 20:4). When did Assyrians capture Egyptian and Ethiopian prisoners and lead them away with their buttocks uncovered? (5) "Is it not yet a very little while, and Lebanon shall be turned into a fruitful field, and the fruitful field shall be esteemed as a forest?" (Isa. 29:17). When did Lebanon become a fruitful field or more fruitful than its neighbors? (6) "No more shall there be in it an infant that lives but a few days, for the child shall die a hundred years old,...." (Isa. 65:20). When has everyone lived to be at least 100 years old? (7) "And I purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me: I will bring them forth out of the country where they sojourn, and they shall not enter into the land of Israel" (Ezek. 20:38). People who transgress God's laws are still entering the land of Israel. (8) "And the land of Egypt shall be desolate and waste;...I will make the land of Egypt utterly waste and desolate, from Syene even unto the border of Ethiopia. No foot of man shall pass through it, nor foot of beast pass through it, neither shall it be inhabited forty years. And I will make the land of Egypt desolate in the midst of the countries that are desolate, and her cities among the cities that are laid waste shall be desolate forty years: and I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and will disperse them through the countries" (Ezek. 29:9-12 and others). (a) Egypt has never been desolate from Syene to Ethiopia. (b) Men and beasts have never failed to pass through Egypt. (c) There has never been a forty year period in which Egypt was uninhabited or its cities desolate and (d) Egyptians have never been scattered among other nations or surrounded by countries that are desolate. (9) "...then shall Jerusalem be holy, and there shall no strangers pass through her any more" (Joel 3:17). Strangers continue passing through Jerusalem every day. (10) "The remnant of Israel shall not do iniquity, nor speak lies; neither shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth...." (Zeph. 3:13). The remnant of Israel has never stopped doing iniquity or speaking lies. (11) "They shall pass through the sea of Egypt; and the waves of the sea shall be smitten, and all the depths of the Nile dried up" (Zech. 10:11 and others). The Nile has never dried up. (12) "...but Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited" (Zech. 14:11). Certainly this has never occurred, especially in today's society. (13) "...they shall eat every man the flesh of his own arm" (Isa. 9:20). When did men eat their arms? (14) "And I will make Jerusalem heaps, and a den of dragons; and I will make the cities of Judah desolate, without inhabitants" (Jer. 9:11). Neither Jerusalem nor Judah has ever been a ruinous heap. (15) "For the stars of heaven and the constellation thereof shall not give their light: the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine" (Isa. 13:10) and "The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee.... The sun shall no more go down; neither shall the moon

withdraw itself...." (Isa. 60:19-20). The sun, moon, and stars have never failed to emit light. (16) "Moreover the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days...." (Isa. 30:26). Mankind is yet to witness such brightness. Moreover, this would seem to contradict #15. (17) "The fishermen will mourn and lament, all who cast hook in the Nile; and they will languish who spread nets upon the water" (Isa. 19:8 RSV). At no time in the Nile's history has it been emptied of fish or unproductive for fishermen. (18) "It will be a sign and a witness to the Lord of hosts in the land of Egypt; when they cry to the Lord because of oppressors he will send them a savior, and will defend and deliver them" (Isa. 19:20). When did Egypt receive a savior? (19) "And the streams of Edom shall be turned into pitch, and her soil into brimstone; her land shall become burning pitch. Night and day it shall not be quenched; its smoke shall go up for ever. From generation to generation it shall lie waste; none shall pass through it for ever and ever" (Isa. 34:8-10). (a) The streams of Edom have never turned to pitch. (b) Edom's soil has never turned to limestone. (c) Edom's land has never become burning pitch. (d) Edom does not lie in waste and (e) people continue to pass through it every day. (20) "Behold, I will gather them out of all countries, whither I have driven them in mine anger,...and I will bring them again unto this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely" (Jer. 32:37). The banished tribes have never returned and dwelt safely. (21) "...they (Ephraim--Ed.) shall return to Egypt" (Hosea 8:13) versus "He (Ephraim--Ed.) shall not return into the land of Egypt" (Hosea 11:5). Will they or will they not return is the question raised by these contradictory prophecies. (22) "...and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in safety" (Hosea 2:18). The Israelites have never dwelt in safety. (23) "...and I will bring up sackcloth upon all loins, and baldness upon every head:...." (Amos 8:10). When and where has every head become bald? (24) "I will utterly sweep away everything from the face of the earth, says the Lord. I will sweep away man and beast; I will sweep away the birds of the air and the fish of the sea. I will overthrow the wicked; I will cut off mankind from the face of the earth, says the Lord" (Zeph. 1:2-3, 18 RSV) "But the earth will be desolate because of its inhabitants, for the fruit of their doings" (Micah 7:13). Obviously these prophecies have never occurred. (25) "...and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more" (Isa. 2:3-4). Neither figuratively nor literally have these optimistic anticipations come to pass. (26) "And my people shall never be ashamed. And it shall come to pass afterwards, that I pour out my spirit upon all flesh; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions" (Joel 2:27-28). Christians say this was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost and subsequently. But God did not by any means pour out his spirit on "all flesh." Nor are the Jews so hardened as never to have been ashamed amidst their poverty and afflictions. (27) "Therefore the fathers shall eat the sons in the midst of thee, and the sons shall eat their fathers; and I will execute judgments in thee, and the whole remnant of thee will I scatter into all the winds" (Ezek. 5:10). When did this wholesale cannibalism occur? (28) "They shall pass through the sea of Egypt, and the waves of the sea shall be smitten, and all the depths of the Nile dried up" (Zech. 10:11, Isa. 11:15, 19:5-6). The Nile has never dried up. (29) "And I will feed them that oppress thee with their own flesh; and they shall be drunken with their own blood, as with sweet wine...." (Isa. 49:26). When have the oppressors of Israel become drunken with their own blood and eaten their own flesh? (30) "Its (Jerusalem--Ed.) end shall come with a flood...." (Dan. 9:26 RSV). When was Jerusalem destroyed with a flood? (31) "On that day living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem half of them to the eastern sea and half of them to the western sea; it shall continue in summer and winter" (Zech. 14:8). No waters have ever flowed in an easternly or westerly direction from Jerusalem to the seas. And what seas are they referring to? (32) "And I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly...." (2 Sam. 7:10 RSV). Jews are still scattered over the world and violent men still disturb and afflict modern Israel. (33) "...but I have gathered them unto their own land, and have left none of them any more there" (Ezek. 39:28). Yet, Jews remain in nearly every

country. (34) "In those days the house of Judah shall walk with the house of Israel, and they shall come together out of the land of the north to the land that I have given for an inheritance unto your fathers" (Jer. 3:18). As the ten "lost tribes" of Israel have disappeared it is not easy to see how they can walk with the tribe of Judah out of the land of the north. (35) "Violence shall no more be heard in thy land, wasting nor destruction within thy borders.." (Isa 60:18). Regardless of the land being discussed this prophecy has failed to materialize. (36) "For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.... The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock; and dust shall be the serpent's meat" (Isa. 65:17, 25). Being partly figurative, perhaps, most partly literal, these extravagant predictions are made to mean whatever best suits Christian requirements. (37) "...The days are at hand, and the fulfillment of every vision" (Ezek. 12:23 RSV). The Modern Language version of this verse says, "...and the fulfillment of every vision shall soon come to pass." After 2,000 years the wait continues. (38) "...Surely Moab shall be as Sodom, and the children of Ammon as Gomorrah, even the breeding of nettles, and saltpits, and a perpetual desolation..." (Zeph. 2:9). When did Moab and Ammon become desolations, especially perpetual desolations? (39) "But I will put hooks in thy (Pharoah's--Ed.) jaws, and I will bring thee up out of the midst of thy rivers, and all the fish of thy rivers shall stick unto thy scales" (Ezek. 29:4). What pharaoh ever had hooks put into his jaws by God and was brought up out of the rivers with fish sticking to his scales? Since pharaohs no longer exist, it's difficult to see how this prophecy could ever be fulfilled? (40) "And I will leave thee (Pharoah--Ed.) thrown into the wilderness, thee and all the fish of thy rivers...." (Ezek. 29:5). What pharaoh has ever been thrown into the wilderness along with all the fish of his rivers? (41) "Thine eyes shall see Jerusalem a quiet habitation, a tabernacle that shall not be taken down...." (Isa. 33:20). When did Jerusalem become synonymous with quietude? (42) "For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee (the Hebrews--Ed.) shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted" (Isa. 60:12). Nations that remain unsubjected by the Jews manage to flourish. If this poetical expression of a Jew's national hopes is perverted into a reference to Christ or his Church, then it may be pointed out that nations have advanced without Christ. (43) "Israel will no longer expect any help from Egypt. Whenever she thinks of asking for it, then she will remember her sin in seeking it before" (Ezek. 29:16 Living Bible). How is this to be reconciled with the recent Camp David agreement? (44) "...for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner...." (Isa. 51:6). When did the heavens and all the inhabitants of the earth perish? (45) "They (the Israelites--Ed.) sacrifice flesh for the sacrifices of mine offerings, and eat it, but the Lord accepteth them not; now will he remember their iniquity, and visit their sins: they shall return to Egypt" (Hosea 8:13). When did the Israelites return to Egypt? (46) And lastly, "For, behold, I will send serpents, cockatrices, among you, which will not be charmed, and they shall bite you, saith the Lord" (Jer. 8:17). Since cockatrices are mythical creatures it is hard to see how this prophecy could ever be fulfilled. A future BE Commentary will be devoted to NT prophecies which are yet to be fulfilled.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #137 from HPS of Honolulu, Hawaii

Dear Dennis. This is just to let you know that I enjoy your publication very much. It has not changed my way of thinking but is organizing it in a better and more accessible manner.... I have one question to which I would like to hear your answer. In a recent issue, you have proven that the very existence of Jesus might be open to question. How do you explain the fact that practically the whole world of today uses the supposed year of his birth to count the years (A.D. 1986)?? When and where was this system instigated and how did it get its clout? I realize that the Jews (and some other cultures) have different ways of counting, but in every day life they use the universally accepted A.D. system.

Editor's Response to Letter #137

Dear DPS. That's a reasonable extra-biblical question and, perhaps, one of our readers has a simple, concise answer. I can't recall the explanation I heard years ago.

Letter #138 from JH of Visalia, California

(On the last page of the 37th issue JH criticized BE for capitalizing biblical terms such as savior, book, and resurrection. BE said words are capitalized when used as proper nouns and no obeisance is to be inferred--Ed.). Dennis McKinsey. I did not like being called "puerile" in your newsletter, although only my initials were given. The words I was referring to are not "proper nouns." Nor do I see how capitalizing these words "facilitate reading" your newsletter. Considering the context, they could hardly be mistaken. I sense that your feelings about this religion are very academic. Mine are not. I take it very personally. It's made a painful mess of my childhood and adolescence. And recently, my niece was deeply distressed because her Sunday School teacher told her that her divorced father is going to hell because he is now living with a woman he is not married to. For other and worse horrors, I refer to the Middle Ages.... I consider Christianity unhealthy and cruel. I hate it. Hence my disinclination to capitalize religious words which mean nothing to me.

Editor's Response to Letter #138

Dear JH. Several of your comments are misleading. First, I did not call you "puerile." I did, however, say that intentionally refusing to capitalize biblical words to express one's distaste for the Bible and religion was a puerile act. If all your acts were in the same vein, then puerile might be an appropriate term. But since we have known each other only briefly and your letters seem to reflect above-average intelligence, I'd be foolish to call you puerile. Second, the biblical words you mentioned in your letter are clearly proper nouns. On page 13 in *The Plain English Handbook* Martyn Walsh says, "a proper noun is the name of a particular person, place or thing; and it should be capitalized." On the same page a common noun, which is not capitalized, is defined as "the name applied to any one of a class of persons, places, or things." Since BE has been discussing a particular book, a particular resurrection, and a particular savior, not just any book, resurrection, or savior, capitalization is in order. Third, I have always found capitalization of proper nouns to be a reading facilitator as it immediately separates generic terms from those which are specific. I like that. Apparently you disagree. Fourth, your comment to the effect that my "feelings about this religion are very academic" is only partially correct, JH. They are both academic and personal. Do you seriously think I would devote hundreds and hundreds of unpaid hours to researching, editing, and publishing a newsletter if a deep personal commitment to the veracity of BE's cause were not involved? For me, religion and the Bible extend far beyond mere academic concerns. You said you "take it very personally" which reflects my sentiments exactly. And lastly, you said you are disinclined to capitalize religious words which mean nothing to you. But they mean plenty to me, JH. They mean deception, misinformation, and indoctrination. If you can provide valid reasons for not capitalizing proper nouns, I'd be more than willing to follow suit. But you will first have to show how the opposition is materially affected. Such acts seem analogous to name-calling, hand gestures, and sticking out your tongue. Emotionally satisfying, yes; but do they really strike the other side where it hurts? How many catholics have ever been converted by anti-catholic jokes? How is refusing to capitalize proper nouns of real substance? Perhaps I'm wrong. It's a judgment question open to discussion.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #139 from MA of Tulsa, Oklahoma

Dear Dennis. Here are a few notes you might find useful.... (1) God tells Abraham that the Israelites will return from Egypt in the 4th generation from Abraham. But Joseph and his brothers were the 4th generation from Abraham (Gen. 15:15-16). (2) God says Sarai will be a mother of Nations. The only nation to descend from Sarai was the Jews (Isa. 7:3-7) and 2 Chron. 28:5-8). (3) Ezekiel 26:3-14, and 27:36 tell us that Nebuchadnezzar will capture Tyre and destroy it forever. Nebuchadnezzar's siege lasted 13 years. He took the outworks but not the town itself. Tyre was destroyed 240 years later by Alexander the Great. But it was subsequently rebuilt (Acts 12:20, Luke 10:13). (4) In 26:12 Ezekiel says that Nebuchadnezzar will seize the riches of Tyre. Then in 29:18 admits that it did not occur. (5) According to Gen. 11:26, 32, and 12:4 (KJV) Abraham was only 75 years old after having lived 135 years. (6) Ishmael was about 16 years old when Hagar carried him into the wilderness and cast him under a shrub (Gen. 17:24-25, 21:5, 8, 18).... (7) And in the Bible people thought with their hearts (Prov. 23:7, Esther 6:6, Isa. 10:7, Matt. 9:4). Like their contemporaries, Hebrews did not know the function of the brain. The word "brain" or "brains" are not to be found in the Bible, except the Moffatt Bible....

Letter #140 from JCW of Galesburg, Michigan

Dear Mr. McKinsey. I'm writing to tell you how much I enjoyed my first two copies of BE. I have long since become an unbeliever in Christianity as a result of a 6 year search into comparative religions, philosophies, and the occult. It becomes increasingly clear after a short time that Christianity was, at best, a hodge-podge of many other cultural and religious dogmas and artifacts, not to mention the possibility that Jesus may never have existed; he may have been a composite of myth and various other characters. In any event, I read your newsletter, not to be convinced that the Bible is a load of rubbish containing at best, those same elements we find in the National Enquirer, et. al., but because I enjoy the excellent scholarship, research, and logic and appreciate what you are trying to convey to the masses. However, I think you have a tough job ahead. I am sure you are aware that the steadfast to rabid Christian does not care much for logic and when backed up against the wall, in an unanswerable position, will probably invoke that ever present main-stay of Christianity--the devil. You, via the devil, are trying to destroy the truth, etc., ad nauseum. In conclusion, you may take this letter as an indirect response to Jack Trimpey (Letter #121) that here I am, another soul freed from the fetters of stupidity and nonsense via an unbiased inquiry into available materials. It's delightful....

Editor's Response to Letter #140

Dear JCW. Several of your astute comments are worthy of note. First, you are correct in saying BE definitely tries to reach the broad mass of the American people, not just the academic community. Second, you are also right when you say there is a "tough job ahead." But that applies not just to me but all those seeking a more rational society. Third, I know millions of people are not subject to reason or logic, but millions are. The Christian community encompasses a broad spectrum of views and many can be reached. Remember, most of the freethought movement is composed of former Christians or sympathizers. And lastly, as far as relating my efforts to the devil is concerned, that should be viewed in perspective. When biblicists portray the Bible as God's word, a Book describing God--the perfect being--as one of the worst personalities in history; when they say God--the epitome of justice--condemns to eternal hell all those who have accepted Jesus as their personal savior because the door is closed through no fault of their own; when they say the God of justice punishes all for the acts of one and teaches one's behavior has nothing to do with determining whether or not one will spend eternity in the fires of hell, they had better start worrying about their own fate, not mine. Their Book propounds this ideology, not one I support. They are attributing these deeds to God, not I. One would be hard-pressed to find a criminal act not applied to God by the Bible; whereas, the devil, comes out of the Book looking quite good in comparison.

Letter #141 from LSW of Sedgwick, Kansas

Dennis. I enjoy your little publication greatly. I am on exactly the same "wavelength" with you. And I must say that you are a mighty brave man to invite the wrath of the whole of the radical "right wing," as well as the entirety of the institutionalized religious hierarchy by your critical-albeit honest critique of their "holy word." I am sure that with the "love of God in their hearts," they would like to see you "drawn and quartered." Guess you count yourself lucky that you live in the modern times when, to the great disgust of the religious radicals, "heretics" can no longer be burnt at the stake! Otherwise I am sure you would be candidate #1 for a trip to the nearest bonfire! CONGRATULATIONS! This has been the lot of some of the greatest men in history.... In addition to the \$6 for an extended subscription I am enclosing another check for \$5 simply to help you with your overhead and expenses.... I believe you should invite contributions to help you with your work. The radio preachers surely make no bones about it and they rake in "BEAUCOUP MOOLAH"!!

Editor's Response to Letter #141

Dear LSW. Being silenced by a bonfire is of little concern to us since BE's influence on the national scene is far too small to warrant such dramatic action. Of much greater importance and far more prominent is censorship exercised by the media. Apparently radio and television personnel go to church, too. There is more than one way to still the opposition and most appearances by people such as myself are little more than window dressing in an aura of entertainment with few return engagements. All too often the better your presentation, the less likelihood of your reappearing. As far as appealing for funds is concerned, I assume people know we need resources. Many individuals have told us that I should become an evangelist and make a fortune. The problem is that I wouldn't feel comfortable appealing for financial support and saying that which I know to be false simply to make money. I'll probably kick myself when I am 70.

Letter #142 from MM of Tamal, California

(MM, a prisoner in San Quentin, ordered a packet of back issues which was returned badly damaged and stamped REFUSED BY SAN QUENTIN--Ed.) Dear Mr. McKinsey. Thank you very much for letting me know about the return of my "BE" back issues by the San Quentin mailroom. I was beginning to worry. Yes, I'm in the pen and don't have much of a life--aside from items such as BIBLICAL ERRANCY, FREE INQUIRY, and SKEPTICAL INQUIRER. I have received two issues on my subscription and am both delighted and fascinated. The work and thought which clearly went into those two issues are quite impressive and the decency and thoughtfulness shown in the writing (as well as the fine underlay of humor) confirm to me that my final, total abandonment of religionism--a few days following my arrest--was the smartest, sanest move I've made in 40 peculiar years....Regarding those 33 back issues of "BE" please mail them to (name withheld--Ed.) and she will put them to good reading and I'll get them in dribs and drabs. Quentin is odd. Anything that looks "published" must carry the return address of a bookstore or publisher. Since your "regular" name was on the sticker, they got huffy and kicked it back. The fact that it was clearly counter-Christian didn't help. Police are badly hooked on godism and never pass up a chance to fire on a heathen.... Good stuff and long overdue.

Editor's Response to Letter #142

Dear MM. From personal experience I have learned to never be surprised when somebody claims victimization by censorship. It's probably the most common, the most serious, the most

insidious, the easiest to hide, and the hardest to prove or oppose form of control exercised in the Country today.

EDITOR'S NOTE: (a) As was stated long ago, any letter sent to BE may be published. If you don't want this to happen, please say so. (b) Anyone who wants their full name and address used rather than initials and a city should so indicate on each letter. We don't want to violate confidentiality, jeopardize anonymity, or hinder communication between readers who would like to contact and/or be contacted.

Issue No. 40

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COMMENTARY

Jesus Vs. Paul (Part One of a Three Part Series)--Jesus, Paul and Peter are three of the most important figures in the NT, yet, the degree to which their teachings diverge is a sight to behold. Peter disagrees with Jesus and Paul on many points, while the latter two often contradict one another. As on TV's *To Tell the Truth*, one can't help but ask, "Will the true voice of Christianity please stand up?" Paul claims to speak for Jesus, to be his voice ("I say the truth in Christ, I lie not"--Rom. 9:1, 1 Tim. 2:7), ("As the truth of Christ is in me"--2 Cor. 11:10), ("Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me"--2 Cor. 13:3), despite abundant evidence to the contrary: (1) Jesus--"Go not into the way of the Gentiles" (Matt. 10:5) and "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 15:24), and "...for salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22) versus Paul--"For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the uttermost parts of the earth" (Acts 13:47) and "from henceforth, I (Paul--Ed.) will go unto the Gentiles" (Acts 18:6) and "that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it" (Acts 28:28) and "that I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles" (Rom. 15:16) and "that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. 3:8) and (Acts 20:21, 26:17-18, 20, 23, 22:21, Rom. 1:5, 13, 3:29, 11:11-13, 15:9, Gal. 2:2, 7-9, 3:14, Eph. 3:6, 1 Tim. 2:7, 3:16, 2 Tim. 4:17). Jesus told his followers not to go to the Gentiles and Paul countermanded the order. (2) Jesus--"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments and shall teach men so, he shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven...." (Matt. 5:17-19) and "it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fall" (Luke 16:17) and "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do" (Matt. 23:2-3) and (John 7:19, Mark 1:44) versus Paul--"Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ" (Rom. 7:4) and "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law" (Gal. 3:13) and "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Rom. 6:14) and "But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter" (Rom. 7:6) and (Rom. 10:4, 3:28, Gal. 3:23-25, 5:2-4, 18, 2:19, 21, 16, 4:10, Eph. 2:15, Col. 2:14, 16, Heb. 7:19, 1 Cor. 8:8 and many others). Jesus said the law would stand till heaven and earth passed, while Paul said it need no longer be followed. (3) Jesus--"Go not into the way of the Gentiles and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not" (Matt. 10:5) versus Paul--"they (Paul and Barnabas--Ed.) passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles" (Acts 15:3). Jesus said Samaria was not to be entered which Paul chose to ignore. (4) Jesus--"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. 28:19) versus Paul--"For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel" (1 Cor. 1:17). To baptize or not to

baptize, that is the question. (5) Jesus--"but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire" (Matt. 5:22) versus Paul--"Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die" (1 Cor. 15:36) and "O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you" (Gal. 3:1) and "We are fools for Christ's sake" (1 Cor. 4:10) and (Rom. 1:22, 1 Cor. 3:18). Apparently Paul doesn't feel "fool" is a dangerous word or hell fire is a thing to be feared. (6) Paul--"I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20) and "who gave himself for our sins" (Gal. 1:3) and "walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God" (Eph. 5:2) and "even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it" (Eph. 5:25) and 1 Tim. 2:6, Titus 2:14, Heb. 7:27, 9:14) versus Jesus--"...My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46, Mark 15:34) and "...My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even unto death:... O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me" (Matt. 26:38-39). "Cup" comes from a Hebrew word which actually means "fate" or, in this case, "death." If Jesus gladly gave himself as a sacrifice for all, you'd never know it from his words. (7) Paul--"Honor thy father and mother: which is the first commandment" (Eph. 6:2) versus Jesus--"If any man came to me and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). (8) Paul--"I will therefore that men pray everywhere lifting up holy hands...." (1 Tim. 2:8) versus Jesus--"And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men.... But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret" (Matt. 6:5-6). Those clamoring for prayer in the schools had better quote Paul and not Jesus. (9) Jesus--"all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:19) versus Paul--"The coming of the lawless one by the activity of Satan will be with all power and with pretended signs and wonders...." (2 Thess. 2:9 RSV). Who, then has all power, Jesus or the lawless one? (10) Paul--"In whom (Jesus--Ed.) are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2:3) versus Jesus--"But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son...." (Mark 13:32). Apparently Jesus didn't feel he was as omniscient as did Paul. (11) Jesus--"but the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you" (John 14:26) versus Paul--"But when Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he ate with the gentiles, but when they came he drew back and separated himself fearing the circumcision party. And with him the rest of the Jews acted insincerely, so that even Barnabas was carried away by their insincerity. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, 'If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?'" (Gal. 2:11-14 RSV) and "For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarrelling among you, my brethren. What I mean is that each one of you says, 'I belong to Paul,' or 'I belong to Apollos,' or 'I belong to Peter' or 'I belong to Christ.' Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" (1 Cor. 1:11-13 RSV). The Holy Ghost must not have reached both Peter and Paul. Apparently, he also missed some of the brethren. (12) Paul--"And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses" (Acts 13:39) versus Jesus--"...but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him neither in this world, neither in the world to come" (Matt. 12:32) and "But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation" (Mark 3:29). According to Jesus you can never be justified for all things. (13) Jesus--"...for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke 18:14) versus Paul--"For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles" (2 Cor. 11:5) and "I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me: for I ought to have been commended of you: for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing" (2 Cor. 12:11) and "that which I speak, I speak it not after the Lord, but as it were foolishly, in this confidence of boasting. Seeing that

many glory after the flesh, I will glory also" (2 Cor. 11:17-18). Apparently Paul did not feel being abased was something to be feared either. (14) Paul--"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ...." (2 Cor. 5:10) versus Jesus--"Ye judge after the flesh; I judge no man" (John 8:15) and "...who made me a judge and a divider over you?" (Luke 12:14) and "...for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world" (John 12:47) and (John 8:50). Somebody should have told Paul that Jesus doesn't want the job. (15) Paul--"...who (Jesus--Ed.), being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God" (Phil. 2:6) and "For in him (Christ) dwelleth all of the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Col. 2:9) versus Jesus--"...for my Father is greater than I" (John 14:28) and "...I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God" (John 20:17). Paul may consider Jesus God's equal but clearly Jesus does not. (16) Jesus--"With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible" (Matt. 19:26) versus Paul--"it was impossible for God to lie...." (Heb. 6:18). (17) Jesus--"If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven" (Matt. 19:21) versus Paul--"For every man shall bear his own burden" (Gal. 6:5). One can't help but ask why people are obligated to aid the poor if every man is supposed to bear his own burden.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #143 from VT of Huron, California

(VT has submitted many letters bearing on the Sabbath Day's Journey problem and now claims to have solid evidence proving a SDJ was 2,000 cubits long and the product of a binding rabbinical ordinance. In Letter #117 in Issue #35 VT was asked to provide such information and in order to do so sent us a copy of a letter he received from the Christian Jew Foundation, photostatic copies of some pages from The Mishnah by Herbert Danby, and a definition of a SDJ from the Interpreter's Dictionary--Ed.) Greetings. Enclosed is the information I promised to obtain.... No Sir, such an ordinance or law is not contrary to the OT. Jewish/Hebrew literature abounds with references to Sabbath Day legislation.... The material I've sent is self-explanatory so I need not dwell on it further. I really believe that with the letter from the Christian Jew Foundation, the page from the dictionary and the pages from the Mishnah you should be satisfied.... To ask for additional PROOF TEXTS would be a signal to me that you can't see the forest for the trees.... To ask for additional PROOF would (I believe) be unquestionably absurd. To deny that you have been given THE FACTS is simply and PLAINLY to DODGE THE ISSUE.

Editor's Response to Letter #143

Greetings. Somehow, VT, I don't think you are nearly as interested in accurate scholarship as in forcing me to say "uncle." Your ego is involved and that's why this lesser problem has taken on almost obsessive dimensions. Frankly, I'm almost ready to say "uncle" if it will move us on to more substantial topics. I trust you realize you are using a strategem two can play. Unlike yourself, I've never badgered or importuned a critic in BE but in your case an exception is warranted. I've asked scores of major questions in this publication and you have chosen to avoid them all. Instead, you have focused on a relatively minor point in a vain attempt to discredit my credibility. So let me ask you some questions bearing on material of real significance: (1) Why are we being punished for Adam and Eve's behavior, especially in light of Deut. 24:16? (2) If acceptance of Jesus is a sine qua non for salvation, then how could infants, the mentally ill, and those in the New World before missionaries arrived be saved? (3) If God is perfect then everything he created is perfect. How, then, could Adam have sinned? (4) If God created everything, then why isn't he the source of evil? (5) What did Jesus do that would prove he was the Messiah and (6) how could God on the Cross talk to God out there somewhere, when there is

only one God? Do you have answers to these queries, VT? Yes or No! If so I'd be more than willing to listen. If not, then be honest enough to admit as much. But don't try to drag the reader's attention to some remote spot on the fringe. After you have addressed these dilemmas, I have many more standing in the wings. In addition, I'm still waiting to hear from geographical books you mentioned in Letter #117 which supposedly refute my extra-biblical geographical commentary in Issue #34.

With respect to the SDJ problem, per se, I still don't see an actual ordinance in the literature you sent. I see comments on a SDJ in the Erubin of the Mishnah--the Oral Law--and an interpretative definition on the page from your dictionary, but where is the chapter and verse I requested. The literature you keep sending is composed of varying opinions, beliefs, and conclusions of scholars as to what constitutes a SDJ but where is the evidence showing the SDJ under discussion is anything more than an oral tradition? In your letter you state that these laws, both ORAL and WRITTEN, ARE BINDING. You mean the Mishnah is as binding as the first five books of the Bible, the Torah? Even the literature you sent denies that! Part of your book, The Mishnah, makes several crucial statements in this regard. (a) "The Mishnah, or compilation of oral laws made at the close of the 2nd century A.D. ranks second only to the Hebrew Scriptures as a Jewish national-religious creation...." (b) "the Mishnah is comparable in its importance with the Apocryphal and Pseudepigraphical literature, as well as the works of Josephus...." (c) "the Mishnah is, after Sinai, the greatest landmark in the history of Judaism." Your literature also shows the Sadducees did not consider the written and oral law equally binding. On pages 19 and 20 of the Introduction are the following comments: "...the Sadducees say that we are to esteem those observances to be obligatory which are in the Written Word but are not to observe what are derived from the tradition of our forefathers" and "...the Sadducean theses that the Written Law alone was authoritative and that the traditional law was not binding." All these quotes clearly show the Mishnah, the oral tradition was of secondary importance to the written law. The question then becomes one of deciding which to follow when they collide. Exodus 16:29 is part of the written law and prohibits any traveling on the sabbath. You, on the other hand, are relying on the Mishnah which appears to allow journeys up to 2,000 cubits, although that figure differs from scholar to scholar. So, in essence, you are faced with three problems, VT. (1) Where is the written ordinance I requested in Issue #35; (2) Where is your evidence that the written and oral law are equally binding, especially when your literature gives the oral law weight comparable to that of the Apocrypha and the writings of Josephus, and (3) if you can find an actual written law defining a SDJ, then how do you reconcile it with the Torah--the Supreme Law--which prohibits travel on the sabbath? The letter attacking BE which you received from the Christian Jew Foundation has major flaws which I'd be glad to expose in a subsequent issue if you would prove it would be of interest to anyone other than yourself.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter # 144 from SO of Tallahassee, Florida (Part a)

Dear Dennis. Let me add my name to the list of those who so anxiously await each new issue of BE. Great stuff!...While I'm at it I thought I'd mention a couple of my favorite biblical contradictions. Like you, I keep a log of biblical errors as well as a corresponding list of fundamentalist rebuttals. I'll just mention two, here, and also note the most common rationalizations that biblicists usually give me. First, one from the OT. This contradiction is between 2 Kings 23:29-30 ("King Josiah went to meet Pharaoh Neco, and Pharaoh Neco slew him at Megiddo, when he saw him. And his servants carried him dead in a chariot from Megiddo,....") and 2 Chron. 35:23-27 ("And the archers shot King Josiah; and the King said to his servants, 'Take me away, for I am badly wounded.' So his servants took him out of the chariot and carried him in his second chariot and brought him to Jerusalem. And he died, and

was buried...."). It turns on the question of where King Josiah died. Second Kings says Josiah was slain at Megiddo and carried by his servants dead, in a chariot from Megiddo to Jerusalem. Second Chronicles, on the other hand, says Josiah was only wounded at Megiddo and did not die until after his return to Jerusalem. This is an obvious and clear-cut contradiction unless, of course, one happens to already believe that the Bible is totally without error of any kind.... The rebuttal I've often heard is the one used by the venerable John Haley in which he argues that 2 Kings mistranslates the word "meth" as dead, when actually it could be "in a dying condition." Thus biblicists argue, there is no contradiction with 2 Chronicles. Do you know of a rejoinder to this fundamentalist dodge?

Editor's Response to Letter #144 (Part a)

Dear SO. I read Haley's Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible years ago and am aware of the applicable rationalization found on page 326, namely, "Davidson, Fuerst, Gesenius, and Rawlinson agree that the word "meth" in 2 Kings 23:30, may mean dying, or in a dying state. Josiah was carried off the field in a dying condition; he expired on the way to Jerusalem." In effect, we are being asked to believe a few scholars who feel "meth" may mean in a dying state instead of dead, as opposed to those who translated every version I have. The KJ, RS, Modern Lang., NI, NAB, Basic English, NAS, and the NWT versions of the Bible all say he was killed at Megiddo. He was dead before leaving. Your example is typical of one of the most common, but dubious, tactics in the apologetic arsenal. When dilemmas become irreconcilable, the script is simply rewritten. Each of the versions I mentioned was created by a committee of experts in Greek and Hebrew and they all agree on what the text should say. Yet, apologists such as Haley, would have us believe that his own interpretation or those of a few close allies represent Greek and Hebrew better than those of men who have devoted decades to biblical research and have written the most widely accepted versions in the English-speaking world. If "meth" means "in the process of dying" rather than "dead," then someone does not know Hebrew very well because the difference is tremendous. Trying to go back and rewrite the text, especially when the most widely accepted versions agree, is a weak ploy because those engaged in such activities are portraying themselves as more knowledgeable in Greek and Hebrew than recognized experts in the field. If someone with six years of Hebrew told me the correct translation of a word or verse was different from that which I was using, then I'd direct his attention to the committee of experts who have studied Hebrew far longer than six years and given that interpretation to the word or verse in dispute. It's their version, not mine. I'm always intrigued by the self-styled expert who considers himself sufficiently knowledgeable in biblical languages to say, "That's what it says, but that's not what it means" or "That's what it says but that's not what the original says." If his assertion is true, then many of the most widely read translations aren't really as reliable as we have been led to believe. If so, I'd suggest we discard them and have our self-styled experts write one of his own which then could be discussed.

Letter #144 Concludes (Part b)

The other contradiction I'd like to mention is the famous case of Jesus bealing the centurion's slave. The problem here, of course, is whether or not Jesus meets face to face with the centurion, as Matt. 8:5-8 clearly states, or whether Jesus meets only with the representatives of the centurion as is stated in Luke 7:1-7. I am familiar with several rationalizations for this one. Most frequently it is argued that Matthew is actually using an accepted figure of speech, a metonymy, when he stated that the centurion did such and such when it is understood that the beseeching of Jesus was in actuality done by representatives of the centurion. Thus, biblicists feel they have escaped the dilemma by appealing to some vague notion of metonymy used by Matthew.... I'm a little unsure how to rebut the figure of speech argument.

Editor's Response to Letter #144 (Part b)

The best refutation of most apologetic defenses is simply to read the text as one would read a newspaper. Matt. 8:5-7 says, "And when Jesus was entered into Capernaum, there came unto him a centurion, beseeching him, and saying, Lord, my servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented. And Jesus said, 'I will come and heal him'," while Luke 7:1-7 RSV says, "After he had ended all his saying in the hearing of the people he entered Capernaum. Now a centurion had a slave who was dear to him, who was sick and at the point of death. When he heard of Jesus, he sent to him elders of the Jews, asking him to come and heal his slave. And when they came to Jesus, they besought him earnestly,... And Jesus went with them. When he was not far from the house, the centurion sent friends to him, saying...therefore I did not presume to come to you." The clarity of the texts and the contradiction between them are all too obvious. Matthew says, "there came unto him a centurion" who spoke to Jesus. Clearly the centurion came himself. Luke says the centurion "sent to him elders of the Jews" and "they came to Jesus," not he. It also says Jesus went with "them" not "him" and the centurion "sent friends to him (Jesus--Ed.)" as Jesus approached the house. The strongest point is the centurion's comment that he "did not presume to come to Jesus." How the text could be clearer is difficult to visualize. The metonymy defense is nothing more than a variation on the common apologetic argument mentioned earlier: That's what it says but that's not what it means. The story is too simple for an objective observer to conclude anything other than that the Book says what it means and means what it says. Apologists will have you believing in square circles if you are not careful.

Letter #145 from RGB of Grand Junction, Colorado

Dennis. Why do you do this? I mean, I'm all for it and enjoy reading about the Christian religion. But what motivates you to put in what is evidently a lot of work on this topic?

Editor's Response to Letter #145

Dear RGB Because it's sorely needed and nobody is filling the void. Tens of millions of people are receiving a wholly one-sided presentation of a subject which colors their views on every topic from knitting to nukes. People constantly debate politics, economics, and sociology; yet, the most important subject to millions--the Bible--the topic that controls their attitudes toward all else, remains unquestioned, out-of-bounds, somehow off-limits. When this is combined with the fact that the Book contains a tremendous number of inaccuracies and deceptions, the need for an in-depth critique becomes imperative. If there is any topic that should not be sacrosanct, it's the Bible. Untold numbers are being adversely affected.

Letter #146 from JB of Tempe, Arizona

Dear Mr. McKinsey. I have finished reading issues one through twenty-seven of BE and would like to congratulate you and offer all the encouragement I can. I am the student president of Americans Promoting Evolution-Science (APES). I founded our organization in response to the efforts of local "creation science" groups to restrict the teaching of evolution in Arizona. Specifically, the law would have required the teaching of any subject regarding the origin of man or the universe be done in such a way as not to "cause a disbelief in a religion." The bill was defeated but only because one of the legislators felt that it didn't go far enough. He wanted the bill to require the teaching of "creation-science" side by side. I am aware that BE takes no stand on the creation-evolution problem and I compliment the topicality of your paper. You have more than enough to deal with as it is, I am sure. I might even go so far as to recommend that you stay out of the fray as much as possible.... To get dragged into the C/E quagmire would be a mistake with fundamentalists, and I have found your paper very, very, helpful, both in discussing with

fundamentalists, and in my own thinking.... I have never been a christian and never will, and have often felt very much outside of our culture as a result. It is refreshing and exciting to find others like myself who feel the need to rationally explore all beliefs....

Letter #147 from JG of Cincinnati, Ohio

Dear Dennis. Enclosed are funds for the first two years. I was totally impressed with 85 and the first three issues of this year.... A few thoughts about your approach in BE. Your universe is the bible which may only weigh a few pounds but is a very big universe. Your approach of minimizing extra-biblical issues is correct. It's strictly a matter of keeping this balance in perspective which you seem to be doing very well.... Your plans to expand to the doubters is best. The fundies neither think nor doubt but can be malicious. I have done abortion clinic escorting and some of that group are truly "mad dogs." You probably have made inroads on the academics and your next approach is correct in working on the doubters. To doubt one must first think. While fundies are currently getting the attention, my guess would be that the universe of doubters is quite high numerically. Keep up the good work. BE is excellent. EDITOR'S NOTE: We'd like to thank GK of Minneapolis, Minnesota who not only contacted a local talk show radio station in behalf of BE but created the following advertisements and paid for their insertion in six Minneapolis newspapers.

(Three advertisements)

COMMENTARY

Jesus Vs. Paul (Part Two of a Three Part Series)--This month's commentary will continue the discussion of the disagreements between Jesus and Paul which was initiated last month. (18) Jesus--"I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 15:24) and "...Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 10:5-6) and "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine...." (Matt. 7:6) and (Matt. 15:26, Mark 8:27, John 4:22) versus Paul "For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek: for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him" (Rom. 10:12) and "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16) and "Even the righteousness of God which is my faith of Jesus Christ unto all and all them that believe: for there is no difference" (Rom. 3:22) and (1 Tim. 2:6, Rom. 4:16, 2:26-29, 4:9-13, 23-24, 11:19-25). Jesus told his followers to go only to the Jews, while Paul said there was no difference between Jews and Greeks. (19) Paul--"Bless them which persecute you: bless and curse not" (Rom. 12:14) versus Jesus--"Ye fools and blind" (Matt. 23:17, 19) and "Woe unto you, scribes and pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres" (Matt. 23:27) and "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers" (Matt. 23:33) and "All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers...." (John 10:8) and (Luke 11:40, 44). Apparently Jesus felt Paul's magnanimous advice was to be ignored since Paul laid down a maxim which Jesus had already cast aside. (20) Interestingly enough, Jesus gave similar advice which Paul chose to ignore. Jesus--"But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you" (Matt. 5:44) and "For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: but if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt. 6:14-15) and "Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, bless them that curse you,.... And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other" (Luke 6:27-29) and Matt. 5:39) versus an account with reference to Paul's activities and comments: "And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him (Paul--Ed.) to smite him on the mouth. Then said Paul unto him, `God shall smite thee, thou whited wall, for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law?' And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest?" (Acts 23:2-4). Contrary to Jesus' advice Paul felt there were times when enemies should be reviled rather than blessed. (21) Paul--"Who (Jesus--Ed.) only hath immortality...." (1 Tim. 6:16) versus Jesus--"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Paul said only Jesus had immortality, while Jesus said others have everlasting life, too. If Paul had said only Jesus can provide immortality to others, there would have been no problem. But he said only Jesus has immortality. Incidentally, how can Paul say only Jesus is immortal when everyone is immortal according to Christian beliefs whether desired or not. It's not a question of whether we are immortal but one of where we will spend eternity. (22) Jesus--"For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:30) versus Paul--"...all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12) and "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth" (Heb. 12:6). Persecution and scourging hardly sound like the concomitants of an easy yoke and a light burden. (23) Paul--"To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, showing all meekness unto all men" (Titus 3:2) versus what Jesus did: "And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money changers...." (Matt. 21:12). Jesus felt that discarding meekness and becoming a brawler were sometimes warranted. (24) Jesus--"Verily I say unto you, That the

publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you" (Matt. 21:31) versus Paul-- "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind...shall inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6:9-10). Whether or not harlots will enter the kingdom of God appears to be in dispute. (25) Jesus--"There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him" (Mark 7:15, Matt. 15:11) versus Paul--"For a bishop must be blameless...not given to wine...." (Titus 1:7) and "Not given to wine...." (1 Tim. 3:3) and (Rom. 14:21, 1 Tim. 3:8). If nothing entering a man from the outside can defile him, then why prohibit the consumption of wine? (26) Jesus--"...Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do" (Luke 12:4) and "But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil" (Matt. 5:39) versus the acts of Paul:"...And when the Jews laid wait for him (Paul) as he was about to sail into Syria, he purposed to return through Macedonia" (Acts 20:3) and "when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them (Paul and Barnabas--Ed.) despitefully, and to stone them, They were aware of it, and fled into Lystra and Derbe...." (Acts 14:5-6). Not wanting to risk life and limb Paul ignored Jesus' advice by being both afraid and resistant to evil. (27) Jesus--"If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven...." (Matt. 19:21) versus Paul--"...but we beseech you brethren, that ye...may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing" (1 Thess. 4:10,12). How can one lack nothing if he sells all he has and gives to the poor? (28) Paul--"If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men" (Rom. 12:18) and "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace...." (1 Cor. 14:33) and "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14) and "Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace" (Rom. 14:19) and "For Jesus is our peace.... Having abolished in his flesh the enmity...so making peace...and came and preached peace to you...." (Eph. 2:14-17) and "Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ...." (2 Cor. 10:1) and "Finally brethren,...live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you" (2 Cor. 13:11) versus Jesus--"Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword" (Matt. 10:34) and "Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division" (Luke 12:51) and "...he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one" (Luke 22:36) and "I am come to send fire on the earth..." (Luke 12:49) and "they said, Lord, behold, here are two swords. And he said unto them, `It is enough'" (Luke 22:38) and Jesus made a scourge of cords and drove them out of the temple while overthrowing tables (John 2:15, Matt. 21:12, Mark 11:15). If Jesus was as peaceful as Paul would have us believe, you'd never know it from his comments and behavior. (29) Jesus--"Thou shalt do no murder...." (Matt. 19:18) versus Paul--"Thou shalt not kill" (Rom. 13:9). Jesus and Paul can't seem to agree on the wording of the 6th Commandment regarding killing. Every moral and legal system recognizes a difference between murder and killing. Paul outlaws killing while Jesus prefers a less comprehensive restriction. If Paul's rule prevails, soldiers, police, and those killing in self-defense are in trouble. (30) Paul--"...who will render to every man according to his deeds" (Rom. 2:6) and "...every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor" (1 Cor. 3:8) versus Jesus--"For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder which went out early in the morning to hire laborers into his vineyard and when he had agreed with the laborers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. (The owner subsequently hired laborers on the 3rd, 9th, and 11th hours for a penny each also--Ed.)...and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first" (Matt. 20:1-3, 8). But every man received a penny regardless of when hired. Those hired first complained and the owner said, "I do thee no wrong: didn't you agree with me for a penny? Imagine! Every man received a penny regardless of when hired and how long employed and Jesus equated this with heaven. This is rewarding every man according to his deeds as Paul forecast? This is justice? Sounds more like hell than heaven! (31) Paul--"...for he--one's ruler--beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God...." (Rom. 13:4) versus Jesus--"Put up again thy sword into his place, for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (Matt.

26:52). (32) Jesus--"...Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Matt. 4:10) and "Neither be called masters, for you have one master, the Christ" (Matt. 23:10 RSV) versus Paul--"Servants, be obedient to those that are you masters according to the flesh,...as unto Christ" (Eph. 6:5) and "Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh..." (col. 3:22) and "Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters..." (Titus 2:9) and "Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor..." (1 Tim. 6:1). Jesus says he is our only master, while Paul tells servants to obey their masters. How many master are there? (33) Paul--"...remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, `It is more blessed to give than to receive'" (Acts 20:35). Nowhere in scripture does Jesus made such a statement. Matt. 10:8 ("...freely ye have received, freely give") does not apply. (34) Jesus--"I and my Father are one" (John 10:30) versus Paul--"It is Christ...who is even at the right hand of God..." (Rom. 8:34) and "...the head of Christ is God" (1 Cor. 3:1, Heb. 9:24, 10:12, 1 Thess. 2:5). If Jesus is one with God as he claims, then how could he be sitting beside, or subservient to, God?

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #148 from Ed McCartney, P.O. Box 79024, Lakewood, Ohio 44107 (Part a) Dear Dennis. I'd like to comment on something in BE #40. On page 4 of Letter #144 SO has a problem with 2 Kings 23:29-30 ("King Josiah went to meet Neco, and Pharaoh Neco slew him at Megiddo, when he saw him. And his servants carried him dead in a chariot from Megiddo....") and 2 Chron. 35:23-27 ("And the archers shot King Josiah; and the King said to his servants, `Take me away, for I am badly wounded.' So his servants took him out of the chariot and carried him in his second chariot and brought him to Jerusalem. And he died, and was buried...."). In addressing this I'll be referring to verses 20-27 of 2 Chronicles. SO falsely accused the Bible by saying that 2 Chron. "says" that Josiah died "after" he was brought to Jerusalem. Is that what the text "says"? SO then said, "This is an obvious and clearcut contradiction unless, of course, one happens to already believe that the Bible is totally without error or any kind." Although I'm a Bible believer, one doesn't have to be to see that it is not "an obvious and clearcut contradiction" so-called. Look at 2 Chron. 35:24. Does the text say that Josiah was brought to Jerusalem? Does it say that he died? If you want to try and show a contradiction in the Bible you would take those events chronologically, wouldn't you? Does the text say that he died at Jerusalem? Where did he die? According to 2 Kings 23:29-30 his enemy "slew him at Megiddo." Sometimes scriptures are to be taken chronologically, sometimes they are not. With reference to 2 Kings 23:29-30, should "...brought him to Jerusalem, and he died...." of 2 Chron. 35:24 be taken in chronological order? A Bible student by comparing scripture with scripture can see that at this point it should not. A Bible critic probably would take that in chronological order so that he could say that the Bible has "an obvious and clearcut contradiction."

Editor's Response to Letter #148 (Part a)

Dear Ed. You picked a poor spot to make a stand. With all due respect your case is flawed throughout and provides a good example of why people reject biblical apologetics as little more than tortuous rationalizing in far too many instances. Your love for Jesus and a Book viewed as your only hope has closed your eyes and produced a kind of "defend at all costs" mentality, even when the situation is all but hopeless. That isn't scholarship but blind adherence. It's one thing to defend your beliefs; it's another to go over the cliff with them. Several points show as much: (1) You asked if the text ("and they brought him to Jerusalem and he died--Ed.) says Josiah died "after" he was brought to Jerusalem. How could one conclude anything else from the literature, ED. Even your own compatriots who translated other versions wouldn't agree with you: ("...and brought him to Jerusalem. There he died and was buried..." Modern Language), ("...and brought him back to Jerusalem where he died"--Living Bible), ("...and brought him to Jerusalem, where

he died"--NIV), ("...and brought him to Jerusalem, where he died"--the Catholic NAB), ("...and took him to Jerusalem where he came to his end"--Basic English Bible), and ("brought him to Jerusalem where he died"--NASB). I don't think you read the literature. (2) You say, "Look at 2 Chron. 35:24. Does the text say that Josiah was brought to Jerusalem? Does it say that he died?" Are you serious, Ed? Of course it does. How could the text be clearer: "...and they brought him to Jerusalem, and he died, and was buried..."--KJV, "...and brought him to Jerusalem. And he died, and was buried..."--RSV, and other versions already quoted. (3) You again asked, "Does the text say that he died at Jerusalem?" Yes, it does. and, then, you stated, "According to 2 Kings 23:2 his enemy "slew him at Megiddo." Precisely! And that's the contradiction. (4) and finally, you stated, "...should...`brought him to Jerusalem, and he died,'...of 2 Chron. 35:24 be taken in chronological order? A Bible student by comparing scripture with scripture can see that at this point it should not. A Bible critic probably would take that in chronological order so that he could say the Bible has `an obvious and clearcut contradiction!" If what you say is true, Ed, then translators of the versions I quoted must not be Bible students because they compared scripture with scripture and wrote the text in chronological order. You impugn the motives of biblical critics when even the Book's supporters disagree with your analysis. I think you'd do well to reread SO's statement to the effect that, "this is an obvious and clearcut contradiction unless, or course, one happens to already believe that the Bible is totally without error of any kind."

Letter #148 Concludes (Part b)

(After drawing a comparison between the contradiction already discussed and an incident involving Elisha and the dead son of a Shunamite which did not even involve a problem, Ed concludes--Ed.)... Although you are wrong in agreeing with SO that the problem is with the Bible, I would compliment you on some of what you did say concerning the way some apologists tried to reconcile those passages. You talked about how the scholars try to change the translation to fit their preference. Although some of those scholars are my brothers-in-Christ and you are not, at this point I agree with you and disagree with them. I think people who go back to Hebrew and Greek and return with a word that differs from the Authorized Bible (KJV) are in folly, conceited, and wrong. Dennis, by God's grace, you won't catch me craw-fishing like that. I'll stick with the King James Bible, no matter what any scholars think. I find it about as frustrating as you do when Christians shift with several standards. We ought to have one standard. Any Christian that confides in more than one version in a given language has a double standard and is stupid. Concerning letter #146, JB wrote, "I am the student president of Americans Promoting Evolution-Science (APES)." I laughed; I think that's humorous.

Editor's Response to Letter #148 (Part b)

Although we agree on one point, Ed, our reasons diverge. You feel people should not leap from version to version because the KJV is the only accurate translation, while I reject this approach because of the dishonest apologetics involved. In effect, biblicists would have many versions of each verse to select from as expediency dictated. The version a defender chooses is of less concern to me than the importance of him staying with that version when in difficulty. Before we can discuss the Bible we must first agree on the words and version we are going to employ. Apologists are increasingly coming to the conclusion that it's easier to rewrite the script by finding a "more insightful" translation of the original Greek or Hebrew than defend the indefensible. Make no mistake about it; the Bible is a political document that is constantly being altered to fit the times, just as catholic teachings are changed by popes and cardinals to fit the era. By rigidly adhering to the KJV you are going to find your position increasingly untenable and easier for people such as myself to refute. Some of the newest versions show that many of your "brothers-in-Christ" agree with me.

Letter #149 from GC of Playa Del Rey, California

(In letter #137 of Issue 39 HPS asked an extra-biblical question: If Jesus did not exist how do you explain the fact that practically the whole world of today uses the supposed year of his birth to count years?--Ed.) Dear Dennis. This is in response to Letter #137 from HPS. Our system of establishing time was devised by Dionysius Exiguus (a monk), in Italy, in the 6th century. He reckoned (according to the reign of Herod) that Jesus was born in December 753 (ab urbs condita-- "from the foundation of the city of Rome"). Thus, Jan. 1, 754 AUC became January 1, A.D. (anno Domini, "in the year of our Lord"). Later, it was discovered his figures were wrong concerning Herod's reign, but by then the new chronology was already in general use. I think your newsletter is great. How you do it on six bucks a year is beyond me. And I speak from experience. A year ago I published a book critical of the Bible; and I can tell you this. There are easier ways to go, although like you, I hang in there. Matter of fact I'm working on a second, even more critical of the "Holy Babble."

Letter #150 from Francis Graham (MS in Astronomy), POB 209, East Pittsburgh,
Pennsylvania 15112

Dear Dennis. Regarding HPS (and his question about dating from Jesus' birth--Ed.) I might be of help in explaining the present calendaric system. During the time of Christ, years were numbered since the founding of the city of Rome (anno urbis conceptis--AUC) at least by the Romans. This process continued until well after the fall of Rome in the 5th century. In the 6th century, an astronomer and historian, Exiguus, tried to reconstruct the time of the birth of Christ by retrocalculation (using the Ptolemaic system!) and historical research (what little he could do--the 6th century was not known for its scholarly libraries). He introduced the year numbering system we now use (AD) 1986 is 2739 AUC. He was at least 4 years off. Josephus relates that a lunar eclipse took place at the time of the death of Herod. A deep partial lunar eclipse took place visible from Jerusalem in 4 B.C., marking the latest possible date for the birth of Christ. I happen to believe in the historicity of Jesus. There were many "jesuses" around at that time and our Jesus was probably one of them, even though the record is scanty. But, as any scholar, I must hold high the principle that reason and evidence and logic are applicable to any situation and even the Bible is an object for critical review as you are doing.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #151 from Jeff Governale of the Independent Atheist, Box 4123, Oak Park,

Ill. 60303-4123

(We were given a free copy of the March 1986 issue of the Independent Atheist in which Jeff said the following--Ed.). ...the main enemy is fundamentalism, which is diametrically opposed to ALL humanism. I fully believe that Humanists cannot influence our culture while 25-40% of America is fundamentalist. The primary goal of all humanists, atheists, and freethinkers should be to subvert fundamentalism. All else is secondary for the next decade. The best way to subvert fundamentalism is to go to its roots, which lie in the dogma of BIBLE INFALLIBILITY. In my view, Biblical criticism and evolution advocay/anti-creationism are the best methods. Since Dennis McKinsey is the only freethinker in America who does Bible criticism the way it should be done, I encourage all IA members and friends to subscribe to McKinsey's newsletter if you have not already done so.

Editor's Response to Letter #151

Your compliment is appreciated, Jeff, although a couple of points need clarification. As I mentioned several months ago, fundamentalism is only the cutting edge of a much larger concern. Millions of people believe in the Bible but their degree of support ranges all the way from fanatical to lukewarm. Engaging the Bible's most ardent supporters while others observe enables us to influence a far larger audience. The primary goal should be to expose the theological foundation upon which rests nearly every church, denomination, and religious creed in the Nation--the Bible--by showing the Book is not reliable, lacks credibility, is not inerrant, and isn't the Word of God. This brings everything into question and weakens the resolve of all adherents. BE doesn't exist to subvert fundamentalists but to reveal the other side of a vital topic. Millions of people are receiving a totally one-sided presentation of the Bible. Thanks to church services, religious schools, and the media, they are hearing all of the pros and none of the cons, all the positives and none of the negatives. As Germany showed in the 30's, it's dangerous for millions to receive only one side of any argument, especially when subjects as vital as politics, economics, and religion are involved. People have a right to know what's wrong with anything they are being asked to buy and when that right is somehow abbreviated or eliminated injustice is bound to occur. BE seeks to fill the void, to provide the other side. If, after hearing both positions over an extended period, people still wish to believe the Bible is truth, then so be it; that's their choice to make. But they should have the story, the whole story, not just bits and pieces, before deciding. An inevitable by-product will be the demise of fundamentalism, although that isn't the primary motive. Incidentally, I'm not entirely comfortable with the word "humanist" as it's rather nebulous and conjures up a wide variety of images. "Freethought" would probably be as good a description of BE as any.

Letter #152 from Jeff Frankel in the Same Issue of the Independent Atheist

...I have often heard Atheists say words to the effect of "Why should we care what religious people think of us?" Considering that the major goal of the Atheist movement, aside from maintaining separation of church and state, is to improve the public image of Atheists and gain a position of respect in society, the answer to that question should be obvious. What if Dr. King had said, "Why should we care what white people think of us?" ...What if Women's Liberation leaders had said, "Why should we care what men think of us?" When a minority is fighting for recognition, who are they fighting for recognition from? The majority, or course, and in the case of Atheists, just who is the majority? Theists naturally. Theists are the majority, like it or not, and to antagonize them with insults and boorish behavior is not only counterproductive but just plain stupid and immature. We Atheists have a wealth of weapons from the areas to religious scholarship, history, and philosophy to battle theism with. Why do we need to be unnecessarily sarcastic, facetious, and obnoxious along with it? Why throw rocks when you have cannons? In my early days as an Atheist and a columnist for (name of publication withheld--Ed.) which is published by an organization noted for the obnoxious behavior of its leadership, I often resorted to the very behavior I am now denouncing. One of the things which changed me was reading Biblical Errancy. Dennis McKinsey regularly argues with defenders of the Bible in the pages of BE and always does so in a mature and respectful manner. At the same time his arguments are rational, compelling, and more than his biblicist opponents can handle. The bottom line is, if one has the ability to present one's position in a rational manner, one will have no need to be obnoxious. I have found that having your facts straight is the best weapon available and will win the respect of any reasonable person, theist or not. If I had not cleaned up my act over the past two years, I strongly doubt that I would have been invited to speak at a Christian university. Reason is the backbone of our movement. Thus, we must not resort to petty emotionalism which, while personally satisfying at the moment, is intellectually undermining in the long run.

Editor's Response to Letter #152

Well said, Jeff. What you are really talking about is work, just plain work, involving a lot of time, effort, and money. We have to know the Bible and related information as well as its supporters and be just as unrelenting about spreading the word as they are. People who think they are going to diminish the influence of the Bible and religion by a few witticisms and cartoons, some well-placed sarcasm about the religious mentality, and other innocuous involvements are living in a world of delusion. The Bible and religion are extremely powerful and well entrenched. Much more than that will be needed to pry them out. You have to take your knowledge, arguments, and strategy to the misled with a determination excelled by none. Unfortunately, that is something few people in opposition to the Bible and religion are willing to do. They don't like biblicists controlling society, but they aren't disgruntled enough to sustain a long term effort. To rewrite the old song, "They have grown accustomed to their place." They also underestimate the capability of their opponents on too many occasions. Just because biblicists are greatly misinformed, misled, and mistaken does not mean they are dolts. Playing chess taught me to never underestimate the intelligence of your worthy foe.

EDITOR'S NOTE: If you change your address, please let me know. The post office is not forwarding some bulk mailings.

Issue No. 42

June 1986

COMMENTARY

Jesus Vs. Paul (Part Three of a Three Part Series)--This month's Commentary marks the final installment on an extensive enumeration of the ideological disagreements between two of Christianity's most prominent spokesmen: (35) Paul--"...and to God the Judge of all,...." (Heb.12:23) versus Jesus--"For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son" (John 5:22) and "Jesus said, `For judgment I came into this world, that those who do not see might see....'" (John 9:39 RSV) and "Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit on the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28). According to Paul, God was to do all judging; while Jesus specifically said others would perform the task. (36) Jesus--"For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (Matt. 24:24, Mark 13:21-22) versus Paul--"God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and diverse miracles,...." (Heb. 2:4) and "Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds" (2 Cor. 12:12) and "For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has wrought through me to win obedience from the Gentiles by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Holy Spirit...." (Rom. 15:18-19 RSV). Jesus had already stated that the ability to do signs and miracles was not to be used to prove one represented God. Note also Rev. 13:11-14 RSV, 16:14, 19:20. Even Paul, himself, admitted the forces of Satan could do miracles: "And then shall the wicked be revealed,....Even him whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,...." (2 Thess. 2:8-9). (37) Jesus--"For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works" (Matt. 16:27) versus Paul--"Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight" (Rom. 3:20) and "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ" (Gal. 2:16) and (Gal. 3:11). Jesus says you shall be rewarded according to your works while Paul holds you are saved by faith alone. What, then, happens to the man who leads a virtually immaculate life but has no faith? According to Paul he is condemned to eternal punishment, while Jesus sees a reward far more comparable to his deeds. (38) Jesus--"Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with

what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged" (Matt. 7:1-2) and "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged...." (Luke 6:37) versus Paul--"Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge" (1 Cor. 5:12 RSV) and "the spiritual man judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one" (1 Cor. 2:15 RSV) and "Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more matters pertaining to this life" (1 Cor. 6:2-3). Paul not only ignored Jesus' advice by telling others to judge but made some judgments of his own such as: "He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strife of words" (1 Tim. 6:4) and "For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already" (1 Cor. 5:3) and (2 Tim. 2:17). (39) Jesus--"...and be killed, and after three days rise again" (Mark 8:31) and (Matt. 28:63) versus Paul--"and that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:4). Did Jesus rise on or after the 3rd day? (40) Jesus--"...for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matt. 9:13, Mark 2:17) versus Paul--"For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Obviously Jesus could not call the righteous to repentance when there are no righteous according to Paul. (41) Paul--"For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come" (Heb. 13:14) versus Jesus--"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5). Apparently Paul felt his meek followers are not going to inherit the earth as Jesus taught but only a world do come. (42) Jesus--"And these signs shall follow them that believe; In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues. They shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover" (Mark 16:17-18) versus Paul--"Now there are diversities of gifts,.... For to one is given...to another prophecy;...to another divers kinds of tongues;...Are all apostles? are all prophets?...are all workers of miracles? Have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues?" (1 Cor. 12:4, 9-10, 29-30). According to Jesus all who believe can speak with tongues, heal, etc. Yet, according to Paul, only certain people can do so. Each ability is limited to a particular group. (43) Jesus--"For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son" (John 5:22) versus Paul--"Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?" (1 Cor. 6:2). Who, then, will judge the world? (44) Jesus--"Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body,.... Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them.... Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin:.... But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought for the morrow: for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself" (Matt. 6:25-28,30-34) versus Paul--"...every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor" (1 Cor. 3:8) and "...this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither shall he eat" (2 Thess. 3:10) and "But if any provide not for his own and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel" (1 Tim. 5:8) and (2 Thess. 3:8, 1 Thess. 4:11, 1 Cor. 4:12, Rom. 12:11, Acts 20:34). Jesus said forget about labor and planning; God will provide. Paul said the opposite. Each person is to be rewarded according to his labor, and no one will be rewarded who does not produce accordingly. (45) Jesus--"Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:54) and "My sheep hear my voice,....and they follow me: And I will give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them to me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand" (John 10:27-29) versus Paul--"For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost. And have tasted of the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh,...." (Heb. 6:4-6) and "For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation,...." (Heb. 10:26-27) and "...in the latter times some shall depart from the faith,...." (1 Tim. 4:1). According to Jesus you are eternally saved; there can be no falling away. Paul, on the other hand, feels salvation can be lost. It's not automatic since you

can still be "plucked out" after having accepted Jesus. "Some shall depart from the faith." (46) Jesus--"Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.... But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned...." (Matt. 18:3-6) and "...Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God....Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein" (Mark 10:14-15, Matt. 19:14) versus Paul--"When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child but when I became a man, I put away childish things" (1 Cor. 13:11) and "Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men" (1 Cor. 14:20) and "...that we henceforth be no more children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men: (Eph. 4:14). Jesus would have us become as children in understanding which Paul rejects outright. (47) Jesus--"But I say unto you, Swear not at all, neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth;...." (Matt. 5:34-35) versus Paul--"The Lord sware and will not repent,..." (Heb. 7:21) and (Heb. 6:13, 3:18). Paul attributed swearing to God which is precisely what Jesus condemned. (48) Jesus--"But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir (Jesus); come, let us kill him...." (Matt. 21:38) versus Paul--"For those who live in Jerusalem and their rulers, because they did not recognize him nor understand him" (Acts 13:27 RSV) and (1Cor. 2:8). There is disagreement as to whether or not Jesus was recognized by those seeking to kill him. (49) Paul--"Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then, said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me) to do thy will, O God" (Heb. 10:5-7). Nowhere in the gospels did Jesus make such a statement. Part of this is from Psalms 40:6-7 which could not have been said by Jesus, or applied to him, since Psalms 10:12 states, "...mine iniquities have taken hold upon me,...they are more than the hairs of my head." The person who said the latter also spoke in Psalm 40:6-7. Would Jesus have more iniquities than the hairs of his head?

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #153 from VT of Huron, California (Part a) (Excerpts from several letters)

Greetings. May I ask you a question? Do you believe that what you are doing is for the good of mankind? And aren't you really saying that you believe in the Bible by the attack you are making on it? Think about it. Don't you really believe it is God's Word? Why would you bother to fight it if you didn't believe it is God's Word? Well there are several QUESTIONS HERE, BUT I KNOW YOU HAVE THE ANSWERS!!! Get old Tom Paine's book out and find a good answer!

Editor's Response to Letter #153 (Part a)

Greetings. Your letters are becoming increasingly divorced from reality, VT, and in this instance you outdid yourself. How you could possibly come to such a conclusion after reading 41 issues of BE is almost beyond comprehension. One might just as well say the Defense Department supports the Soviet Union because it devotes enormous time to combatting the latter's military and those in opposition to abortion are really its proponents deep down inside. Some biblicists just can't believe there are those who know the Bible and still reject the Book. As far as serving mankind is concerned, BE is undoubtedly meeting the needs of many. One doesn't need to rely on Tom Paine to answer your questions, VT, as they aren't particularly profound.

Letter #153 Continues (Part b)

...Did you know that Satan perverts the Word of God? Satan loves to do this. He misuses and reverses the WORD OF GOD and uses it to his own diabolical purposes. There are some 1189 chapters in the Bible and Satan, doubtless to say, has read every single chapter. HE MAY NOT BE A BIBLE LOVER, but HE IS A BIBLE READER. (1) Satan likes to take scripture out of context.... (2) Satan causes scripture to be misinterpreted! (3) He overstresses one side of a doctrine and ignores the other side. (4) Understresses certain doctrines. (5) He resists the prayers of God's servants. (6) HE BLINDS MEN TO THE TRUTH. (7) He steals the Word of God from human hearts.

Editor's Response to Letter #153 (Part b)

Your criteria are far more applicable to apologists than critics, VT, as past and future issues of BE demonstrate. When it comes to taking out-of-context and eisegesis (reading something into a verse that isn't there) they are past masters.

Letter #153 Continues (Part c)

(On page 3 of issue #40 VT was asked why we are being punished for Adam and Eve's behavior, especially in light of Deut. 24:16 which says, the fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers" every man shall be put to death for his own sin--Ed.)...The reason death spread to all, Paul explains, is that ALL SINNED. Adam's act of sin was considered by God to be the act of all people and his penalty of death was judicially made the penalty of everybody: "For all in Adam died, so in Christ all will be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22). So, just as sin entered the human race through Adam, so salvation from the penalty of sin is through Jesus Christ.... Though personal responsibility was the norm in the law codes of the ancient Near East, in some cases a son was permitted to be put to death in place of his father (Code of Hammurabi, Law 230). Moses forbade such a practice: each is to die for his own sin. You should not equate this law in verse 16 with the ORIGINAL SIN or the Sin of Adam or Man's Fall....

Editor's Response to Letter #153 (Part c)

You haven't answered the question, VT, but only skirted the issue. Just because Paul said all sinned doesn't make it true. You didn't eat of the forbidden fruit nor did I. So, obviously we couldn't have sinned. To say that Adam's sin was considered by God to be the act of all merely begs the question. How could God be just if he considered all guilty and punished everyone equally. To say the problem was corrected by Jesus is irrelevant since there would have been no problem to be corrected if justice had reigned initially. How is the justice of our being punished for Adam's deed corrected by Jesus being punished for what we did? Two wrongs don't make a right. Or are you saying they do? If Joe is executed because of what you did, how is justice accomplished by you paying the supreme penalty for Ed's crimes? Moses may have forbid the execution of sons for their fathers' deeds but the Original Sin in which you believe still dominates. Consequently, the problem remains as does the contradiction between Deut. 24:16 and Original Sin. Or are you saying Moses also repealed the idea of Original Sin on the grounds it was unjust?

Letter #153 Continues (Part d)

...Now the story of Genesis states that we started at the top and fell to the bottom.... We started in the GARDEN and fell to the GUTTER. Bible critics with their various cockamamie concepts jump on this Bible account with both feet. One of the first questions is: How could a just and

loving God permit Adam and Eve to be tempted? The answer is elementary. God created mankind with the power of choice. HE HAD FREE WILL. Man chose to SIN....

Editor's Response to Letter #153 (Part d)

In the first place, VT, your use of "we" is inappropriate. "We" didn't fall to the bottom; "we" didn't start in the Garden: Adam and Eve did--only two people. Second, what "cockamamie" concepts are you referring to? Could you be more specific? Third, the question you pose is not of great concern to those in opposition to the Bible. You built a strawman. A query of far greater substance is: How could Adam have sinned since he was created perfect? To say that he had free will is of no consequence. Regardless of how much free will he had, if he chose to sin then he wasn't perfect. And lastly, according to Genesis "a man" chose to sin, not mankind. Let's put the responsibility where it belongs.

Letter #153 Concludes (Part e)

...Jeff of Independent Atheists (Issue #41, page 5) is right on. The main enemy of humanism/freethought is fundamentalism.... WE FUNDAMENTALIST CHRISTIANS are diametrically opposed to ALL HUMANIST AND FREETHOUGHT THUMPERS who are not the only CULTURE CULPRITS on our most wanted list. I don't believe they do near the harm to the cause of Christianity as do the liberal-modernistic theologians and ministers in some of our churches....

Editor's Response to Letter # 153 (Part e)

"Freethought thumpers" and "culture culprits!" Do you really believe pejoratives are productive, VT? Surely you must realize I could respond in kind and, then, where would we be? Mutual recriminations aren't going to do anything other than build walls instead of bridges.

Letter #154 from Ed McCartney, Post Office Box 79024, Lakewood, Ohio 44107

(Number 30 in the Commentary of Issue #38 posed a question: How could Jesus' prophecy that he was to be intombed 3 days and 3 nights like Jonah be true if he was buried on a Friday afternoon and rose on Saturday night or Sunday morning--Ed.) Dear Dennis. For years I believed that Jesus Christ was crucified on Friday and rose Sunday morning. That was on the assumption that there was only the 7th day sabbath that week. And since Jesus was crucified before the sabbath (Mark 15:42) many teach a Friday crucifixion. A few years ago it was pointed out to me by someone who went by the scriptures that there were 2 sabbaths that week, the passover and the 7th day. You said "Friday afternoon to Sunday morning does not encompass 3 days and 3 nights." You are right, Dennis. In Matt. 12:40 the Lord Jesus said, "...3 days and 3 nights...." Taking God's word into consideration I reject the teaching of a Friday crucifixion and believe in a Wednesday crucifixion.

Editor's Response to Letter #154

Dear Ed. Could you give me chapter and verse for your assertion that there were two sabbaths that week? You heard from "someone who went by the scriptures." What scriptures? And what text are you using to equate the Passover with the sabbath? The only sabbaths in the OT that weren't on the 7th day were in the 7th month; whereas, the yearly Passover was always in the 1st month (Nisan). Since you believe in a Wednesday crucifixion, you must believe in a Thursday sabbath. Where is scripture for this? Now who is reading something into the text?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #155 from WA of Madera, California

Dear Dennis. First of all I want to say that your newsletter is one of the best on Biblical nonsense that I have read so far. Although I've been studying quite a number of years picking out the errors, contradictions, etc. you have brought out so much more that it is totally educational to me. Keep up the good work.... I can't understand why people can't see the Bible for what it really is, nonsense. All they have to do is read it. Everyone who owns a Bible should have copies of your newsletter next to it.

Letter #156 from RK of Huston, Louisiana

(LSW of Sedgwick, Kansas, made the following statement on page 5 of Issue #39: "I must say that you, Dennis, are a mighty brave man to invite the wrath of the whole of the radical "right wing," as well as the entirety of the institutional religious hierarchy....--Ed.) Dear Dennis. This is in response to LSW....In particular I refer to LSW's use of the phrase "...radical right wing." Care should be exercised. It is suggested not to associate BE's admirers with a particular POLITICAL spectrum--if that is LSW's intent. This is the great failing of the Humanist movement--corrupting a noble philosophical concept into a de facto leftwing political party. To test the resolve of LSW and political liberals to match (or better) it.... Perhaps someday, BE's elegant scholarship will be put into a computer program so that one may be able to enter a particular Bible verse or concept and receive an immediate readout of the contradictions and fallacies. Keep up your inspired (humanly inspired, that is) work, Dennis. I predict you are making a place in history for yourself.

Editor's Response to Letter #156

Dear RK. Both you and LSW are making valid points. When he implied that most of those in opposition to BE's stance are "right wingers," he is correct. However, your point is well taken. Judging by letters and other correspondence we have received, a significant number of people opposed to the Bible are by no means political left wingers.

Letter #157 from Jack Trimpey of LOTUS PRESS, Box 800, Lotus, California 95651

Dear Dennis. LSW of Kansas raised a vital issue from those interested in a more rational society, namely money. He wonders how you can offer your excellent publication for 50 cents per copy, when the cost of producing and mailing it must be more than that. On the surface, it would appear that BE is a break-even venture at best. Part of the problem, Dennis, is that very few non-Christians understand the need for "intellectual mercenaries," or persons who wish to devote their productive time to the cause of rational sanity. Sometimes this is because they do not truly understand the nature of the extent of the problem with big-time, organized religion. Other times they get pre-occupied with petty differences over style and slant, and become "sectarian" within the secular humanist movement. Most often, though, it simply fails to occur to most non-Christians that they have been, and continue to be, injured by mass mysticism in its many potent forms. For the remainder of this century, and who knows how long into the next, the dominant social and political phenomenon will be the intrusion of mystical religion into human affairs. While the outcome is certainly up for grabs, my Christian friends say, "And it is written that this shall be." They are looking fondly toward a Christianized world, with one authoritative rule applicable to all, pluralism be damned. When people finally get wised up about what is happening under their very noses, they will see the big picture and understand the magnitude of the religious problem. They will see that their freedoms are lusted after by visionaries who themselves are fleeing bogymen of their own creation, and they will finally recognize that they

had better seek out their own spokesmen and finance them well. You are one such spokesman, Dennis, and, with proper support, your influence on the national scene can only grow.... Also I'd like to contribute an angle on the question of propriety often raised by your readers regarding the capitalization of dreaded words like God, Christian, etc. Proper nouns often lose their status in a changed form as in "ungodly," "presidential," "biblicism," "jovial," "methodism," and so on. Perhaps free thought publications could comply with the conventions of capitalization when referring to the highly specific, i.e., "He is a Christian," and exercise some license when dealing with the general, i.e., "Many atheists are better "christians" than most "Christians."

Editor's Response to Letter #157

Dear Jack. I commend your letter except for the last sentence. My problem is not with the capitalization issue but the subtle implication that "real" christians are somehow the model for good behavior. It implies that Christianity is good; it's just christians that are bad. That's been an apologetic theme for centuries. Non-christians don't become good people by becoming better christians than christians. Please be careful. Comments such as your last often expose the subconscious influence of earlier teachings. Many people haven't broken away from the Bible and Christianity as much as they think they have.

Letter #158 from Steven Overholt of FREETHINKERS, POB 30544, Santa Barbara, California 93130

Dear Dennis. Our operation here works by the posting of essays that challenge religious positions. Curious folk note our mailing address and write us to ask what other similar material we have. This led four years ago to our hearing about the Society of Evangelical Agnostics which carried an ad about BIBLICAL ERRANCY. I have read all of your issues with great interest selecting some ten Bible verses, in the course of this, which I have felt most effective in convincing fundamentalists that the Scriptures are unreliable. Last year I designed a tiny tract, "Bible Study Issues," consisting of a chapter-and-verse list of these. I distributed 1,800 at Los Angeles' Billy Graham Crusade, 120 at a Kenneth Copeland Convention, and even stocked a table at the closing day of a California Bible Convention. Assuming that at least a few others have been as resourceful as myself, BIBLICAL ERRANCY has been exceedingly influential. Most who take a copy of "Bible Study Issues" look them up,...and seem to defect from fundamentalist positions to a more constructive and open-minded outlook almost as rapidly as they do their "homework." Congratulations.' I think your intuitions about the nature of your work and the need to APPROACH the religious have been precisely correct.

EDITOR'S NOTES: (a) Many people send us letters with a wide variety of biblical and personal questions. Because of the large number involved and the protracted answers some would require, please don't feel slighted if yours are not addressed. (b) Some readers have not been able to obtain the books we recommended by John Remsburg, Joseph Wheless, and others. Based on personal experience, the inter-library loan system appears to be the best method to obtain hard-to-find books in distant libraries. (c) Although BE has published the full names and addresses of many organizations and publications in the United States, this may or may not represent an endorsement of their approach. (d) We'd like to thank all the readers of BE who have enabled our subscriptions to reach the highest level yet.

Issue No. 43

July 1986

COMMENTARY

Cannibalism--In recent months several readers have asked if the Bible supports cannibalism in any form and the answer, succinctly stated, is yes. The following enumeration covers virtually every relevant biblical comment and shows the key verses fall into two broad categories: those in which God or Jesus commands or condones cannibalistic activity and those which merely relate activities of this nature. One can justifiably accuse the Bible of advocating cannibalism in light of the former but not the latter. Merely relating instances of cannibalism, rape, incest, or other atrocious behavior doesn't mean such activities are being fostered or proposed. Among the former are such verses as: "And ye shall eat the flesh of your sons, and the flesh of your daughters shall ye eat" (Lev. 26:29) and "I will cause them to eat the flesh of their sons and the flesh of their daughters, and they shall eat every one the flesh of his friend...." (Jer. 19:9) and "I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh, and they shall be drunk with their own blood as with wine" (Isa. 49:26 RSV) and "Therefore fathers shall eat their sons in the midst of you, and sons shall eat their fathers...." (Ezek. 5:10). In addition, there are statements by Jesus which some Christians have chosen to spiritualize, while other interpret them literally: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye shall have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:53-54) and "as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it and broke it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood...." (Matt. 26:26-28, Luke 22:19-20, Mark 14:22-24, 1 Cor. 11:24-26) and "He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me and I in him.... So he that eateth me, even he shall live by me" (John 6:56-57). Then, of course, there are verses which merely relate or predict cannibalistic activity: "So we boiled my son, and ate him. And on the next day I said to her, 'Give your son, that we may eat him.' but she has hidden her son" (2 Kings 6:28-29 RSV) and "The hands of compassionate women have boiled their own children; they became their food...." (Lam. 4:10 RSV) and "What is to die, let it die; what is to be destroyed, let it be destroyed; and those that are left devour the flesh of one another" (Zech. 11:9 RSV) and "They snatch of the right, but are still hungry, and they devour on the left, but are not satisfied; each devours his neighbor's flesh" (Isa. 9:20 RSV) and "you shall eat the offspring of your own body, the flesh of your sons and daughters.... The man who is the most tender and delicately bred among you will grudge food to his brother, to the wife of his bosom,...so that he will not give to any of them any of the flesh of his children whom he is eating.... The most tender and delicately bred woman among you...will grudge to the husband of her bosom...her children whom she bears, because she will eat them secretly...." (Deut. 28:53-57 RSV).

Communism--Although most biblicists are strongly opposed to communism, their prized possession has some decidedly communistic statements: "All that believed were together, and had all things in common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need" (Acts 2:44-45) and "Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.... Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet" (Acts 4:34-37) and "This is what the Lord has commanded: Gather of it, every man of you, as much as he can eat; you shall take an omer apiece, according to the number of persons who each of you has in his tent. And the people of Israel did so; they gathered some more, some less. But when they measured it with an omer, he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack; each gathered according to what he could eat" (Ex. 16:16-18) and "...but that as a matter of equality your abundance at the present time should supply their want, so that their abundance may supply your want, that there may be equality. As it is written (Ex.16:18--Ed.), He who gathered much had nothing over, and he who gathered little had no lack" (2 Cor. 8:14-15 RSV) and "For even when we were with you, this we commended you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which

walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread" (2 Thess. 3:10-12) and "Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his hands, so that he may be able to give to those in need" (Eph. 4:28 RSV).

REVIEWS

Two of the latest apologetic critiques of the freethought movement to appear on the market are *False Gods in Our Time* by Norman Geisler (Professor of Systematic Theology at Dallas Theological Seminary) and *The New Atheism* by Robert Morey (Executive Director of the Research and Education Foundation). Published by Bethany House the latter work is of particular interest to BE because of its wholly inaccurate portrayal of this publication and the philosophy of its editor. After attacking Madalyn M. O'Hair, the courts, the policies of some universities, and Paul Kurtz of Prometheus Press, Morey opened Chapter 3 by denouncing anti-theists in general and biblical refuters in particular. "Militancy is the difference between what was historically known as 'atheism' and the modern movement of 'anti-theism.' The atheists of the old school took a rather relaxed, passive attitude toward God and the Bible. They felt that if people were foolish enough to believe in religion, that was their problem. The atheists did not feel the need to read through the Bible, desperately seeking contradictions or errors. They did not sit up night after night feverishly trying to formulate attacks against religion. They simply ignored religion" (p. 25). A few paragraphs later he continued by saying, "Anyone who reads its literature or debates its leaders finds that modern anti-theism is fueled by such ignoble motives as bitterness, rage, and hatred. Its spokesmen manifest an angry spirit which rages first against God and then (because they cannot confront God directly) against those who dare believe in Him. This irrational rage motivates some of them to read the Bible, frantically searching for ways to attack it. Obsessed with the need to debunk the Bible, they cannot rest until they have rooted out all faith in the Bible as God's Word. Modern anti-theists are on a crusade against the Bible as well as God. One clear example of the anti-Christian bias of modern anti-theists is the monthly newsletter called *The Bible Errancy*. While its editor claims to be objective and scholarly in his investigation of the truthfulness of the Bible, in his April 16, 1984 edition (issue #16) he let the proverbial cat out of the bag: He had requested Madalyn O'Hair to allow him booth space at her atheist convention in Kentucky, but she refused because, "The Bible needs to be thrown in the trash....and the editor's response to Madalyn revealed his attitude toward the Bible was the same as hers. The motivation behind his newsletter was to get people to "throw the Bible in the trash." He would do whatever was necessary to undermine the trustworthiness of the Bible. With such an irrational hatred of the Bible as the motivation behind *The Bible Errancy*, it is no surprise to find the newsletter filled with every logical, historical, and biblical error known to man. Apparently, the editor superficially rushes through the Bible looking for anything he can twist into a contradiction or error. Of course, he does not indicate he has ever had any education in the original languages of the text and history of the Bible." (p. 27).

Dr. Morey's analysis is sad to say the least. He accuses others of bias and irrationality while attributing beliefs and motives to someone with whom he has had no contact whatever and criticizing a publication with which he appears to have had only a superficial acquaintance. An itemized analysis of his comments is more than justified. (1) Why would I need to read through the Bible "desperately seeking contradictions and errors," Robert, when they aren't particularly hard to find? Indeed, while an adolescent some bothered me even before I had read to Book in depth. The word "desperate" implies they are few and far between which runs counter to the entire tenor of this publication. (2) To accuse me of sitting up "night after night feverishly trying to formulate attacks against religion" hardly merits a response. Your imagination could use some restraint. I rarely lose sleep over anything. (3) Your allegation that anti-theism is fueled by such ignoble motives as bitterness, rage, and hatred, highlights one of the most common weaknesses

of biblicists--their inability to see anything other than nefarious motives in their opponents. Maintaining any degree of objectivity, much less providing a forum for the opposition, would be all but impossible if "bitterness, rage, and hatred" were controlling factors in this periodical. (4) Your contention that "its spokesmen manifest an angry spirit which rages first against God and then against those who dare believe in Him," is deceptive at best. A determined spirit, yes; an "angry spirit which rages," no. Anger and rage tend to blind one's vision by fostering emotional rather than rational decisions. "Those whom the gods would destroy, they first make mad" is as true today as ever. In what back issue did you find an angry spirit raging against God? Again, you are making accusations against a periodical you don't appear to have read. BE's dispute is far more with the Bible than with God. Thomas Paine, the deist, displayed a similar philosophy when he said, "For my own part, my belief in the perfection of the Deity will not permit me to believe that a book so manifestly obscure, disorderly, and contradictory can be His work" (The Life and Works of Thomas Paine, Vol. 8, p. 330). (5) "Frantically searching" would be a poor way to research anything. Our approach is actually rather slow, methodical, and systematic to the point of tediousness. (6) Hyperbole rather than reality appropriately describes such phrases as "obsessed with the need," "rooted out all faith," and "on a crusade." Tactically speaking, it's not wise to be obsessed by anything, since common sense tends to fade. (7) Upon what basis do you assert that "its editor claims to be objective and scholarly?" I've always felt our readers are sufficiently intelligent to make that determination for themselves. In what issue is such boasting to be found? (8) As far as "letting the cat out of the bag" is concerned, I never knew he was in one. BE has never supported the Bible or implied as much. The captions, alone, should corroborate that. Nor has it ever said the Bible should not be discarded. Your real mistake lies in saying "the motivation behind his newsletter was to get people to `throw the Bible in the trash." when it really exists to get people to see all the problems contained therein. As a result, many will, no doubt, discard the Bible but that is an understandable by-product, not the motivating factor. (9) Surely you don't think I "would do whatever was necessary to undermine the trustworthiness of the Bible." To imply someone you know little about would lie, cheat, steal, or physically harm others to undermine the Bible is decidedly unfair; wouldn't you agree. I haven't impugned your motives, denegated your integrity, or implied you'd do anything to spread the Bible, although many biblicists would not fare as well. Is it too much to expect the same consideration? (10) "An irrational hatred" is certainly not the motivation behind BE. Again, if you had kept up with the publication you'd know that reason and evidence with an abundance of biblical quotes are the hallmark of our research. Hatred would only blind us to the other side's strengths and cause exaggeration of our own. (11) To accuse me of "superficially rushing through the Bible" looking for anything I can twist into a contradiction when hundreds of hours of laborious study have been invested is only excusable because you qualified your sentence with "apparently." You might want to reread #5 above. (12) And lastly, as far as knowing the original languages is concerned, you again exhibit unfamiliarity with prior issues of BE. The 6th issue discussed the Greek-Hebrew question although more will be said about this in next issue because another biblicist sent a more involved letter covering the same topic. Turning from the negative to the positive aspects of your narrative, Robert, a couple of your points do have an element of truth. The new atheism does appear to be more assertive than the old and BE does seek to cover every logical, historical, and biblical error known to man. Of course, the magnitude of the latter all but eliminates any possibility of success. Incidentally, in case someone should ask, the name of the publication is BIBLICAL ERRANCY not THE BIBLE ERRANCY.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #159 from Robert H. Bowman, Jr., Research Coordinator of the Christian Research Institute of San Juan Capistrano, California (Part a)

Dear Mr. McKinsey. CRI is an evangelical apologetics ministry which seeks to educate the public in all matters relating to apologetics, including warning them about pseudo-Christian cults, explaining and defending the teachings of Scripture, and responding to criticism of the Bible. During the last year or so, several people have written to us concerning your newsletter Biblical Errancy, of which I now have your sample copy. I would like to ask you some general questions and then comment on the specific argument in your sample newsletter. To begin with I would like to know whether you consider the Bible to be (a) the product of sincere human beings, (b) the product of dishonest human beings who set out to deceive others, (c) the product of some sincere human beings and some dishonest ones, or (d) the product of deranged, insane human beings. If you believe that there was a mix...please tell me which you think were sincere, which insincere, and which same. Second, I wonder if you consider the Bible to contain (a) a number of errors roughly comparable to the number of errors, contradictions and the like that we might find by comparing other ancient books and documents, (b) a number of errors somewhat less than in other ancient books, or (c) a number of errors far greater than in other ancient books. If you think the number to be far less or far greater, please tell me your opinion as to the reason for this variation. Third I would like to know if you believe that not only do the biblical writers contradict one another and make errors of fact but they also contradict themselves.... Further, does Paul (or any other writer in the Bible) contradict himself within the same document? How often, if at all, do you think such self-contradictory statements are made by the biblical writers--more, less, or about as frequently as in other books? If more or less, how do you account for the variation?

Editor's Response to Letter #159 (Part a)

Dear Mr. Bowman. You have posed some comprehensive biblical and extra-biblical questions which have puzzled scholars for centuries. Let me address them in the order they were submitted. Your first question is extra-biblical and concerns the character and motives of the Bible's authors. Before we can proceed, however, the writers must first be identified. And, as you are no doubt aware, scholars are by no means unanimous on who wrote which book. Even if the author of each book was known for certain, his motives could not be firmly established. It's hard enough determining the motives of people living today, let alone nebulous figures writing thousands of years ago. They were probably like people of today--some honest, some dishonest, some sincere, some insincere, some deranged, some not--but that's only conjecture. I can't help but feel the author of Revelation was something less than stable and I've had doubts about the author or authors of Daniel, and Ezekiel. But that's not proof either. The writings have to be judged on their own merits regardless of authorship.

Your second set of questions involves material outside the scope of this publication and not really germane to the Bible's "inerrancy." Even if it had less errors and contradictions than other ancient book and documents, that would have little hearing on whether or not the Bible was God's Word, unless the tally sheet showed a score of 100%. Judgments with respect to comparisons between documents are hard to make because two mistakes in one book may be of far greater importance than twelve in another. As with nuclear weapons, sheer numbers aren't the whole story. A lot more is involved. Weapons experts must consider speed, location, power, accuracy, and range. If you are only concerned with numbers then I can say that I can't think of any book I've read that's had more problems than the Bible. But, then, I haven't read them all.

Your third series of questions are not extra-biblical and warrant a more extensive reply: (1) You ask if biblical writers contradict one another, make errors of fact, and contradict themselves. By all means, and no one better exemplifies this than Jesus Christ. You might want to read the commentaries in issues 2, 3, 9, 24, 25, 27, and 28 which focus on his vacillations and inconsistencies and those in issues 40, 41, and 42 which highlight his disagreements with Paul.

(2) You ask if Paul (or any other writer in the Bible) contradicts himself within the same document. Again, one need only read the issues on Jesus to see the answer is yes. (3) You ask how often such self-contradictory statements are made by biblical writers. I've never made a count but they are far too numerous to lend any credence to their authors. As far as how this compares with other writings, I can only repeat my earlier reply.

Letter #159 Continues (Part b)

Finally, I would like to comment on just one point. On page 3 of your sample issue you quote from page 23 of McDowell and Stewart's *Reasons Septics Should Consider Christianity*, where they list eight reasons for believing "that the very words of the Bible are God-given." All eight of these reasons essentially make the point that the Bible itself claims that its words are inspired. You challenged this argument as circular, if I understand you correctly, because it involved using the Bible to prove the Bible. Whatever position you choose to maintain on the inspiration of the Scripture, I think you should admit that you misconstrued McDowell and Stewart on this point. The section from which the passage you quoted was taken is entitled, "To what extent is the Bible inspired?" (p. 21). They open the section with these words: "If a person recognizes that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, he often questions the degree of inspiration. Does it include every book, every word? Does it extend to historical matters? How about scientific statements? Their purpose is not to prove that the Bible is inspired, but rather to answer the question of the extent of inspiration. Given that a person accepts the Bible as the Word of God, the question of the extent of its inspiration can be answered from the Bible without arguing in a circle. The form of the argument may be analyzed as follows: (1A) The Bible is in some sense the Word of God. (1B) The Word of God, at the very least, is a reliable guide to matters concerning God and what He wants us to know. (1C) One thing that concerns God and His revelation is the extent of the inspiration of the written medium of His revelation, namely, the Bible itself. (2A) Therefore, the Bible is a reliable guide to the extent of its own inspiration. (2B) The Bible repeatedly, emphatically, and unambiguously asserts that its inspiration extends to the very words of the text. (2C) Therefore, the very words of the Bible are inspired by God." Editor's Response to Letter #159 (Part b)

You've made two major points, Robert, both of which are fatally flawed: (1) You stated McDowell and Stewart's "purpose was not to prove that the Bible is inspired, but rather to answer the question of the extent of inspiration." I agree. So where is the problem? The first sentence of my sample issue states that, "McDowell and Stewart provide a list on page 23 of 8 commonly given reasons for believing the Bible is inerrant." There is no problem. I stated at the outset that they intended to prove that the extent of inspiration was total and complete, i.e., inerrancy dominates. I never said they only sought to prove the Bible was inspired. You're trying to create a difficulty where none exists. (2) Your second mistake is even more pronounced because your syllogistic reasoning leaves a lot to be desired. (1B) really repeats (1A). (1C) isn't even needed. (2A) is comparable to saying it's true to the extent it's true. (2B) is the first significant statement and merely repeats what McDowell and Stewart said in their 8 reasons, i.e., it's true because it says so, which, as I said in the sample issue, is no proof whatever. If "the Bible's inspiration extends to (all of--Ed.) the very words of the text" as (2B) says then (2C) is nothing more than redundancy. Obviously "the very words of the Bible are inspired by God" if "inspiration extends to the very words of the text." (1A), (1B), and (2A) suggest limited inspiration. Not until we reach (2B) is complete inspiration slipped into the picture--a rather subtle attempt to succeed where McDowell and Stewart failed. This is the kind of deceptive reasoning that has had a lot to do with my rejection of the Bible in general and apologetics in particular, Robert. You are trying to use rationality to make irrationality sound rational.

Letter #159 Concludes (Part c)

McDowell and Stewart's argument admittedly rests on premises 1A and 1B, but these premises are different than 2C; consequently, they cannot be accused of arguing in a circle. The reasons for accepting 1A and 1B are not treated in the section of their book which you quoted (they have discussed such reasons in other books). Incidentally, you obscured the context of their statements by not italicizing or underlining the words "very words" in the first sentence which you quoted since they had italicized them to emphasize that they were discussing the extent of inspiration, not the fact of inspiration. This may have been unintentional on your part, of course. In any case, I think you owe it to your readers to admit that you took McDowell and Stewart out of context.

Editor's Response to Letter #159 (Part c)

Premises 1A and 1B have nothing to do with their argument, Robert. With all due respect, I think you should reread their comments. They go straight to (2B) and (2C). Your other premises aren't needed. They don't even imply, as (1A), that "the Bible is in some sense the Word of God. They state their position clearly and unmistakably: "Two words describe the extent of inspiration according to the Bible: verbal and plenary. Plenary means full, complete, extending to all parts" (p. 21) and "the entire Bible is inspired, not just certain parts! Inspiration extends not only to all parts of the Bible, it extends to the very words" (p. 22). I think you owe it to our readers to admit that you slipped something into McDowell and Stewart's narrative. I didn't feel a need to italicize "the very words," but maybe I should have. I'm surprised you would want them stressed since they strengthen my case and weaken yours. If "the very words" are inspired, why would (1A) and (1B) be of significance since both emphasize something less than total inspiration.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #160 from RB of Sugar Grove, Pennsylvania

Dear Dennis, a greeting. I continue to enjoy and profit from the reading of your publication. The hard-core Fundies are so outgunned that all they can do is ignore your essential points, dwell on side issues, and evade any acknowledgement of the comprehensive catalogue of obvious biblical errors and contradictions that you document with such undiminished firepower. It is characteristic of them that they pretend with fervent faith, that the Bible doesn't really say what you show that it clearly does say--the translators own plain unequivocal English. Under the bright light of your searching glance they can only squint, squeal, and scurry off to their dark, narrow corners. Yours is an honest reading of the Bible, an objective one. Those who are not afraid of using their eyes and their reason in order to seek out the book's real nature, rather than following unexamined feelings or what one has always been told, will be able to look the realities you point to squarely in the face.

Letter #161 from Mark Potts, 8510-A East 66th Place South, Tulsa, Oklahoma 74133

Dear Dennis. I had an interesting adventure this weekend. Some Jehovah's Witnesses were having a convention in Tulsa's Civic Center downtown, so a couple of my friends and I went there to find some biblicists to deprogram. One of my friends struck up a conversation with a Witness and began to teach him about the scientific problems in the Six-day Creation and the worldwide Flood. My other friend and I were listening in as we sat on a bench across the hall from the Witnesses' auditorium. Soon a couple of other Witnesses accosted the four of us, and threatened to have security guards remove us. So we broke off that session and sought out an official in the Civic Center to discover our rights. She called the City Attorney, and verified that all the Witnesses controlled with their lease was the auditorium and the half of the hallway giving access to it. As long as we didn't solicit, pass out literature, or otherwise cause a public disturbance, we could converse with anyone we wanted in the rest of the building. So, for the

rest of the afternoon we tried to strike up conversations with Witnesses about the Bible's validity. Eventually, however, a group of Witness officials gathered and began to shadow us. As soon as my friend spoke to a Witness, an official would come up and say, "Excuse me a minute, brother, may I have a word with you?" And he would pull away the person and quietly order him not to speak with us. This happened several times, and none of the Witnesses disobeyed. I felt like saying, "Hey people, this isn't Jonestown! You're free adults." ...Oh, well, at least we tried.

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Aug. 1986

COMMENTARY

Peter Vs. Jesus--One of the distinguishing characteristics of Peter is the degree to which he disagrees with comments by other figures and biblical teachings. He contradicts Jesus, Paul, the Old Testament, the New Testament and even himself, on occasion. So many instances can be given that each conflict merits a separate section. For example, Peter clashed with Jesus on numerous topics: (1) Jesus--"Ye judge after the flesh; I judge no man" (John 8:15) versus Peter--"And he (Jesus--Ed.) commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained to be the Judge of quick and dead" (Acts 10:42). (2) Peter--"The words which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ" (Acts 10:36) versus-- Jesus--"Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I come not to send peace, but a sword" (Matt. 10:34). (3) Peter--"Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but to the froward" (1 Peter 2:18) versus Jesus--"...for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Matt.4:10). (4) Peter--"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins,..." (Acts 2:38) and "he (Peter--Ed.) commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord" (Acts 10:48) versus Jesus--"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. 28:19). Are people to be baptized in the name of Jesus, the Lord, or in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost? (5) Jesus--"It is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail" (Luke 16:17) and "For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled" (Matt. 5:18) and "the scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: all therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do...." (Matt. 23:2-3) and (John 7:19) versus Peter--"And God knows the heart bore witness to them (the gentiles--Ed.), giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did us; and he made no distinction between us and them, but cleansed their hearts by faith. Now therefore why do you make trial of God by putting a yoke (being circumcised and following the Old Law--Ed.) upon the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?" (Acts 15:8-10 RSV). Jesus said the Old Law would never fail till all be fulfilled. Yet, Peter considered adherence to it by all gentile converts to be an unnecessary yoke. (6) Jesus--"Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible they shall deceive the very elect" (Matt. 24:23-24) and "Why doth this generation seek after a sign? Verily I say unto you, there shall no sign be given unto this generation" (Mark 8:12) versus Peter--"Ye men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you,..." (Acts 2:22). Jesus stated that the ability to do miracles does not prove one is approved by God. False christs and false prophets can do as much. Yet, Peter said the ability to do miracles, wonders and signs proved one was approved by God. Jesus also said no sign would be given to his generation but Peter said the opposite occurred. (7) Jesus--"I and my Father are one" (John 10:30) versus Peter--"Who (Jesus--Ed.) is gone into heaven and is on the right hand of God...." (1 Peter 3:22) and (Acts 2:22). How two beings can be one, i.e.

identical, while sitting beside one another is, indeed, perplexing. (8) Jesus--"Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life...." (John 6:54) and "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them to me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand" (John 10:27-29) versus Peter--"For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire" (2 Peter 2:20-22). Contrary to Jesus, Peter held that the "sheep" can be plucked out of the Father's hand. Those who have knowledge of Jesus can return to the "pollution of the world." They can accept Jesus and later reject him. (9) Peter--"...but God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean" (Acts 10:28) and "Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith" (Acts 15:7-9) and "Of a truth I perceive that God is not respecter of persons; But in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness is accepted with him" (Acts 10:34-35) and (Acts 10:43-45) versus Jesus--"...Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not" (Matt. 10:5) and "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 15:24) and "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and cast it to dogs" (Matt. 15:26). Contrary to Peter, Jesus feels some are unclean and unworthy of his message. (10) Peter--"The Lord is not...willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9) versus Jesus--"He (the Lord--Ed.) hath blinded their eyes, and hardened their hearts; that they should not see with their eyes, nor understand with their heart, and be converted, and I should heal them. These things said Esaias, when he saw his glory, and spoke of him" (John 12:40-41).

Peter Vs. Paul--Peter also disagreed with Paul on several issues. (1) Peter--"Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34) versus Paul--"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the the Greek" (Rom. 1:16) and "But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentiles" (Rom. 2:10) and "Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints" (Col. 1:26) and "As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated" (Rom. 9:13) and "when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, he divided their land to them (the Israelites--Ed.) by lot" (Acts 13:19) and (Eph. 3:4-5). Apparently Paul doesn't concur in Peter's belief that God does not play favorites. (2) Peter--"Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you...." (Acts 2:22) versus Paul--"Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders...." (2 Thess. 2:9). Paul's statement clearly shows that the ability to do signs and wonders can not prove one is approved of God as Peter alleges, unless Satan is approved of God. Satan and his agents can also do signs and wonders. (3) Paul--"...and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor. 2:17) versus Peter--"Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward" (2 Peter 2:18). Telling people to willingly submit to their master regardless of the latter's behavior hardly fosters a spirit of liberty. (4) Peter--"Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe" (Acts 15:7) versus Paul-- "...but on the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been

entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised (for he who worked through Peter for the mission to the circumcised--the Jews-- worked through me also for the Gentiles)" (Gal. 2:7-8 RSV). Peter and Paul can't even agree on who is to take the message to whom.

Peter Vs. Peter--Peter not only disagreed with others but himself as well. (1) "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34) and (1 Peter 1:17) versus "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Peter 2:9). (2) "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29) versus "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers." (1 Peter 2:13-14). (3) "God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment" (2 Peter 2:4) versus "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). How could the devil be walking around when he was chained in hell until judgment?

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #162 from JW, President of Alpha and Omega Ministries of Phoenix, Arizona (Part a)

Dear Mr. McKinsey. I was recently sent a copy of your periodical entitled "Biblical Errancy" (May 1986). I found it quite interesting, and representative of a view-point I have encountered on numerous occasions. Though a full refutation of the information in the newsletter would be impractical, a few points should be brought up. First, your commentary entitled "Jesus vs. Paul" amazed me. Do you, sir, understand the implications of the word "context"? Does background, chronology, and language enter into this discussion? For example, your first mentioned "contradiction" (Number 18) completely ignores the chronological progression of events. It tears the texts from their context and creates nothing but confusion. Your final statement read, "Jesus told his followers to go only to the Jews, while Paul said there was no difference between Jews and Greeks." This ignores the fact that Jesus' statements were made before his death, burial, and resurrection. After that event Jesus Himself said, "Go ye therefore and teach all nations..." (Matt. 28:19). To postulate a contradiction between Paul and Jesus on the basis of the passages you cited is simply illogical. Only a preconceived prejudice against the Bible could allow such a contention. Is it possible, sir, that you are just as guilty of such a preconception as many Christians are in their remarks?

Editor's Response to Letter #162 (Part a)

Dear JW. Like you, I have encountered the same arguments on numerous occasions and your "out-of-context" pleading is one the most common. You alluded to point #18 in the May 1986 commentary and held that there was no contradiction between Jesus and Paul because the former adopted a new position after his death and resurrection. Oddly enough, we agree on one point. His posture did change. Before his death Jesus said, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 15:24) and "Go not into the way of the Gentiles" (Matt. 10:5), while afterwards he said, "Go ye therefore and teach all nations" (Matt. 28:19). So which view represents the real Jesus? I'm not sure. Are we to assume God, i.e. Jesus, changed his mind and completely reversed a very important teaching. I assumed he did not, which accounts for the disagreement with Paul who said, "For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek." If you insist he altered his stance, then you have only eliminated a contradiction between Jesus and Paul by creating one between Jesus and Jesus (which was discussed in Issue 28's commentary--#78). Jesus initially said one thing; afterward he said another. One of his comments is false

unless he originally came to save only a small group instead of all mankind. Is that what you are contending? If so, then you had better rewrite some Christian theology. Or, are you saying Jesus, i.e. God, the perfect being who changes not (Mal. 3:6), changed his mind and reversed his teaching merely because he died and was resurrected? Why would his death, burial, and resurrection warrant such a major change or be of significance and weren't those to whom he spoke before his death on the cross given false information? After all he knew he was sent to save more than just the Jews.

Letter #162 Continues (Part b)

Section 21 in the same issue contrasting 1 Tim. 6:16 ("Who, Jesus only hath immortality") with John 3:16 ("For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life") provides another example. Later in the periodical you mention people jumping from version to version in an attempt to defend the Bible. I am surprised that this would even be a problem. You, as the person initiating the discussion, should realize that you are attacking (if you don't mind the term) the veracity of an ancient document that was written in two languages Hebrew and Greek (with some Aramaic). Hence, I would assume that you would be fluent in both languages, or, at the very least, in Greek, as Hebrew is fairly basic, especially in comparison with koine Greek. At any rate, a basic knowledge of Greek would have cleared up your confusion concerning this example. The word found at 1 Tim. 6:16 is *atharasion*, whereas John 3:16 it is a phrase that is translated "eternal life," that phrase being *zoeon aionion*. As you can see you are comparing apples and oranges. Also, you mention that only Jesus "has" immortality, supposing this to be a contradiction of Christian teaching concerning immortality of all people. Again, a simple examination of the text is in order. The word translating "hath" in the KJV is a participle in the original, *echon*. The continuous action, without relationship to time expressed by this participle is significant to the meaning of the passage. I submit that it is your misunderstanding of the passage in its original tongue that causes your "contradiction." Your assault on the Bible without reference to its original tongue is comparable to my attacking Goethe's *Faust* without a knowledge of German--few would seriously consider my remarks valid. Nowhere is this more clearly seen than in the comment found under Number 29. YOU imagine a difference between Jesus' words in Matt. 19:18 ("Thou shalt do not murder") (Greek: *ou phoneuseis*) and Paul's in Rom. 13:9 ("Thou shalt not kill")(Greek: *ou phoneuseis*). As you can see, there is absolutely no difference whatever in the two occurrences--both are quoting directly from the Septuagint (LXX) version at Exodus 20:13 ("Thou shalt not kill") (20:15 in the LXX). Your comments demonstrate an extremely shallow depth of research on your part. I would hope that you would remove this example in a coming edition of "Biblical Errancy."

Editor's Response to Letter 162 (Part b)

I realize that apologists, such as yourself, place great reliance on the "back to Greek and Hebrew" defense, JW. Some even like to think of it as their ace-in-the-hole. If there were unanimity among scholars and only one version available, their dream would be plausible. But, unfortunately for them, anything but agreement reigns supreme and widely varying versions abound. Your own example shows this quite well. You said there was no difference between Matt. 19:18 ("Thou shalt do no murder") and Rom. 13:9 ("Thou shalt not kill") because both came from "*ou phoneuseis*" in Greek. That is in direct opposition to some of the most widely accepted versions on the market today. Since you questioned my knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, I'd like to pose some questions to you. How many years have you studied Greek and Hebrew? Have you ever taught it on a professional, full-time basis? Are you an expert, a recognized authority on these languages? With all due respect, I doubt it. Those who translated Greek and Hebrew into such versions as the King James, the Revised Standard, the New

American Standard, the New American Bible etc. are such experts. Indeed, many have devoted their lives to linguistics. And the consensus of several of these committees is opposed to your analysis of our example. The translators of the KJV say "murder" is the proper word in Matt. 19:18, while "kill" is the best term to use in Rom. 13:9. Are you saying they don't know the difference, that they don't know how to translate? Are you saying you know Greek and Hebrew better than those who assembled the KJV? They say there is a difference, while you say there isn't. Before leaping to the common response that later research has corrected some errors in the KJV, you had better take note of the fact that several of the newest versions agree with the King James. The Modern Language says "murder" (Matt. 19:18) and "kill" (Rom. 13:9), the New American Bible says "kill" (Matt. 19:18) and "murder" (Rom. 13:9), and the New English Bible says "murder" (Matt. 19:18) and "kill" (Rom. 13:9). So clearly the experts on several committees say there is a difference where you deny one exists. This is typical of the type of problem that arises when you return to the "original" Greek and Hebrew to see what the text says. Even the experts clash. They often don't agree on which text to use among the multitude available and they often don't agree on what the text says even when agreement is reached on the text to use. The dispute as to whether "almah" in Isaiah 7:14 means a "virgin" or a "young woman" has never been resolved. I could become one of the world's greatest Hebrew/Greek scholars and still find many knowledgeable people who disagree with my interpretation. The example you gave demonstrates the problem quite clearly. Does "ou phoneuseis" mean "kill" or "murder." Certainly there is a difference between killing and murdering. The KJ, the NAS, the Modern Language, and the NE versions contend one "ou phoneuseis" does not equal the other. So we have disagreement within these versions. We also have the problem of versions that are internally consistent but in opposition to one another. For example, the RSV says "kill" (Matt 19:18) and "kill" (Rom. 13:9) as does the Living Bible, the New American Standard and the New Jerusalem. The NIV, the NASB, the NWT, and the TEV, on the other hand, say "murder" (Matt. 19:18) and "murder" (Rom. 13:9). So who is right? Who knows Greek best? Which group of Greek scholars should we accept? And these men have devoted decades to these languages. That's why BE does not become involved in linguistics and translations. It's a never-ending struggle often decided more by political expediency than objective scholarship. It's the same kind of expediency that decided which books would enter the canon to begin with. BE only requires apologists to stay with one version or the other and relates problems primarily from the KJV because it's accepted by the largest number of people. Relating every disagreement within and between all versions is out of the question.

Your reconciliation of the disagreement between 1 Tim. 6:16 ("Jesus only hath immortality") and John 3:16 ("whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life") doesn't fare much better, JW. You say the word in 1 Tim. 6:16 is athanasian which Webster defines as "immortal (Greek: a-without + thanatos-death) and view that as different from the "eternal life" in John 3:16. How "immortality" differs from "eternal life" is a distinction only theologians can visualize. I'd say we are comparing apples to apples. Like many apologetic theologians you are trying to create a distinction where non exists. Your attempt to solve the "only Jesus has immortality" problem is muddled at best. You said, "the word translating `hath' in the KJV is a participle in the original, echon. The continuous action without relationship to time expressed by this participle is significant to the meaning of the passage." How it is significant and what "continuous action" has to do with the issue, one can only surmise. Either Jesus is or is not the only immortal being.

You implied that only those fluent in Greek and Hebrew are qualified to critique the Bible. But, that goes two ways. Are you sufficiently fluent in these languages to defend the Book? And, even more importantly, are you more fluent than recognized experts on translation committees such that you can tell them their understanding of a passage is in error? You need to realize that some of your points exhibit disagreement more with them than with me, JW. You say there is no

difference between the "ou phoneuseis" of Matt. 19:18 and the "ou phoneuseis" of Rom. 13:9; whereas, the translators of the KJ, the NAB, the ML, and NE versions say there is. With all due respect, I'm more inclined to believe them than you. And since BE can only focus on one version at a time we have stressed problems within the KJ.

Letter #162 Continues (Part c)

The examples such as the above abound. Number 31 ("one's ruler beareth not the sword in vain" versus "all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword") would be humorous if it were not found in the context of your periodical, as is #33 (Paul quotes Jesus as saying, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" when Jesus made no such statement anywhere in Scripture)--see John 21:25 ("But there are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written"). Number 34 ("I and my Father are one" versus "It is Christ who is even at the right hand of God") deals with in-depth theology, a subject that I really don't believe you are prepared to handle, given the above examples of your work. What gender is the word "one" in, and what significance does that have?

Editor's Response to Letter #162 (Part c)

In all honesty, JW, I fail to see the humor in #31. Seems like a clear-cut inconsistency to me! Your comment with respect to #33 does, however, have some merit. As long as you are willing to admit that the statement attributed to Jesus by Paul does not exist in Scripture, I am willing to admit there could be an extra-biblical comment to that effect. But don't give people the impression, as is often done, that such a statement by Jesus can be found in the Bible. As far as #34 is concerned, some of that "in-depth theology" on the Trinity was covered in Issues 15, 18, 36, and 38 which you don't appear to have read. Instead of answering the trinitarian dilemma posed, you merely belittled my understanding and asked an innocuous question about gender which has little relevance and less impact. I've debated the Trinity on numerous occasions and seriously doubt you could add anything new. But I'm willing to listen.

Letter #162 Concludes (Part d)

At any rate, I do look forward to receiving your work. I do not believe that you demonstrated so much as one contradiction in your paper, and looking over the vain attempts of atheists and others to confound the Word of God only strengthens my faith in that book. I do not blindly accept anything--I have examined your "facts" and found them wanting. Please reply to the information I have provided you.

Editor's Response to Letter #162 (Part d)

Do you honestly expect me to believe that you "do not blindly accept anything, JW. You condemned BE before hearing my responses, without reading prior issues, without addressing many other points that were made; without giving clear, unmuddled responses to the problems you chose to discuss, and without acknowledging your own limitations with respect to Greek and Hebrew. You have not examined my "facts" but only examined some facts, very few, in fact. Moreover, confounding the "Word of God" is not the purpose of this publication, JW. We only ask that you examine all the evidence before accepting the Bible as the "Word of God." But you have acted in precisely the opposite manner. You accepted it as the Word of God long ago and have been judging all evidence accordingly. That which corroborates your belief has been retained; that which doesn't has been discarded.

And finally, since you are rather generous with gratuitous advice let me respond with some of my own. Never talk as if you have the final word on what the text says when even the experts don't agree and, remember, Greek and Hebrew are no different from other languages. They are constantly changing and often open to varying interpretations.

Letter #163 from AS of Chicago, Illinois

Dennis. I am a fan of BE, and I look forward to each new edition. I wanted to thank you for our recent comments on cannibalism. However, there was a statement you made within that text that I disagreed with, and I felt you should know about it. You said, "Merely relating instances of cannibalism, rape, incest, or other atrocious behavior doesn't mean such activities are being fostered or proposed." Christians always claim their God is all-powerful. This being the case, he has the power to STOP any activity he sees that he doesn't like. To me, when this God sees cannibalism, rape, incest, or murder occurring, and these offenses should offend a just, loving God, and he does not stop it, he is condoning it.... If this is true, why do Christians consider this a God worth worshipping? This is one of the reasons I'm an atheist. I can't see why a just, loving God would let these things happen, unless there was no God to prevent them.

Editor's Response to Letter #163

Dear AS. Your position seems reasonable but I'm afraid I'll have to stand by my earlier comment. Far be it from me to defend biblicism but I can't agree with the belief that God does not exist because he fails to turn the world into a heaven on earth. The belief that the undesirable must exist for us to have choices by which to strengthen our character and earn our way seems more plausible. The idea that God should do it all while we enjoy nirvana without effort doesn't sit well with me. That's why BE has never held, as do many in the freethought movement, that God does not exist because if he did he would clean up the planet. Although your argument is good and merits consideration, I feel better ones are available.

EDITOR'S NOTE: We recently bought an Apple computer and hope to have it on-line when we learn the requisite operational procedures and find a compatible printer such as the Image Writer II.

COMMENTARY

God, Prayer, and Miracles--During an extrabiblical response to last month's letter #163 we told AS that better questions could be directed to theists concerning the alleged existence of God than how a just and omnipotent being could permit atrocious behavior. Several of these queries have always bothered us and need to be brought out. First, why does matter, which is known to exist, have to have a creator, while God whose existence is not known does not? Why couldn't only matter or the material world have always existed? Why can't it be eternal? Secondly, and in close conjunction with the first, where can one see an act or event that can not be explained by logical, natural causes? Aspects of quantum mechanics aren't sufficient. Biblicists talk interminably about miracles and divine intervention. In fact, one can say without fear of exaggeration that few topics receive more attention with less evidence. Religious writings and comparable literature are awash with them; yet, proof, evidence, and data of a tangible, verifiable nature are all but non-existent. If God's existence is shown by his interference in the affairs of mankind, if he alters the course of events or changes what would otherwise occur, then events must happen for which no natural explanation exists. The cause must be supernatural, i.e., beyond nature. Yet, biblicists are wholly unable to provide such proof. Prayer is viewed by many as one means by which such intervention is effectuated. Believers constantly give examples of prayers being answered while conveniently ignoring two major considerations. What about all the prayers that did not materialize which unquestionably far outnumber those that appear to have been met? The cemeteries are replete with people who prayed; they prayed so hard it hurt, but they died anyway. And, as far as those prayers that appear to have been satisfied are concerned, how does one know that that which was sought would not have occurred in any event? If that which is pursued by prayer happens, how does one know prayer was the cause? After all, one could pray for a new governor or president, which will occur regardless, and conclude one's prayer was the motivating factor. Hardly a rational approach! And thirdly, there is the question of the burden of proof. Those who doubt the existence of God or the supernatural should not seek to prove their non-existence as they are under no obligation to do so. A fundamental axiom of science and reasonable thought is that the onus of proof lies on he who alleges. It's the theist, the supernaturalist who must prove. He is the one obligated to repeatedly provide evidence for all to see. If a scientist says he will create an explosion by dropping a lump of sodium into water, he can demonstrate the truthfulness of his belief by repeatedly doing so. One need not believe him but only request proof. When someone says he talks with Jesus on a regular basis or other people offer different beliefs of a similar ilk, the burden of proof rests on their shoulders. Realizing that beliefs aren't valid merely because they can't be disproven is of crucial importance. Otherwise, every belief of every individual would be true until shown to be false, which would create an absurd situation. How would one prove people do not live inside the planet Neptune to someone who believed they do? How would one prove the gods, spirits, devils, and demons of different religions are the product of imaginations unleashed? How would one prove we are not followed by green men to those who clearly see them? How would one prove an eternal, omnipotent being, a giant, or a group of gods did not create everything? The sky's the limit if the burden of proof is lifted from the shoulders of those making claims and placed on those who don't believe until provided evidence. AS's letter deserved a more extensive reply and hopefully that requirement has been addressed.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #164 from IF of Vacaville, California

Dennis. In your answer to AS's letter #163 in Issue #44 you finally admitted you are a deist. No one has proven the existence of a deity that is unseen, silent, and does nothing in the face of tremendous evils that befall mankind. Your deity is the invention of ignorant hallucinating, primitive priestcrafts. Man's most useless invention. In the time I've subscribed to BE you never mentioned your background. Have you studied for the ministry?

Editor's Response to Letter #164

IF. Where did I state in that short paragraph at the end of last month's issue that I believed in a deity of any kind? AS and I were discussing the best strategy by which to confront those believing in an omnipotent, just being. Whether or not such a being existed wasn't even the issue. I feel that arguments such as those in this month's commentary present biblicists and theists with poignant and effective questions from which escape is more difficult. At least they have always been among those that troubled me the most. If AS feels his approach will touch more people, then, by all means, he should use it at every opportunity. No doubt many are influenced by his contention that a truly just and loving God would never allow rape, incest, murder, and other atrocious behavior to exist. I, myself, said it was a good argument. Judging from your letter my position should have been made clearer. Including me among believing in an unseen, silent deity created by ignorant hallucinating priests has never occurred before and hopefully will never occur again. This publication would never create, support, or condone any beliefs in the supernatural, including those pertaining to gods, devils, demons, spirits, and angels. As I mentioned many issues ago, my background is primarily in the field of education with a bachelor's degree in philosophy and a master's in the social sciences. I've never participated in any formal biblical training and consider that a definite plus because I've been able to view the Bible with a critical eye and few preconceptions. Most biblicists, on the other hand, have been taught what to seek and, thus, what to avoid, which amounts to little more than being guided in such a manner as to read the Book through a filter of expectations. Verses affirming what one has been taught are accepted while those to the contrary have been ignored or rationalized. Inculcating children before they are able to critically analyze and compare is key to the whole process.

Letter #165 from KG of Champaign, Illinois (Part a)

Dear Dennis. First, let me state that I am a devout atheist living for the day religion peters out due to rationality. I've got some comments I'd like to make. I think it's important to distinguish between hard contradictions, vague contradictions, and non-contradictions. I'll speak of issue #44. Number 6 is a hard, irreparable contradiction, as are most of your points. But I'd say #2 ("preaching peace by Jesus Christ" in Acts 10:36 VERSUS "I come not to send peace, but a sword" in Matt. 10:34) is a vague contradiction, meaning it's open to interpretation. Although Jesus did say this about the sword, it's obvious he didn't come to earth to cause wars. I think it's evident that Jesus was an opportunist and knew what to say to who and when to gain the sympathies of the masses, and this may be an example. Granted I have no idea what he meant by saying all those seemingly irresponsible statements in Matt. 10:34-36.

Editor's Response to Letter #165 (Part a)

Dear KG. Although some verses are no doubt clearer than others, limits exist to the "it's to be interpreted figuratively" defense. Granted, when Jesus said he was a door (John 10:9) and was laying down his life for sheep (John 10:15), he did not mean he was a real door dying for real sheep. One must concede some poetic license. But bounds do exist and when Jesus said he came to bring a sword, I see no reason to doubt that he intended to utter words which would set people against one another, which, indeed, has occurred. Why do you say "it's obvious Jesus didn't come to earth to cause wars" when his followers have not only warred against non-believers for their

religious convictions but themselves as well. Moreover, if he didn't intend to generate friction and strife, then he shouldn't have said as much. If he didn't mean "to set man at variance against his father and the daughter against her mother,...(Matt. 10:35), then he shouldn't have said it. You stated, "I have no idea what he meant by saying all those seemingly irresponsible statements in Matt. 10:34-36" when it's clear he meant what he said. Be careful! Don't succumb to a common weakness of biblicists. When Jesus and other figures say or do things that don't conform to their preconceptions, they often ignore or rationalize the message.

Letter #165 Continues (Part b)

An example of a non-contradiction is #3 (Peter--"Servants, be subject to your masters" versus Jesus--"Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve"). Here is where the usually sophisticated argument of context has merit. Peter and Jesus were obviously talking about two different things. Peter was speaking of "earthly" conduct towards government, albeit, because he believed governors and kings were tools of god. Jesus was speaking of the worship of one god only, forsaking false gods. I would have left this item out. We, as critics of the bible, do not want to come across as "irrational" fanatics, grasping at straws to condemn the bible.

Editor's Response to Letter #165 (Part b)

You are giving the same defense often employed by apologists, KG,--"That's what it says but that's not what it means." But if it meant something else, then it should have said something else. This is the kind of problem you have when you are working with a book that deals in absolutes. If the Bible dealt more with shades of gray or qualified statements with greater precision, problems of this nature would fade, but it doesn't. So we are left to conclude that it means what it says and says what it means. You say they were "obviously" talking about two different things when an anarchist could just as easily conclude they were discussing the same topic and Jesus was arguing for anarchism. I don't know your religious background but you appear to be reflecting a preconception of what Jesus should be teaching and are molding verses accordingly. Be careful with the word "obviously." What's obvious to one can be interpreted differently by others. As I've said before, even though apologists can rationalize problems, we are still going to present them and allow readers to judge the plausibility of their own explanations for themselves.

Letter #165 Concludes (Part c)

Have you ever given thought to comparing discrepancies between factions in christianity? I'm talking about the main factions as considering them all would be impossible. Or how about commentaries concerning totally fabricated doctrines such as immaculate conception, original sin, indulgences, etc. That would be fascinating. Keep up the good work.

Editor's Response to Letter 165 (Part c)

I've considered your suggestions, KG, and hope to employ them someday. But they have a rather low priority because of more pressing concerns. They would not only involve some extrabiblical issues but some degree of risk. To compare the teachings of one denomination with those of another could imply that one group was more correct, more truthful, or more reliable than another. BE is not concerned with whether or not baptists know theology better than methodists or presbyterians but with proving that anyone reclining on the Bible for truth, guidance, and comfort rests on a weak foundation, indeed.

Letter #166 from VT of Huron, California

Glancing at the latest edition of BE, I'm compelled to send the following little paragraph or two. I CONTEND: If we believe the truth, it is because we choose to receive it: if we reject it, it is because we will to reject or disbelieve.... Just my thoughts, my opinions. O yes, my opinion is based on PREJUDICE! You see, I'm very, very opinionated...I read BE. I read this and I read that. If I'm convinced of any one thing, it is that the BIBLE IS THE INERRANT WORD OF THE LIVING GOD. For me there is no controversy.... The Bible says it, I believe it, and that settles it.

Editor's Response to Letter #166

It took a long time VT, but I'm glad to see you finally admit that your opinions are based on prejudice and you are opinionated. Webster defines prejudice as "a judgment or opinion formed before the facts are known, a judgement or opinion held in disregard of facts that contradict it, an unreasonable bias" and opinionated is defined as "holding unreasonably or obstinately to one's own opinions." Judging from what you have said here and in prior letters, need I say more. Your final comment (The Bible says it....") is the logical outcome of what you have already conceded and a poor argument to direct to this publication. The Bible says what? What does it say you must do to be saved? What does it say about God's face being seen or God's repenting? Does it say all men are sinners or who was Joseph's father? What does it say about Jesus being God? In these instances and thousands more the Bible says one thing on one page and something else on another. Even if someone took the Book seriously and agreed to accept whatever it taught, VT, he still wouldn't know what to believe. You think you know but that's because you have never critically compared one part of the Book with another.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter # 167 from Mark Potts, 8510-A East 66th Pl. South, Tulsa, Oklahoma 74133

Dear Dennis. Regarding your exchange with VT of Huron, California in Letter #153, I'd like to ask a question: If we inherit Original Sin, why was Noah exempt? The Bible says Noah was both perfect (gen. 6:9) and righteous (Gen. 7:1), so he was obviously a break in the transmission of Original Sin. Also, since we are all allegedly descended from Noah, how could we have Original Sin today if Noah lacked it?

Secondly, regarding Jack Trimpey's implication in Letter #157 that "christians" somehow represent a high level of morality, I'd like to point out that the standard biblicist doctrine of salvation through faith in no way discourages immoral behavior. When a person gets "saved," so the story goes, it happens regardless of his merit or moral actions. You can't work your way into heaven, so your immoral actions are quite irrelevant to your salvation. By the logic of this teaching, if Hitler had accepted Jesus a minute before he died he would have appeared before God with a clean slate.... (Not that I take an afterlife seriously).

Regarding your exchange with JW in Letter #162, I'd like to point out there are other biblicists who eschew Greek and Hebrew scholarship altogether, and insist that all you need to understand an English translation of the Bible (usually the KJV) is the guidance of the "Holy Spirit." Since the biblicists themselves can't agree on what one needs to understand the Bible, how can they possibly advise us in this matter with any assurance?

I also have some other problems to pass along. According to 3 John 11, "He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God." Does this include Satan, who saw God in Job 1:6-12? And does this include Judas, who followed Jesus (God)? According to 1 John 4:15, "Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God."

Does this cover devils and unclean spirits who readily acknowledge Jesus in Matt. 8:29, Mark 1:25, 5:7, and Acts 19:15? Acts 13:37 says, "But he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption." But if Jesus' resurrection body saw no corruption, why did it still bear the scars of his execution (John 20:25, 27-28)? Heb. 8:6-7 indicates that the original covenant created by God has been replaced by a "better covenant." Couldn't God have made a perfect covenant to begin with? When a biblicist says the Old Law is no longer in effect, shouldn't we ask, where in the Bible does it say God's Law has an expiration date? And when is the New Law laid down by Jesus and Paul supposed to expire? Biblicists assert that the penalty for our sins is "death" or eternal damnation (Rom. 6:23). Yet, they also tell us that Jesus took the penalty of our sins upon himself that we might be saved (Heb. 9:28). If that's the case, then why is Jesus in heaven instead of hell? Both Heb. 9:26 ("but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself") and 1 Cor. 5:7 ("For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us") assert that Jesus' death was a sacrifice for our sins. But there are problems with this notion: (1) When you sacrifice a living organism it stays dead. It doesn't come back to life on the third day. (2) God disavows the custom of sacrifice in Jer. 7:22 ("For I spake not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt offerings or sacrifices") (also Isa. 1:11). (3) Why would God accept a sacrifice when one of his inspired prophets states that sacrifice is a second-rate form of worship (1 Sam. 15:22). And finally, Paul states in Rom. 8:7 ("the carnal mind is enmity against God"), 1 Cor. 2:14 ("the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God") and 2 Cor. 4:4 ("the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not") that unsaved people cannot understand spiritual matters. But since biblicists assert that everyone starts out unsaved, how can anyone ever figure out what to do to be saved? An apologist might argue that God gives people spiritual knowledge through divine intervention, but that's equivalent to saying that the apologist needs to invoke a miracle to save his theory. The Bible gets itself into trouble by making unconditional statements and then providing exceptions.

Now I'd like to relate my radio adventure. "Talkback with Bob Larson" is a live, call-in Christian radio talkshow broadcast via satellite from Denver. In Tulsa we get it on KCFO-AM 970 starting at 3:00 P.M. every weekday. Judging from the geographical distribution of the show's callers, I'd say it has anywhere from 100,000 to 1,000,000 listeners. Normally Larson discusses social issues from a Christian perspective, but on July 1-3 he was taking calls on theological matters. On July 3rd his guest was an apologist named Richard Yawn. I called right at 3:00, got through (which surprised me, since his switchboard is usually jammed by that time) and said on the air that I was not a Christian, but that I had studied the Bible for a number of years (I have found this to be a good "icebreaker" when I want to ask a biblicist a few deprogramming questions. I then asked the apologist why we're being punished for what Adam and Eve did, and how these alleged first parents could have sinned if they were originally perfect. To the first question Yawn replied that we are NOT being punished because of Adam and Eve; each person is punished for his own sins. His answer is plainly contrary to Paul's assertions in Rom. 5:12-19, but I decided to let that slide, since his answer to my second question was easier to attack. To the second question Yawn replied that, yes, Adam and Eve were originally perfect, but they also possessed the magical power called "free will" which allowed them to choose to rebel against God. Larson then turned to me for a rebuttal, and I accused Yawn of begging my second question. Regardless of how much "free will" Adam and Eve allegedly had, since they were PERFECT, how could they have sinned under ANY circumstances? Larson then changed the subject to my integrity. He asked me if I had "sin" in my life. I confessed to eating pork, which the Bible clearly condemns in Lev. 11:7, but that wasn't the sort of "sin" he had in mind. He pressed me on this point, so, to keep the discussion going, I admitted that I had my share of FAILINGS. Larson then asked me what I was going to do about my sin. He was obviously expecting a biblical answer, so I gave him one--but not the one he wanted. I responded that according to what Jesus told a man in Matt. 19 all I'd have to do to attain eternal life is to follow the Commandments and give my money away. That

caught him off guard even better than my remark about pork. He started quoting salvation-by-faith verses to me, but I counter-attacked by pointing out that the passage in Matt. 19 is a straight-forward question-and-answer; there is nothing there to "interpret." I also asked where Jesus states that his salvation advice to the man in Matt. 19 doesn't work. He had no good answers. I topped off by saying that if you had only the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke as spiritual guides, the only conclusion you could draw is that you get saved by being humble, following the Commandments, and giving your wealth to the poor. Only in John and in Paul's writings do you find salvation-by-faith. By that time I had worn out my welcome, so I graciously signed off. Neither Larson nor Yawn got mad but I sure had them sweating. Reached a lot of people, too. How often do biblicists meet or hear someone who talks sense about the Bible? I think that our phone-call showed some of the potential an organized anti-biblical movement could have.

Editor's Response to Letter #167

Dear Mark. Your call to the station was an excellent idea although I'm not sure how much of a hearing you will be allowed when they control the equipment and finance the air time. Millions of people are receiving a one-sided presentation of the Bible and actions such as yours are strongly needed if the trend is to be reversed. BE exists not only to inform but to stress upon people the importance of carrying information to others. Merely learning the Bible's inadequacies is insufficient. One must also relay them to others on a continuous basis as people are not going to alter long held beliefs after a mere 30 minute conversation. Hundreds, if not thousands, of informed spokesmen teaching a kind of Sunday-School-in-Reverse are sorely needed. If people such as you and I don't expose the Bible's problems, who will? Certainly ministers, priests, and rabbis won't. They are out to sell the Book not disprove it. Some freethinkers seem to feel that once they have more than enough information to realize the Bible falls far short of its billing, they can drop the whole matter. Not by a long ways! Not when biblicists dominate society. I may lose interest in the Bible but tens of millions haven't. And since they are "running the show" I'm forced to concentrate on whatever interests them, although I may be bored to tears and wish to progress beyond superstitious nonsense.

Letter No. 168 from RT of Piedras, Puerto Rico

Dear Mr. McKinsey. The latest BE (#44) was a gem.... I find BE to be a very interesting publication. For many years I thought little at all about religion, having become an atheist in my teens or early 20's. But not long ago, I subscribed to cable TV and have been continually horrified by the amount of religious nonsense displayed almost continuously, much of it morally degenerate and self-serving. On top of that I find myself living in an unusually religious society, compared to U.S. society generally, and am frequently in contact with people who profess to believe in the literal truth of the Bible. (Oddly enough, my girlfriend is a fundamentalist Christian). Since Christians usually have an explanation for any apparent contradiction, I think the only way is to overwhelm them with contradictions and errors, which is what your publication holds some promise of doing. (the resilience to evidence, however, is amazing). In attempting to answer all contradictions, one hopes that they will eventually perceive that they have tied themselves in a knot and further see that the only escape is to cut it and leave the shreds behind. The Worldwide Church of God people are fond of saying the Bible is like a jigsaw puzzle, but in fact it is more like 50 partial puzzles dumped in one box and sold as a complete puzzle. Christianity condemns itself with the immense variety of ways in which the Bible has been interpreted. It is impossible to derive a unified body of doctrine from it. Along with simply pointing out Biblical contradictions, I think this is one of the strongest arguments that one can use when discussing biblical errancy with Bible-believers. Reiterating the various contradictory beliefs derived from the Bible can (but will not inevitably) make a dent in the

armor of certainty. I am told that if one prays earnestly for guidance and reads the Bible that one will come to know the correct meaning. If one points out that thousands of Christians over the millenia have read and prayed for guidance and gotten different answers, this is a lance-point wedged under one of the belly scutes of irrational belief....

Letter #169 from MJ of Wenatchee, Wisconsin

Dear Mr. McKinsey. I have read all of the monthly issues you have produced and I am very impressed. I believe you have done an excellent job in research and analysis concerning the various contradictions and inconsistencies contained within the Bible. I have read several books dealing with Biblical contradictions and the origin of the early Christian Church, but your publication is the first I have seen dealing with this subject on a monthly basis. Your publication has an excellent potential to be distributed on a full national and international basis. We are fortunate to live in such an enlightened and liberal period.... Had such a publication been produced only a mere 100 or 200 years ago in certain sections of Europe, the author/ publisher would have been subject to severe punishment....

EDITOR'S NOTE: The editor of this publication has accepted a gracious invitation to speak on Saturday, October 11th, to members of the FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION at their 3-day convention in Madison, Wisconsin.

Issue No. 46

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COMMENTARY

Biblical "History" (Part One of a Four-Part Series)--Historical problems, inconsistencies, and contradictions comprise a significant part of the Bible and include a sizable body of extra-biblical information. Examples are not hard to find although some facts and figures are still in dispute: (1) "Thirty and two years old was he (Jehoram--Ed.) when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem 8 years, and departed without being desired. Howbeit they buried him in the city of David, but not in the sepulchres of the kings" (2 Chron. 21:20) and "the inhabitants of Jerusalem made Ahaziah his youngest son king in his stead.... So Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah reigned. Forty and two years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign...." (1 Chron. 22:1-2). If Jehoram began to reign at age 32 and ruled 8 years, then he died at age 40. Yet, his son took over at age 42. Imagine a son two years older than his father! (2) "In the thirty and first (31st) year of Asa king of Judah began Omri to reign over Israel, twelve years:...." (1 Kings 16:23) versus "So Omri slept with his fathers, and was buried in Samaria and Ahab his son reigned in his stead. And in the thirty and eighth (38th) year of Asa king of Judah began Ahab the son of Omri to reign over Israel" (1 Kings 16:28-29). How could Omri have reigned 12 years if he ruled from the 31st to the 38th year of Asa's rule? And how could Ahab have taken over from his father Omri in the 38th year of Asa's rule when Omri didn't give up his rule until the 43rd year of Asa's rule (31 + 12=43)? (3) "Solomon had three score and ten thousand (70,000) that bare burdens, and four score thousand (80,000) hewers in the mountains; Beside the chief of Solomon's officers which were over the work, three thousand and three hundred (3,300) which ruled over the people that wrought in the work" (1 Kings 5:15-16) and "the house which king Solomon built for the Lord, the length thereof was threescore (60) cubits, and the breadth thereof twenty cubits and the height thereof thirty cubits" (1 Kings 6:2) and "...So he was 7 years in building it" (1 Kings 6:38). It took 153,300 men seven years to build a house that was 60 cubits by 20 cubits by 30 cubits or 96 X 32 X 48 feet. The mountain labored and brought forth a mouse. (4) Now, behold, in my (David--Ed.) trouble I have prepared for the house of the Lord an

hundred thousand talents of gold, and a thousand thousand talents of silver...." (1 Chron. 22:14). The gold collected amounted to \$3 billion and the silver amounted to \$2 billion. In other words, David gathered more bullion than was possessed by the Roman Empire at the height of its power. (5) "Now the weight of gold that came to Solomon in one year was six hundred threescore and six (666) talents of gold...." (1 Kings 10:14). A talent of gold is worth over \$29,000. The chief of a petty, barren district of Asia Minor without significant arts, manufacture, or civilization received \$20,000,000 per year. Yet, the Romans only got \$22,500,000 from all their Asiatic provinces. (6) "Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, The Lord God of heaven hath given me all the kingdoms of the world...." (Ezra 1:2). When did Cyrus rule all the world or all the known world? (7) "...so there fell down slain of Israel five hundred thousand (500,000) chosen men" (2 Chron. 13:17). If this is a correct figure, what a massacre! At Gettysburg, the greatest battle of the Civil War, the defeated army lost fewer than 5,000 men or 1/100th the number. (8) "It came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth (480th) year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the 4th year of Solomon's reign over Israel...." (1 Kings 6:1) versus "About the time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness. And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Canaan, he divided their land to them by lot. And after that he gave unto them judges about the space of 450 years until Samuel the prophet (who lived before Solomon--Ed.)." If there were 480 years between the time they left Egypt until the 4th year of Solomon's reign and Judges ruled for 450 of these years, then that would mean that Saul and David, both of whom lived before Solomon, could only have ruled for a total of 30 years. Yet, David, alone, ruled 40 years as 2 Sam. 5:4 ("David was 30 years old when he began to reign, and he reigned 40 years") shows. (9) "The first of the firstfruits of thy land thou shalt bring into the house of the Lord thy God" (Ex. 23:19). Exodus was supposedly written by Moses. Yet, how could this verse have been written before the time of Solomon; for God had no house prior to the erection of the temple in 1004 B.C. which was 447 years after Moses? When David proposed to build God a house He forbade it and said he had never lived in a house since they left Egypt. "Whereas I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle" (2 Sam. 7:6). (10) "Your children shall wander in the wilderness for forty years...." (Num. 14:33). Does "wander" mean "lost?" If so, how could they be lost for 40 years in an area only 400 miles wide at its widest part? (11) "Hiram said moreover, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel that made heaven and earth...." (2 Chron. 2:12). Hiram, king of Tyre, was not a Jew. Would he have said that the God of Israel made heaven and earth? (12) "Abijah set the battle in array with an army of valiant men of war, even 400,000 chosen men; Jeroboam also set the battle in array against him with 800,000 chosen men, being mighty men of valour" (2 Chron. 13:3). All these soldiers were Jews; all lived in Palestine, a poor miserable little country about 1/4th the size of New York. Yet, 1,200,000 soldiers were put in the field. This would have required a population of 10 to 12 million which is absurd. Palestine could have barely supported 2,000,000. (13) "and the king of Egypt spake to the Hebrew midwives, of which the name of the one was Shiphrah, and the name of the other Puah: and he said, When ye do the office of a midwife to the Hebrew women, and see them upon the stools, if it be a son, then ye shall kill him: but it be a daughter, then she shall live" (Ex. 1:15-16). Would the Pharaoh have entrusted the execution of a command on which he thought the safety of the kingdom depended, to Hebrews. It is all but certain that the midwives were Egyptian not Hebrew. Shiphrah and Puah are Egyptian names. Josephus says they were Egyptian (Antiq. B2, Ch. 9:2).

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #170 from JW of Alpha and Omega Ministries of Phoenix, Arizona (Part a)

Dear Mr. McKinsey. In response to your reply found in BE of August 1986 I will attempt to be brief, as your space is limited. DM, your point that Jesus contradicted Jesus by, after His death

and resurrection, commanding the disciples to go unto all the world is built upon the supposition that Jesus' command to the disciples ("I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel"--Matt. 15:24--Ed.) originally was meant to be eternal. There is no indication that it was. You don't seem to feel Jesus could direct His ministry in the best way possible. Quoting Mal. 3:6 ("For I am the Lord God; I change not") begs the issue as it removes the phrase from its context and misapplies it to a completely different issue. Jesus did not "change his teaching" merely because He died and was resurrected--the death and resurrection of Christ (as the Bible makes clear) was the focal point of the entire NT revelation. The standards you apply to Jesus are at best extremely unrealistic. During his ministry He sent the twelve to the Jews only as He came as their Messiah; upon their rejection of Him and His death and resurrection, the Gospel was opened up to all who would believe. If you think this is a contradiction, fine. Most would disagree.

Editor's Response to Letter #170 (Part a)

Dear JW. So many of your comments warrant analysis tht one hardly knows where to begin. (1) You state that there is no reason to suppose that Jesus' original command to his disciples was meant to be eternal. But what else could have been intended when he said "I am not sent but unto?" If you're going to employ this line of defense you're going to throw out the baby with the bathwater. Literally thousands of biblical statements will be brought into question. One could ignore any biblical maxim by simply saying it only applied to the individuals directly involved and the period in which it was uttered. If the absolutist nature of many biblical teachings is jettisoned, the structure will begin to disintegrate. One could argue, for example, that the "Thou's" in the Ten Commandments only apply to the persons being directly addressed. Secondly, what evidence do you have that it was not eternal? I see no such qualifier in the text. You talk about a "supposition"; yet, you are supposing something less than eternity when nothing in the text justifies your belief. Thirdly, even if the statement was meant to be valid only for a short period, you have only shown that Jesus changed his mind and strategy. The perfect, omniscient being altered his course! This could be seen as more damaging than a contradiction. Fourth, you said "Jesus could direct His ministry in the best way possible." Yet, one can't help but ask, "What's best about it?" The supposedly prescient, perfect being changed tactics and abandoned a crucial teaching. (2) Your comment that Mal 3:6 was misapplied and taken out of context has no merit not only because biblicists constantly quote the verse in any context deemed suitable but because it is appropriate. Jesus is God and God does not change his basic nature, which includes consistency. For Jesus to change a basic teaching, especially because it was rejected by those to whom it was directed, would not only be inconsistent but expedient. (3) You accuse me of contending that Jesus changed his mind because of his death and resurrection when that was your position. Remember saying, "Your final statement read, `Jesus told his followers to go only to the Jews'.... This ignores the fact that Jesus' statements were made before his death, burial and resurrection. After that event Jesus said...teach all nations" (Issue #44, p.3). (4) You accuse me of applying unrealistic standards to Jesus when all I'm requesting is consistency. Is that too much to ask of a perfect being? (5) What do you mean by saying, "the gospel was opened up...?" You mean Jesus only came to save the Jews and only turned to the gentiles because the Jews rejected him? You mean we can all be saved only because the Jews eschewed him. How does it feel to be a consolation prize, separate from God's first choice, especially when this flies in the face of Acts 10:34 and Rom. 2:11 which say God is impartial? (6) Finally, it isn't a question of whether I think this is a contradiction; I know it is. Jesus originally said I am not sent but unto and later sent his followers to all nations. The "most" whom you contend would not feel this is a contradiction are biblicists and that's to be expected.

Letter #170 Continues (Part b)

Part (b) truly amazed me. The main proof you attempted to argue had to do with the fact that you had claimed a contradiction between Paul and Jesus at Matt. 19:18 ("Thou shalt do no murder") and Romans 13:9 ("Thou shalt not kill"). You wrote, "Jesus and Paul can't seem to agree on the wording of the 6th Commandment regarding killing." I simply pointed out to you that you were wrong. Both Jesus and Paul said the exact same thing--ou phoneuseis--hence, they obviously did agree on the wording of the 6th Commandment. Your claim was wrong. How an English, German, or French translator or anyone else renders ou phoneuseis into their own tongue is completely irrelevant to the issue you brought up. If you have problems with Matt. 19:18/Rom. 13:9 bring it up with the translators, not with the Bible. There is no contradiction as the exact same word is used. You spent nearly a full page begging an issue that had not even been raised. I would challenge you to look up the passage in a modern critical text and see for yourself. And then to say that my comment "is in direct opposition to some of the most widely accepted versions on the market today." Really, DM, this is ridiculous. Phoneuo is defined as "murder, kill" (Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, Danker, A Greek-English Lexicon of the NT and other Early Christian literature, p. 864). You contend that since various versions use synonyms (murder, kill) they are trying to point out a difference in the two passages--please, DM, since you failed to answer my question of your own ability to translate Greek I can only assume that you are unqualified to make the assertion that you do. These versions are not trying to differentiate these passages at all. Again, all of this is irrelevant as your charge was that Jesus and Paul used different wording which they obviously did not. Let the reader decide for himself. (By the way, the very fact that you list the New World Translation of the Jehovah's Witnesses along with truly scholarly editions is amazing--I would like to suggest you look into the NWT and find out what it really is--I enclose a tract pointing out some interesting facts about that subject).

Editor's Response to Letter #170 (Part b)

Again, JW, your comments are misleading. To begin with, you speak as if you had the autographs (the original writings) in your lap when, in truth, you and your compatriots have never seen them nor have any other living human beings. Apologists concede that they do not exist and I see little reason to believe they ever did. "The autographs are not extant so they must be reconstructed from early manuscripts and versions" (A General Introduction to the Bible by Geisler and Nix, p. 237). All scholars have are thousands of manuscripts, codices, lectionaires and other writings purporting to be accurate representations of the non-existent originals. How, then, do we know for certain what the original said? We don't! Scholars only make educated guesses based upon the best evidence available after analyzing and comparing those writings that are available. They boast about the large number of existing NT manuscripts as if this confirmed the reliability of today's NT. "There are now more than 5,300 known Greek manuscripts of the NT. Add over 10,000 Latin Vulgate and at least 9,300 other early versions and we have more than 24,000 manuscript copies of portions of the NT in existence today. No other document of antiquity even begins to approach such numbers and attestation" (Evidence That Demands a Verdict by Josh McDowell, p. 39). "There are no known original manuscripts of the Bible; in fact, none are needed because of the abundance of manuscript copies" (Ibid. Geisler and Nix, p. 267). Yet, they also admit there are over 200,000 disagreements among these writings on what verses say and what verses should be included. "The multiplicity of manuscripts produces a corresponding number of variant readings, for the more manuscripts that are copied the greater will be the number of copyists' errors.... The gross number of variants increases with every new manuscript discovery.... To date there are over 200,000 known variants and this figure will no doubt increase in the future as more manuscripts are discovered" (Ibid. Geisler and Nix, p. 360-61). Notice that Geisler and Nix try to diminish the importance of this figure by attributing the variants to just copyist errors which they have no way of proving. They also minimize the problem by contending some errors are merely repetitious and few have any real bearing on important Christian doctrine which is utterly false. Because of wide variances among

manuscripts scholars can't agree on whether the last 12 verses of Mark (which involve some very important tests for belief) should even be in the the Bible. They can't agree on whether Isa. 7:14 says a virgin or a young woman, which has a direct bearing on the only OT prophecy of a virgin birth. They can't agree on whether the word "yet" should be in John 7:8, which is crucial to Jesus' honesty. One need only read critiques of the latest versions of the Bible written by the King James advocates to see that many disagreements over wording involve important beliefs. Apologists even go so far as to imply that the greater the number of variants the greater the precision. "At first, the great multitude of variants would seem to be a liability to the integrity of the Bible text. But, just the contrary is true, for the larger number of variants supplies at the same time the means of checking on those variants. As strange as it may appear, the corruption of the text provides the means for its own correction" (Ibid. Geisler and Nix, p. 366). "Strange" is hardly the word; "absurd" is much better. Imagine a homicide detective saying his knowledge of what occurred grows as the number of conflicting testimonies increases. Twenty-four thousand manuscripts would provide tremendous support if they agreed, but when they don't, when over 200,000 disagreements exist, precisely the opposite occurs. Secondly, as a result of speaking as if you have the autographs and ignoring manuscript variances, you erroneously conclude that your source is the final authority. You said that if I "have problems with Matt. 19:18/Rom. 13:9" I should "bring it up with the translators, not with the Bible." But it is not I but you who should consult with the translators. You said, "both Jesus and Paul said the exact same thing--ou phoneuseis--yet translators used different words--murder and kill-- which you erroneously called synonymous. You mean soldiers in battle and those shooting in self-defense or to protect loved ones are murderers? The translators with whom you disagree might have any one of several reasons for rejecting your interpretation and used "murder" in one instance and "kill" in another. The following are only a few available: (a) "You picked inaccurate manuscripts among the thousands available. Some translators might have good reasons for using manuscripts with something other than "ou phoneuseis." For example, 100 manuscripts may have "ou phoneuseis" and 50 something else; yet the 50 are preferable because they are far older and closer to the source. (b) "You chose accurate manuscripts but don't realize that identical words can have different meanings." "Pound," for example, can refer to an enclosure for animals, English money, or hitting something, rather than weight, and "hand" can refer to a sailor, part of a clock, a unit of measurement or a game of cards rather than the end of an arm. One "ou phoneuseis" might mean something quite different from another and if you would consult with the translators they might show you why one was translated "murder" and the other "kill." A contradiction could exist even though the words are identical. Identical words need not have the same meaning. Context is a major factor. (c) If you manage to surmount these two obstacles as well as others, an even larger one could be looming on the horizon--the imprecision of the Greek language. If "ou phoneuseis" can mean both "kill" and "murder" as your Greek-English lexicon of the NT says, then the verse means nothing and might just as well be stricken from the Bible. Unless definite guidelines exist by which to determine which is appropriate, and that's highly unlikely in light of the disagreements among the experts, the words can't be translated reliably. How do you know which to use in the English translation--kill or murder? The distinction is crucial. If they were synonymous in English there would be no problem. But they are not. The problems associated with lower (textual) criticism seem to elude you, JW. The large number of disagreements among the major versions on the market today are something biblicists would just as soon avoid for obvious reasons. If people realize experts are at loggerheads over many key points then what is the layman to believe. Dissension erodes people's faith in the Bible to such an extent that biblicists would rather have you believe in any version than nothing at all. Your comment with respect to the Jehonah's Witnesses' New World Translation exposes a distinct bias. BE quotes the most prominent versions available regardless of the source. We also quoted the Living Bible and for you to include it among the "truly scholarly editions" borders on the absurd. The NWT, with all its imperfections, is considerably more scholarly than the pathetic paraprse known as the Living Bible.

Letter #170 continues (Part c)

(Part 21 in the May commentary expressed the following contradiction. Paul said, "Jesus only hath immortality," while Jesus said, "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life--Ed.) Again, DM, you beg the question by dodging the clear fact that the Bible differentiates between athanasia (Greek for immortal--Ed.) which is Christ's by right, and zoen aionion (Greek for eternal life--Ed.) which is given to the believers at the time of the new birth. Just because you don't understand the difference does not mean it doesn't exist. In the same way, you said that my explanation of the use of echon (hath--Ed.) in relation to immortality was "muddled" and that what the relationship of the continuous action of the participle to the passage was "one can only surmise." Again, simply because you do not understand the passage as it was written is no excuse for continuing to suppose a contradiction. Anyone familiar with the language would be able to follow what I said and would see that you are arguing from ignorance. You simply will not allow for the possibility that the Bible might indeed be consistent on this point, DM. You are making the exact same kind of error you decry in others. (To Be Continued)

Editor's Response to Letter #170 (Part c)

You speak of ignorance, JW, when the tapes and literature I received from your organization continually try to make distinctions without differences in order to escape imbroglios. You assert that athanasia applies to Christ while zoen aionion applies to believers. Where does the Bible make such a distinction? First Cor. 15:53-54 says, "For this corruptible must put on incorruption; and this mortal must put on immortality (from athanasia--Ed.) ...and this mortal shall have put on immortality,..." As you see athanasia could apply to any believer and need not be restricted to Jesus. Moreover, several verses show zoen aionion could apply to Jesus and need not be restricted to believers: "God hath given to us eternal life (zoen aionion), and this life is in the Son" (1 John 5:11), "Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood hath eternal life" (John 6:54), "For the life was manifested, and we have seen it...and shew unto you that eternal life which was with the Father, and manifested unto us" (John 1:2) and 1 John 5:20. If eternal life is in the Son, if eternal life enters one by eating the Son, if Jesus can be called that eternal life which was with the Father, then it's safe to conclude "zoen aionion" can apply to Jesus as well as believers. You said, "Just because you don't understand the difference does not mean it doesn't exist," when the truth is that just because you created one doesn't mean it does. Your interpretation of "echon" (hath) in 1 Tim. 6:16 ("who only hath immortality) is even more tenuous. On page 4 in the August issue you originally asserted that, "the word translating `hath' in the KJV of 1 Tim. 6:16 is a participle in the original, echon. The continuous action, without relationship to time expressed by this participle is significant to the meaning of the passage." Although you are yet to make your point very clear, I assume you meant then, and are repeating now, that echon means Jesus had immortality throughout eternity while others merely obtained it at a point in time. Following your logic, echon (hath) in Mark 9:17 ("my son, which hath a dumb spirit") means his son had a dumb spirit throughout eternity and echon is John 10:20 ("He hath a devil, and is mad") means he has been mad throughout eternity. These are only a couple of the many examples available. The question is not when immortality or eternal life is obtained but who has it. First Tim. 6:16 said only Jesus has it. Nearly every major version translates the verb in 1 Tim. 6:16 as "has," "possesses," or "is," and none even imply that the verb requires eternity. If it did then their translators aren't very proficient because that's a major distinction. Judging from the verbs they employed those on translation committees apparently don't see your capricious distinctions either. You need to either get with your apologetic colleagues on these committees and create a consensus version or devise a version of your own. Should you decide on the latter, send me a copy and I'll be glad to critique it. You have several lamentable habits, JW, including inadequately explaining or proving your position, generating arbitrary distinctions to escape dilemmas, rationalizing the obvious, and patronizing your opponent. You also dwell on

ad hominem comments to such an extent that if it continues you could notice a change in the tenor of my responses.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #171 from AS of Chicago, Illinois

Dear Dennis. I've been thinking about something for quite a while and I thought the time had come to ask someone who knows the bible rather than read the whole thing myself to find the answer. The question may seem simple, but I am really curious about the answer. It is simply this: How many bad or evil things in the bible is SATAN DIRECTLY responsible for? How many wars did he start? How many people did he kill? How many towns did he destroy? How many times did he use disease to strike back at or simply cause someone trouble? Don't get me wrong. I am not a satanist, simply an Atheist who is curious. Christians always say God is GOOD and Satan is BAD and I want to see just how bad the bible says Satan really is. In the research I've done,...I have yet to see Satan responsible for anything. With the bad rap Christians give him I want to know just how much he's done! Are Christians misdirecting their hatred or is Satan deserving of it?

Editor's Response to Letter #171

Dear AS. Excellent questions! I've often expressed similar concerns. Perhaps readers of a different persuasion can delineate biblical acts showing the Devil's deeds are worse than those attributed to God by the Bible and outlined in our third issue. On the radio I've gone further by asking people to relate one good, honest, just act committed by God in the entire OT that would cause you to hug his neck and kiss his cheek while saying, I'm proud of you.

EDITOR'S NOTE: We'd like to thank DS of Saskatchewan, Canada who arranged for our October 17th appearance on a radio talk show. Except for financial donations nothing is of greater assistance to BE than contacting the media on our behalf. We'd also like to thank the anonymous donor who entered an ad for BE in the NFD Journal. Requests for sample copies are coming in.

Issue No. 47

Nov. 1986

COMMENTARY

Biblical "History" (Part Two of a Four-Part Series)--This month's commentary will continue last month's listing of historical problems: (14) If Terah was 70 years old when Abraham was born ("When Terah had lived 70 years, he became the father of Abram..."--Gen. 11:26) and Abraham left Haran at age 75 after his father Terah died ("...Abram was 75 years old when he departed out of Haran"--Gen. 12:4) ("Then he--Abraham--lived in Haran and after his father died, God removed him..."--Acts 7:4 RSV), then Terah lived to be 145. Yet, Gen. 11:32 says, "And the days of Terah were 205 years; and Terah died in Haran" (Gen. 11:32). (15) Or to restate #14 differently: If Terah was 70 years old when Abraham was born (Gen. 11:26) and Terah was 205 years old when he died (Gen. 11:32), then Abraham was 135 years old when Terah died. Yet, Abraham was only 75 years old when he left Haran after the death of Terah (Gen. 12:4, Acts 7:4 RSV). Abraham was only 75 years old after having lived 135 years. (16) "And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech" (Gen. 11:1) and "the Lord said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language" (Gen. 11:6) and "Therefore is the name of it called Babel;

because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth" (Gen. 11:9) versus "By these were the isles of the Gentiles divided in their lands; every one after his tongue" (Gen. 10:5). How could languages have been created at the Tower of Babel in Gen. 11 when Gen. 10:5 shows there were already many languages? There couldn't have been one language in Gen. 11, because Gen. 10:20 and 10:31 say "after their tongues" and show many languages already existed. (17) "And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose" (Matt. 27:52). How could there be saints before the church set up the saint calendar? Jews did not canonize saints. (18) If Noah was 500 years old when he begat Shem ("Noah was 500 years old and Noah begat Shem, Ham, and Japheth"--Gen. 5:32) and 600 years old at the time of the Flood ("And Noah was 600 years old when the flood of waters was upon the earth"--Gen. 7:6) then Shem was 100 years old at the time of the Flood. How, then, could Gen. 11:10 ("Shem was an 100 years old, and begat "Arphaxad 2 years after the Flood") be true? Shem would have been 102, not 100, when he begat Arphaxad two years after the Flood. (19) "And there came a writing to Jehoram from Elijah the prophet saying..." (2 Chron. 21:12) versus "...there appeared a chariot of fire,...and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven" (2 Kings 2:11) and later "And in the 5th year of Joram the son of Ahab king of Israel,...Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah began to reign" (2 Kings 8:16). In 2 Kings 2:11 Elijah went to heaven in a chariot and later in 2 Kings 8 Jehoram began to reign. How, then, could Elijah have sent Jehoram a letter when Elijah left for heaven before Jehoram appeared on the scene? (20) "Now the sojourning of the children of Isreal, who dwelt in Egypt, was 430 years" (Ex. 12:40) versus "Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring.... This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward (after the promises--Ed.) does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God,...." (Gal. 3:16-17). If what Paul says in Galatians is true, then Abraham got the Covenant exactly when the Israelites entered Egypt which is impossible. Some try to solve the problem this presents by quoting the Septuagint, which says, "they sojourned in Canaan and in Egypt 430 years." This would require 430 years from the time Abraham entered Canaan until the Exodus from Egypt. Yet, there were 25 years from Abraham entering the land until Isaac's birth: "So Abram departed...and Lot went with him; and Abram was 75 years old when he departed out of Haran" (Gen. 12:4) and "when Abram was 99 the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him...my covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year" (Gen. 17:1, 21). Isaac was 60 when Jacob was born ("and his name was called Jacob: and Isaac was threescore years old (60) when she bear them (Jacob and Esau--Ed.)"--Gen. 25:26 and Jacob was 130 when he entered Egypt ("and Jacob said to pharoah, The days of the years of my sojourning are 130 years"--Gen. 47:9 RSV). If we add 25, 60, and 130 we get 215 years which would leave 215 years for the actual sojourning in Egypt, not 430 years. (21) "And God spoke to this effect, that his (Abraham's--Ed.) prosperity would be aliens in a land belonging to others, who would enslave them and ill-treat them 400 years" (acts 7:6) versus "Now the promises were make to Abraham and to his offspring.... This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God..." (Gal. 3:16-17 RSV). How could they have been in Egypt for 400 years if the law was given 430 years after the covenant was given to Abraham? That would mean all the events between Abraham receiving the covenant and the Jews entering Egypt would have to have occurred within 30 years, hardly a viable option. (22) "Now the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt was 430 years" (Ex. 12:40) versus "Kohath (Jacob's grandson--Ed.) who went down into Eqypt with Jacob, lived 133 years ("the years of the life of Kohath were an 133 years"--Ex. 6:18). Kohath's son was Amram ("And the sons of Kohath: Amram, and Izhar...."--Ex. 6:18) who lived 137 years ("...and the years of the life of Amram were 137 years"--Ex. 6:20). Amram's son was Moses (Ex. 6:20) who was 80 years old when the Israelites left Egypt ("Moses was fourscore (80) years old and Aaron fourscore and three years old, when they spake unto the Pharoah. Consequently, the Israelites could not have been in Egypt longer than 350 years (133 + 137 + 80 = 350), even if Kohath had been born the day they entered. (23) "...Pilate saith unto them, Take ye him, and crucify him: for I find no fault in him" (John 19:6). It's hard to believe that the highest court of a

country would pronounce a man innocent and then condemn him to death. (24) "...which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:21). What prophets were living when the world began? (25) "King Solomon offered as a sacrifice 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep" (2 Chron. 7:5). These numbers are dubious at best in light of the fact that they were offered within a one week period and would have required the killing and burning of 5 oxen and 24 sheep every minute, assuming 12 hours for work. (26) "That upon you (the pharisees and scribes--Ed.) may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar" (Matt. 23:35). (a) How could the pharisees and scribes be responsible for Abel's death? (b) The Zacharias mentioned was killed in Jerusalem in 69 A.D. Jesus is accusing people of killing a man who was yet to die. He was the same Zacharias Baruchos who, according to Josephus, was slain in the temple a short time before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Several scholars, such as Professor Newman, say there is no other man known to history to whom this passage could apply. (c) Several apologists seek to resolve the problem by contending Zacharias is Zechariah in the OT. The problem with this lies in the fact that the accusation of Jesus was intended to cover all time from the first offense to the last. If the Zechariah of 2 Chron. 24:20 is being referred to then that would mean no righteous blood was shed from his day to that of Jesus, i.e., 850 years later. (27) "And David took the head of the Philistine, and brought it to Jerusalem" (1 Sam. 17:54) versus "And the king (David--Ed.) and his men went to Jerusalem unto the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land: who spake unto David, saying, Except thou take away the blind and lame, thou shalt not come in hither.... Nevertheless David took the stronghold of Zion (Jerusalem-- Ed.) the same is the city of David" (2 Sam. 5:6-7). David could not have taken Goliath's head to Jerusalem in 1 Sam. 17:54 because it was a Jebusite city. How could David have taken Goliath's head to Jerusalem when David's people did not have the city until later? The duel between David and Goliath is said to have occurred in 1062 B.C., while the conquest of occupancy of Jerusalem by the Israelites (2 Sam. 5) did not occur until 1047 B.C., 15 years later. (28) "Belshazzar, while he tasted the wine, commanded to bring the golden and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had taken out of the temple...." (Dan. 5:2). Nebuchadnezzar was not the father of Belshazzar. The Modern Language Version admits as much by calling Nebuchadnezzar his grandfather. (29) "But when he (Joseph--Ed.) heard that Archelaus reigned over Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there, and being warned in a dream he withdrew to the district of Galilee" (Matt. 2:22). A son of Herod also reigned in Galilee, so Joseph could not have been more secure in one province than in the other. (30) "then a Pharisee named Gamaliel...arose in the Sanhedrin and...addressed them, `Men of Israel, be careful what you intend to do to these men; for in earlier days Theudas appeared claiming to be somebody, and about 400 men adhered to him; but he was killed and all his supporters were dispersed, and they came to nothing. After him Judas the Galilean led an uprising at the time of the census, and raised a popular following, and he perished, too...'" (Acts 5:34-37). (a) According to Acts the sedition of Theudas occurred before the taxing or census which was about 6 A.D. According to Josephus it really occurred while Fadus was procurator of Judea around 46 A.D. which was 40 years after the date assigned in Acts (Antiquities, Book 20, Chapter 5, Sec. 1). (b) Acts 5:36-37 came from a speech by Gamaliel before the Jewish council. Josephus says the revolt by Theudas, which Gamaliel is referring to, occurred when Fadus was Procurator of Judea in 45 or 46 A.D. Yet, Gamaliel spoke before 36 A.D. Many feel he spoke in 29 A.D. Thus the author of Acts makes Gamaliel refer to an event as long past which, in reality, would not occur until 16 years later. (31) "Now it came to pass in the third year of Hoshea son of Elah king of Israel, that Hezekiah the son of Ahaz king of Judah began to reign" (2 Kings 18:1) versus "Now in the 14th year of King Hezekiah did Sennacherib king of Assyria come up against all the fenced cities of Judah, and took them" (2 Kings 18:13). The 3rd year of Hoshea was no later than 728 B.C. and since Hezekiah began his rule then, the 14th year of Hezekiah's rule would be 714 B.C. But Sennacherib did not come to the throne in Nineveh until 705 B.C., and according to his own annals, the invasion of Judah took place in 701 B.C. Therefore, the

invasion must have occurred in the 27th year of Hezekiah's reign rather than the 14th, as related in 2 Kings 18:13.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #170 from JW of Alpha and Omega Ministries Continues from Last Month

(Part d)

You mentioned a list of issues that dealt with the Trinity--I now have access only to Issues 15 and 18, hence I can only comment on them. Our ministry deals with the cults, and what you wrote in those articles shows much less research than does the material printed by such groups as Jehovah's Witnesses (from whom you obviously borrowed freely). The very fact that you could list as the Trinitarians main support such passages as 1 Peter 1:2 ("Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ"), 1 John 5:7 ("For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one") (are you kidding?), 2 Cor. 13:14 ("The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all") and Matt. 28:19 ("...baptizing in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost") demonstrates one of two things: (1) you have not read much on the subject, which obviously is not true as you make references to a number of works in your articles, or (2) you are deliberately deleting a number of important factors. I would hope the reason for #2 is that you don't have a lot of room with which to work. At any rate, the view you gave of the Biblical view of the Trinity is, at the very best, contorted and twisted. It is not my desire to enter into a long discussion of the Trinity with you, as you would not allow for a logical, contextual, and linguistic interpretation of the Scriptures. I enclose more information on the subject for your personal reading. By the way, I asked you a simple question that anyone familiar with the subject of the Trinity would know the significance of and would be able to answer. It was not meant to insult you--it was meant to make you deal with the issues. You did not.

Editor's Response to Letter #170 (Part d)

Again JW, you continue to summarize to the jury before the facts are heard and make misleading or inaccurate statements. (1) You allege BE shows much less research than does material from groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses. Are you comparing newsletter to newsletter or newsletter to books? Have you compared their newsletters to BE, i.e., 6 pages to 6 pages? Have you compared their material to all of my notes, including 3 large loose-leaf binders? (2) Your comment that I obviously borrowed freely from the Jehovah's Witnesses is totally erroneous. I've never needed their literature to notice the same problems with orthodox biblicism. (3) If you wish to reject 1 Peter 1:2, Matt 28:19 etc. as proofs for the Trinity, I certainly have no objections. Since these are among the few that directly link the three parts of the Godhead and have been interpreted as evidence for trinitarian beliefs, I support your efforts wholeheartedly. A few more comments like that, JW, and perhaps you might want to consider joining us. (4) You accuse me of "deliberately deleting a number of important factors" and giving a "contorted and twisted view of the Trinity. Yet, no examples are provided in either instance. You have an unfortunate habit of drawing conclusions and making judgments before evidence is forthcoming. (5) You accuse me of "deliberately deleting" factors and predict I will "not allow a logical, contextual, and linguistic interpretation of Scriptures." Apparently you consider yourself a long-distance mind-reader and a forecaster of future events as well. (6) You implied I did not address a trinitarian question with respect to the gender of the word "one" in "I and my Father are one" (John 10:30) because I had no answer. The real reason was that the question is of little import since the gender of "one" is of less importance than the number. Incidentally, I listened to your trinitarian seminar tape-

recording and found little more than typical Christian metaphysics in which rationalization and obfuscation are sold as erudition and perception. However, I do appreciate the fact that you sent your materials.

Letter #170 Continues (Part e)

In response to part d: I did not condemn BE in any letter--I mentioned only the single issue I had at that time. I simply stated that you had not demonstrated a single contradiction in that paper, and I hold to that claim. I would like to kindly submit to you, DM, that it is you who will not admit "your own limitations with respect to Greek and Hebrew." I have given my qualifications, what are yours? And finally, I would like to point out that Greek and Hebrew as modern languages are indeed always changing--but that misses the whole point. We are dealing with classical Hebrew and koine Greek--they are not changing and evolving. Such a dodge does not work.

Editor's Response to Letter #170 (Part e)

First, as far as your comment that "I had not demonstrated a single contradiction" is concerned, JW, that's merely an opinion and we all make mistakes. In your current frame of mind I don't think you would admit the Bible has contradictions if Jesus and Paul supported me. Secondly, I've never claimed to be a Greek and Hebrew scholar nor could you. An in-depth knowledge of these languages is not necessary as apologist W. Arndt explained quite well, "With the various revised versions at hand, with an analytical concordance, with reliable commentaries, and with the help of dictionaries of the Bible language, the reader need not know Greek or Hebrew to verify the original meaning of a given passage. He has in his mother tongue the means whereby he may determine the correctness of most of the obscure translations" (Bible Difficulties, page 20). Thirdly, as I've said before, JW, Greek and Hebrew scholars are by no means agreed on what texts say, what they mean, or how they should be translated. You seem to think that by throwing your chips into the Greek/Hebrew basket you are going to emerge with a body of beliefs, teachings, and words resting on granite after emerging from God's mouth. You have succumbed to one of the cornerstones of Christian mythology. Fourthly, your assertion that "classical Hebrew and koine Greek are not changing and evolving" is almost beneath comment. There is nothing so permanent as change and nowhere is this more evident than in languages. No language is fixed in time and above evolution. The classical Hebrew and koine Greek of 100 B.C. were different from those 100 A.D. and both were different from those of 200 A.D. So the question becomes one of determining which classical Hebrew and koine Greek you are referring to. You, not I, missed the point when you decided to find truths that were good at all times and under all conditions. Not I, but you, dodged the issue when you refused to acknowledge the fluidity and imprecision inherent in all languages, classical or otherwise. You tend to minimize the wide variances among modern translations and ignore the fact that knowledgeable scholars disagree on many points. Some of your disagreements are more with your compatriots than with me. You're seeking a kind of permanence in life that doesn't exist my friend. Good luck!

Letter #170 Concludes (Part f)

(Under Peter versus Peter on page 3 of Issue #44 is the following contradiction: "God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment" (2 Peter 2:4) versus "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). The question then became one of determining how the devil could be walking around if he was chained in hell until judgment--Ed.) One other point I cannot resist bringing up--in the August issue, page 3--please give me the reason you equate "the angels who sinned" with Satan. Jude

gives us more information about those angels mentioned in 2 Peter, and even Peter narrows it down a good bit. This again demonstrates that it is your misunderstanding of the passage that creates the difficulty--the Bible nowhere says that Satan is chained, awaiting judgment. That is only your erroneous conclusion based on preconceived prejudices and mistakes.

Editor's Response to Letter #170 (Part f)

Again, JW, you summarized to the jury without knowing or weighing many of the facts, took verses out-of-context, displayed a poor knowledge of a principle in logic, and exhibited a strong proclivity for tendentious reasoning. (1) What additional relevant information does Jude 6 ("And the angels that kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation he hath reserved in everlasting chains..."-) add to 2 Peter? Nothing! Both are merely noting the fact that some angels were punished for sin just as were those living in Sodom and Gomorrah. (2) Where does Peter say they were the ones (the angels--Ed.) who sinned in the days of Noah, thus narrowing it down a good bit? Talk about taking verses out-of-context! After mentioning that some angels were punished for sinning (2 Peter 2:4) the text merely notes that people living in the days of Noah (verse 5) and those living in Sodom and Gomorrah (verse 6) were also punished for their wickedness. Nowhere does the text imply, much less state, that verse 4 is discussing angels who sinned in the days of Noah. (3) I'm surprised you mention the parallel verse in Jude 6 because, following your logic, I could also conclude that some angels were also cast down for their sins when the Israelites were saved from Egypt. The prior verse (Jude 5) says, "...the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not." If you are going to link 2 Peter 2:5 with 2:4, then I'm going to link Jude 5 with Jude 6 in the same manner. In fact, I think I'll also bring in 2 Peter 2:6 with 2:4 and say some angels were also cast down when Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed. It's amazing what can be devised when you let your imagination run wild. If there is anyone who should refrain from attributing preconceived prejudices to others.... You read just enough of the text to try to create a plausible rationalization while ignoring that which went before and after. (5) Where did I "equate the angels who sinned" with Satan? I implied, then, and state now that he was included among those cast down. Obviously he couldn't be equated with them since "angels" is plural. My textual support lies with 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6. "The angels who sinned" means all the angels who sinned, not some or most. I learned that logical construct years ago in college. And wasn't Satan among those who sinned and were cast down? You just displayed one of the great errors common to those who have been reared in an uncritical Christian environment, JW. You have been so thoroughly imbued with a cardinal belief, e.g., the Devil is loose throughout the world and responsible for so much evil, that any evidence to the contrary couldn't possibly be valid. You even closed your eyes to contrary biblical verses and dismissed them out-of-hand, thus showing why people want to reach children as soon as possible. You said you couldn't resist bringing up this issue, JW, but you should have. One final point. I recommend that you read all of the back issues of BE before making additional criticisms, as some of your points have already been discussed. Since you apparently consider yourself an authority in biblical defense, I'd especially like for you to address more substantial problems such as most of those posed on pages 2 and 3 of issue #34.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #172 from AH of Sonoma, California

Dear Dennis.... I really like your commentaries because they are so informative but I really enjoy the letters from Bible believers when they are "grasping for straws." What I would like to do is photocopy hundreds of copies and everytime I stay in a hotel place copies of BE in the Bibles they all seem to have. I have a small typed sheet, like a book mark, titled Bible Study Questions with suggested verses to be read. They are the verses about whether anyone has ever seen God or

his face and each verse contradicts the prior one. Every time I stay in a hotel I place a copy of this book mark. Also I put a bumper sticker on my car last year that said, "THE BIBLE: AN ANCIENT JEWISH PUPPET PLAY." Usually believers just stare with hateful glares, occasionally they wait by my car for me to arrive to tell me they are going to pray for me. But recently several have driven up next to me, honked the horn and given me hand gestures when I looked over. Then they sped away. Only last week someone yelled out (expletive deleted--Ed.). I would like to tell you that I am an Amway Distributor and for the first 5 years the group I was in had a prayer and a pledge to the flag at all their meetings; in fact, Sunday meetings were even stated to be religious. they even had Jerry Falwell speak at a rally. I wouldn't sit down thru the prayer, which really caused some problems, because the speakers would see this and spend the next several hours saying, "if you want to be Rich in Amway, you'd better get it right with God. I found that by standing with everyone else the "sermons" were shorter. But I transferred to a new group and the new Double Diamond came to my house to tell me religion and politics have no business in the Amway business. I really enjoy my Amway Business and am doing well. I wish I had had BE before I transferred from the old group. Our Direct from the old group would come to our house, "to help us build our business" but the whole event would be to convince (confuse) us that the Constitution allows school prayer. If you weren't a Bible Promoter, you were not allowed to speak on stage, when I went 1,500 and got to walk up on stage, my upline "clued in" the host who held the "mike" for me. All I could say was my name, sponsor, and Direct's name. What I wanted to say was that I did it without all their religion and God stuff. But the "mike" was pulled away too fast. Of course the next couple got to say that they only did it with God's help. Lots of applause. Dennis, I am so glad I'm in a new group. And I am also glad I now have BE to help me when confronted with these poor unfortunate believers.

Letter #173 from FM of Chicago, Illinois

Dear Dennis. Your presentation at the Freedom From Religion convention in Madison was memorable. You said a series of "workshops," seminars, and courses could turn out trained speakers who could present our ideas in a way that listeners could accept--without feeling "put down." I agree with so many things you said.

Letter #174 from WB of Waterloo, Iowa

Dear Mr. McKinsey. It was a pleasure to have met you & to have heard your presentation at the FFRF convention. Your method of bringing attention to the very basis of the Christian religion could not be improved, for what basis is there other than the Holy Bible. Your endeavor is sincerely appreciated and I am envious of the fact that you are able to retain so much information relating to a book that is so boring. Please include me as a subscriber.

EDITOR'S NOTE: My recent appearance before the FFRF convention in Madison, Wisconsin was most enjoyable and quite rewarding. Everyone was very gracious and most cooperative. Subscriptions to BE increased by a full 10%, marking the largest single 3-day increase ever. My speech focused on the philosophy, goals, strategy, and tactics behind this publication and the need for a national organization, a think tank, to confront biblicists on their own turf.-

Issue No. 48

Dec. 1986

COMMENTARY

Many months ago we instituted a policy of devoting an entire issue to Letters of the Editor and have decided to renew that program before continuing our discussion of biblical "history."

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter No. 175 from OR of Hesston, Kansas

Dear Mr. McKinsey: More on "original sin." When the sperm meets the egg the resulting soul is immediately damned to eternal torment in a literal hell fire. Because of God's unmerited favor and mercy He forgives and saves the fetus, infant, and child. When the human being reaches the age of accountability God's unmerited favor and mercy is no longer any good. The human being who reaches the age of accountability loses his salvation. The only way he can regain his lost salvation is to repent, make a decision and endorse a correct doctrinal statement....Accepting Jesus Christ is just another one of the good works we have to do in order to be saved.

Editor's Response to Letter #175

Dear OR. Jesus, himself, made several statements ("I am the way, the truth and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me"--John 14:6), ("He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already,...."--John 3:18), and ("He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life: but the wrath of God abideth on him"--John 3:36) that clearly show everyone must accept Jesus to be saved. Everyone means everyone, not some, not most, but all. Consequently, all beings that die as foetuses, infants, and babies are condemned to eternal damnation because of events over which they had no control. In an attempt to eradicate the obvious injustice and heartlessness involved, some biblicists have devised the wholly unbiblical concept known as the age of accountability. Few beliefs are given more credence with less biblical support. Generally speaking, the Bible does not make fine distinctions such as would accompany a finely-honed legislative document and this instance is no exception. There is nothing in the Bible about an "age of accountability." In fact, the word accountability does not even appear in the KJV of the Bible. If you contend the word "trinity" does not appear either, then you must produce verses comparable in weight to those provided in support of the Trinity and prove it's a valid concept. Moreover, you said a baby is conceived damned, forgiven, and saved until the age of accountability. Where are you getting all this? Could you provide chapter and verse rather than what appears to be your own theology.

Letter #176 from KMB of Columbus, Ohio

(In part c of the Commentary in Issue #11 is the following: Gen. 6:17 says, "I do bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breadth of life, from under heaven: and everything that is in the earth shall die". Gen. 7:4 reinforces this point by saying, "Every living substance that I made will I destroy from off the face of the earth." The question was then posed of determining how a flood could destroy whales,.... and all other animals of the sea--Ed.) Dear Mr. McKinsey. Please allow me to take issue with you on only one point in Issue #11. Your idea is that God said all life was to perish. Including sea animals--whales, etc. However, what God actually said is quite different. Gen. 6:7 says, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the ground, and beast and creeping things and birds of the air" (NO mention of sea life). Gen. 6:17 says, "Everything that is on the earth shall die." Gen. 7:4 says, "Every living thing that I have made I will blot out from the face of the ground." Gen. 7:22-23 says, "Everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breadth of life died; every living thing that was upon the face of the ground." Man shall live by every word that proceeds forth from God. To do less than that is to miss the mark. All of your biblical "errors" could be explained in the same manner as the above was. Your friend, a christian.

Editor's Response to Letter #176

Dear KMB. As I mentioned many issues ago, any discussion of the Bible is going to be exceedingly difficult unless there is a consensus on the version to be employed. If people seek to avoid difficulties by leaping from version to version as expediency dictates, then dialogue will become all but impossible. One can't analyze, critique, or even believe in a phantom, a book which alters its wording from moment to moment. BE has always focused on the KJV because of its almost universal acceptance. As was stated previously, we can't discuss every version in every issue. Your exegesis is based on the difference between the RSV and the KJV in five verses and has major flaws. First, the KJV of Gen. 6:7 says, "...I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth: both man and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air..." while the same verse in the RSV says, "from the face of the ground." Gen. 7:4 in the KJV says, "...every living substance that I have made will I destroy from off the face of the earth," while the RSV says, "...I will blot out from the face of the ground. Your argument rests on the contention that because the word "ground" is employed in the RSV rather than "earth" only land animals are being discussed. You also alluded to Gen. 7:23 which mentions the death of every living substance "upon the face of the ground" as additional evidence. Yet, as far as the first two verses (Gen. 6:7 & 7:4) are concerned you'd do well to note the large number of other versions (NIV, NAB, BEB, GOOD NEWS, MASORETIC TEXT) which agree with the KJ rather than the RS. Even more important, note the wording of Gen. 6:17 in your own RSV. It says, Everything on the earth shall die, not just those on the ground. Moreover, you ignored the first part of verse 17 ("...to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life from under heaven") which shows that not only all flesh that breathed was destroyed but all flesh under the heaven perished. The latter would include both land and sea animals, since both are under heaven. Second, you underlined the word "on" in verse 6:17 RSV with the intention of showing only animals on land are being discussed. If we are going to be that technical, then one could conclude that worms, moles, grubs and many other subterranean creatures were never killed because they live under the earth rather than on it. And believers in the KJV would have to believe the opposite since it says, "Every thing that is in the earth shall die." Moreover, your own RSV supports the King James wording by saying "on the earth" rather than "on the ground" in Gen. 6:17. And we all know sea creatures are on the earth. Surely you aren't saying they are in space somewhere? Third, you quoted Gen. 7:22 in the RSV ("Everything on the dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died") but omitted the prior verse which says all flesh that moved upon the earth died, which would include sea creatures. All the earth is included, not just dry land. And lastly, Gen. 7:23 actually says, "He blotted out every living thing that was upon the face of the ground,...Only Noah was left, and those that were with him in the ark." You quoted the first half but omitted the second which clearly says only those in the ark survived. All other land and sea creatures perished. If sea creatures survived as you allege, then verse 23 is false because, both the KJ and the RS say only those on the ark evaded death.

You said, "man shall live by every word that proceeds forth from God." In light of your propensity to quote out-of-context and selectively extract parts of verses in typical apologetic style, KMB, you'd do well to heed your own advice. Your allegation that all my "biblical errors" can be explained in the same manner only proves BE is in better shape than I thought.

Letter #177 from RS of Richmond, Virginia

(We asserted on page 4 in the 8th issue that a different kind of problem is found in 1 Cor. 15:5 where Paul says, "He--Jesus--was seen of Cephas--Peter, then of the twelve." If true, this would mean that there were 13 apostles unless Peter was not an apostle--Ed.) Dear Dennis. On "Paul, the Deceptive Disciple" page 4, couldn't this be also read that Jesus was seen by Peter, then by all twelve together (including Peter)? Keep up the good work!....

Editor's Response to Letter #177

Dear RS. I have re-read that verse in and out of context many times and concluded it could be read either way, although I still prefer my original analysis. Because the verse is so ambiguous, like so much of the Bible, I've decided to remove it from my comments.

Letter #178 from VT of Huron, California Greetings: Please allow me to recommend two books that certainly should be of interest to you. I know how really concerned you are in SEEKING AND REPORTING THE TRUTH. One is Alleged Discrepancies in the Bible by John Haley. You may have this one. The other is The Bible has the Answer by Henry Morris. The writer deals with some 100 of the most important questions. I don't see how anyone could read this book and come away with doubt in regard to the Bible being the word of God....

Editor's Response to Letter #178

Greetings. I bought and read these books years ago, VT, and came away fully convinced the Bible wasn't God's word. In fact, I read Haley's book twice and have quoted both in BE.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #179 from OR of Hesston, Kansas (Combined Letters)

Dear Mr. McKinsey. Most Christians say they believe in a literal interpretation of Scripture. Any comprehensive interpretation of Scripture includes literal and symbolic interpretation. But if Christians are going to believe in a literal approach to what Jesus said about heaven and hell, they should believe in a literal interpretation of what He said about being in the grave 3 days and 3 nights (Matt. 12:40). There is no way to get a literal 3 days and 3 nights from Friday evening to Sunday morning. Concerning the allegation that nature teaches bodily resurrection from the dead in 1 Cor. 15:35-50. A seed that falls into the ground does not die and then resurrect from the dead. The seed first procreates and then dies, leaving the shell (body) in the ground. If Christians want to say that nature teaches a bodily resurrection from the dead, that is their privilege, but bodily resurrection from the dead does not happen in nature.

Letter #180 from TF of Dothan, Alabama

Dear Dennis. A Jehovah's Witness and her two children came to my door recently. I immediately told her I had read the Bible all the way through several times. She said, "Oh, well you ALREADY have a lot of Bible knowledge. Great!" I said, "I learned the Bible contains a lot of contradictions. "WHERE", she demanded. I said, "Hold on." I got Issue #47 and gave it to her. She said, "No, no, I don't want it." I said, "But you wanted to know where the contradictions were!" So she looked at it and said, "Who is this Dennis McKinsey? Is he a preacher?" I said, "No, he has just studied the Bible thoroughly." So I showed her the contradiction about Terah. She said, "I'm sure it could be explained logically." I said, "Then take it home and write to Mr. McKinsey and he'll print your explanation." She refused. She said, "The important scripture is clearly non-contradictory anyway." I said, "Important scripture? It says ALL scripture is given by god and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness. She said, "Well, I just KNOW I am right." "How do you know," I asked? I finally penned her down to saying, "Well, you have got to have faith!" "So you don't KNOW then do you," I asked? Dennis, I have always been able to pen people, usually Fundamentalists, down on this "know" business. Anyway she started walking away and refused to talk or read anything further.

Editor's Response to Letter #180

You are to applauded for several reasons, TF. First, fate brought you a greatly misguided human being whom you did not turn away. Instead, you asked some poignant questions relevant to her most cherished beliefs. You assumed a burden place upon all enlightened individuals, that of showing biblicists how they have been misled and misinformed. After all, ministers, priests, and rabbis certainly aren't going to expose the Bible's inadequacies. That's not what they are paid for. If people such as you and I don't act, who will? When confronted with biblicists, a substantial number of freethinkers seem to feel they have prevailed if they prevent biblicists from converting them. That isn't victory; that's defeat. Why? Because believers in the Bible are far more numerous than those of the opposite persuasion and will remain so without an increase in our numbers and a reduction in theirs. Victory can only be declared when you have converted them to your views, not when you have merely prevented them from converting you to theirs. The latter is a formula for failure. Second, you stayed within the Bible and used Scripture to discredit her remarks. Your injection of 2 Peter 3:16 at a key point was particularly effective. That's why its so important for us to know the Book better than they do. As I've said before, the Bible is its own worst enemy. Third, she left herself open with several poorly conceived statements and you quickly took advantage of her mistakes. She said, "No, I don't want it" after having asked "where" and she said, "all the important scripture is clearly non-contradictory," which not only implies some scripture is contradictory but some is less than important. And lastly, you let her terminate the conversation which she will ponder later. You probably won't see her again but she will replay your dialogue in her memory. If she encounters other individuals such as yourself, especially on a repetitive basis, her faith in the Bible couldn't help but diminish. That's why it is so important for many individuals to follow your lead. A lot of study is involved; that's true. But BE already contains much of the leg-work. The longer I'm involved with this strategy, the more I realize it is the only way. My only reservation is that I wouldn't have started with the Terah problem. It isn't close enough to the heart of christian beliefs; it involves a more detailed knowledge of biblical verses; it's more open to rationalization, and it's not the type of problem that stays with people the longest. I would have opened with one of the suggested queries in the 34th Issue. Initial questions are very important because biblicists will quickly lose respect for your comprehension of the material if they are readily countered. Keep up the good work; we need thousands similarly involved.

Letter #181 from AH of Sonoma, California

Dear Dennis....I was in a coffe shop the other morning and was joined by a prospect I wanted to show Amway to. I mentioned that it was a good thing that he wasn't a christian, because the Bible clearly states that to follow Christ and secure a place for oneself in Heaven one must sell all one's possessions and give the money to the poor. He said he was a christian, but that I was taking all of this out of context. So I pulled #16 out of my briefcase and started reading. Well!, almost immediately this very rude christian woman who just happens to be behind me in the booth started tapping me on the shoulder, demanding that I take her Bible and read the whole thing. Not loosing my cool, I informed Ms. Christian that she was bothering me. She continued to tap my shoulder and tried to hand me her Bible. I informed her again that she was bothering me. She said she just wanted me to get it right, and that I had to read the whole thing to understand what it meant. I told her that I had read the whole thing and know what it says. I told her she was misinformed, she was not invited into my conversation, and she should learn to mind her own business. She turned around and left me alone for the rest of my stay. However, my prospect was terrified and suggested that we change the subject. It really makes me angry that christians are able to force their acceptance of their God onto everyone else....

Editor's Response to Letter #181

Dear AH. Although your compliments are greatly appreciated, I think you missed a golden opportunity. You should have followed the example of TF in the prior letter. Instead of shewing the woman away, you should have leaped to the occasion by showing her the errors of her ways and explaining the inadequacies of the Bible. If you don't know them, then you should. If you do know them, then you should have acted. She might never meet another person such as yourself. One of the major purposes of this publication is to provide people like us information to use in encounters such as this.

Letter #182 from Mark Potts, 8510-A, East 66th Pl.S. Tulsa, Oklahoma 74133

(Combined Letters)

Dear Dennis. Recently, in a discussion with a biblicist I asked how Adam and Eve could have sinned if they were perfect. He denied they were perfect, and said only people who get saved will become perfect. This raises a question: If God couldn't create perfect people the first time around, why should we expect him to do better later on? This biblicist's apology is equivalent to saying that God requires trial-and-error to attain his goals. If God can make mistakes, that doesn't say much for his alleged wisdom and power.

Biblicists accuse atheists and freethinkers of being advocates of moral relativism, the doctrine that right and wrong vary from place to place and age to age. Curiously, however, the laws of the Pentateuch were for centuries held to be moral absolutes--until a man named Paul came along to pronounce most of the Old Law invalid....

Consider the following: Trinitarians allege that God, Jesus, and the Holy Ghost are distinct, yet co-equal. According to the Bible, Jesus has a spirit (Luke 23:46, Gal. 4:6) and God either has or is a spirit (John 4:24, Gen. 1:2). Does the Holy Spirit have a spirit? When a biblicist tells me that Jesus "lives" in his heart," I ask, if he were to get a heart transplant or an artificial heart, what would happen to Jesus. The biblicist then usually explains that "heart" doesn't literally mean an organ in the chest. But when biblicists, especially catholics, talk about the "blood" of Jesus, they mean the literal physiological fluid in Jesus' body.

To your list of questions for biblicists, you might add: How could Jesus have been a "sacrifice" for our sins when the Gospels indicate he didn't stay dead? After all, when the Jews sacrificed lambs, they didn't revive on the third day.

Editor's Response to Letter #182

Dear Mark. Be careful! Most of your queries are quite insightful but sometimes you ask a question (e.g. your heart transplant question) which could be read by biblicists as little more than an attempt to be facetious. In such cases, you aren't going to be taken seriously because they won't feel you are taking the Bible seriously. It's analogous to relying upon anti-religious humor as one's primary instrument. Biblicists are going to think: No wonder he doesn't see the Bible is true; he doesn't think about it seriously enough to see it's correct.

Letter #183 from EZ of Dayton, Ohio

Dear Dennis.... I recently spent some time in Mexico on a short-term missionary outreach (5 weeks) and am soon planning to go to Israel to study Hebrew. So I haven't had much time to appreciate your publication lately. You may correctly gather that I'm a disciple of Christ. (Labels, especially the typical ones, don't seem to fit me). Yet, I find BE stimulating and

sometimes challenging. I'm neither a "fundie" nor a literalist; so much of what you say provides support to my beliefs. Your response to letter #163 was terrific....

Editor's Response to Letter #183

We have other religious subscribers, EZ. You are by no means alone. Although they believe in the Bible and/or religion, they are willing to give others a hearing.

Letter #184 from RM of Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Dear Dennis. I just read Issue #46. The historical short-comings of the Bible are numerous. The study of biblical "history" is possibly the best scientific debunker of the Bible. With your indulgence, I will list a few historical problems contained in "God's Word." (1) Daniel 5:31 contains two historical inaccuracies. This verse gives Darius "the Median" credit for the capture of Babylon and the resulting liberation of the Jews. In fact, it was Cyrus who accomplished this deed; and neither Cyrus nor Darius were "Medians." Both were Persians who ruled Persia and Media. (2) Luke the "physician" should perhaps be called Luke the "inventor." He apparently invented two "traditions." No historical evidence exists for Luke 2:3-4. This famous verse states that families were supposed to return to ancestral homes in order to be counted for tax purposes. Imagine thousands, if not millions, of people attempting to find their ancestral cities, some of which no longer existed. This would have completely disrupted Mediterranean life and commerce. The second tradition that Luke apparently invented occurs in Luke 23:17 which infers that it was traditional for governors to release prisoners of choice at Passover. This "tradition" does not exist in Hebrew or Roman history. These are just a few of the many historical "bleeps and blunders" the Bible contains.

Letter #185 from AH of Sonoma, California (Combined Letters)

Dear Dennis. I really enjoyed your commentary about Women and the Bible, what the Bible really says about women. I let a friend read this; now she is really questioning her belief and faith in the Bible. I doubt she'll ever give up belief in God, but just one issue has caused her to reject the Bible. Just ONE issue!

I agree completely with your methods. Could it be called fighting fire with fire? I handed out BE to my waitress at the Good Earth restaurant and almost had to fight to get them back, especially the issues on SLAVERY AND WOMEN. She knew she didn't like religion, now she knows why. I think the average christian I meet (certainly all my relatives) are as uninformed and misinformed about the Bible as most of us who have rejected the whole idea of what religion stands for. Certainly this is true for me. Even at an early age I wanted to know why certain things were done a certain way and not another. And the idea of having a minister come to our house to ask for money, tell us what to do, and tell us how to behave was upsetting to me. I'm so glad my parents didn't indoctrinate me....

EDITOR'S NOTE: As you can tell our new computer and printer have made a difference. Many readers suggested we widen the margins so holes could be punched, create more paragraphs, provide more white space, create columns, and raise the rates. Apparently, most people want an improvement in appearance even with a reduction in content. So we have decided to comply in some respects and will probably institute additional changes later. Because of increased costs, improved format, substantial purchases, and no advertising revenue, we must raise our rates on January 1, 1987 to: 6 months = \$5, 1 year = \$9, 2 years = \$17. Back issues = \$1 each. Compared to other publications on the market, that's still minimal and quite a bargain. Hopefully, our

publisher and postmaster won't give us any news. Many people want to subscribe for a longer period of time so we are providing another year.

Biblical "History" (Part Three of a Four-Part Series)--One of the more prominent aspects of historical difficulties within the Bible pertains to those events for which there is little or no extrabiblical corroboration. Examples are rather numerous and receive a good deal of attention in freethought literature. (32) "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king,...." (Matt. 2:1). There was no such person as King Herod because the Jews were under the control of Roman emperors who governed by governors or tetrarchs. (33) "Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under,...." (Matt. 2:16). (a) Josephus devoted nearly 40 chapters to the life of Herod and relates every important event in his life. He detested Herod and dwelled on his crimes and errors. Yet, he never mentioned this massacre and appears to have known nothing about it. (b) No ancient historian recalls this massacre. (c) Herod already had full grown sons to succeed him. Would he be afraid that the babe of an obscure Nazareth carpenter would supplant him? (34) "Then were there two thieves crucified with him, one on the right hand, and the other on the left" (Matt. 27:38). Thieves were not crucified. Death, in any form, for theft was contrary to Jewish and Roman law. It was not a capital offense. (35) "And behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many" (Matt. 27:51-53). No historian of antiquity mentions these events. (36) "And when the sixth hour was come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour" (Mark 15:33). There is no mention of this in the history of the period. (37) "And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria)" (Luke 2:1-2). (a) History says nothing about a taxing (census) ever being taken of the whole Roman world. (b) The KJV says "all the world should be taxed," yet no such decree was issued by Augustus. He not only never issued a general decree but never attempted a uniform assessment. Taxes were done province by province. (c) When Jesus was born, the governor of Syria was not Cyrenius. Cyrenius did not become governor of Syria until nearly 10 years after the death of Herod and Matt. 2:1 ("Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king...") says Jesus was born during the reign of Herod. (d) If Jesus was born during the reign of Herod as Matthew says, Joseph, whether a resident of Judea or of Galilee, could not have been taxed by Augustus in any event since neither province was then a part of Roman Syria. Both provinces belonged to Herod's kingdom and Herod's subjects were not taxed by the Romans. (e) Cyrenius (Quirinius) made a census in Palestine but his census took place 10 years after the death of Herod. (38) "...because there was no room for them in the inn" (Luke 2:7). The historical scholar, Dr. Geikie, says "inns" were unknown among the Jews. (39) "And when they were come to the place, which is called Calvary, there they crucified him,...." (Luke 23:33). If Jesus had been tried, convicted, and executed by the Jews, he would not have been crucified but stoned. Jews never used crucifixion. (40) "The Jew therefore...besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away" (John 19:31). This punishment, known as *crusifragium*, was a distinct mode of execution and was never combined with crucifixion. Moreover, neither method was ever employed to punish theft. Yet, we are asked to believe both were used. (41) "And he said to the devils, Go. So they came out and went into the swine; and behold, the whole herd...." (Matt. 8:32 RSV). The swine are as imaginary as the devils, since the keeping of these animals was prohibited in ancient Judea and Galilee. The French philosopher, Voltaire, wanted to know why swine were there to begin with. (42) "...he planteth an ash, and the rain doth nourish it" (Isaiah 44:14). Not in Western Asia. Ash trees do not grow there. Some commentators think a pine was meant. (43) "...he came unto the sea of

Galilee, through the midst of the coasts of Decapolis" (Mark 7:31). This statement was made by Mark when there were no coasts of Decapolis, nor was the name so much as known before the reign of Emperor Nero. (44) "And being in Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at meat,...." (Mark 14:3). This is highly improbable since lepers could not legally live in the cities. (45) "And it came to pass, that after three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both hearing them, and asking them questions" (Luke 2:46). Not until the time of Gamaliel in the middle of the 1st century was a child allowed to sit in the presence of rabbis. (46) "Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building,...." (John 2:20). (a) The scholar, English, says this is incorrect because the temple then standing was built by Herod who reigned but 37 years and built it in 8 years. (b) Josephus (B. 15, Chapter 11) gives a full account of the building of the temple. Sec. 6 says it took 1 1/2 years. Herod built it between 19 and 17 B.C. (47) "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice" (John 13:38). English says cocks were not allowed in Jerusalem at that time. (48) "That very night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain. And Darius the Mede received the kingdom (of Babylon--Ed.) being about 62 years old." (Dan. 5:30-31 RSV). (a) Belshazzar was not the king of Babylon. Nabonidus was the king of Babylon at the demise of the Chaldean Empire. Belshazzar was his son. (b) Darius never took the kingdom nor was he ever king of Babylon. (c) There is no reference to Darius the Mede in any ancient document we have today. (d) Profane history says it was Cyrus the Persian who conquered the Babylonian empire. (49) "Pul the King of Assyria came against the land;...." (2 Kings 15:19). John Remsburg says the king who reigned in Assyria at that time was Iva-bish. Assyria never had a king named Pul. (50) "John the baptizer appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance...." (Mark 1:4 RSV). The only extrabiblical evidence of John the Baptist's existence is a passage in Josephus (Antiquities B. 18, Ch. 5, Sec. 2) which appears to be an interpolation (a forgery). Herod had put away his wife who was the daughter of Aretas. Aretas defeated Herod who appealed to Tiberius for help. Tiberius sent Vitellius, a Syrian governor. Then follows an account of John the Baptist. From that, the narrative returns to Vitellius saying that he prepared to make war with Aretas. How the passage on John the Baptist relates to the narrative one can only surmise.

Jesus' Trial as "History"--Freethought literature is especially concerned with the historical problems associated with Jesus' trial and concomitant events. (51) "And some began to spit on him, and to cover his face, and to buffet him, and to say unto him, Prophecy: and the servants did strike him with the palms of their hands" (Mark 14:65). Every person acquainted with the Jewish history of that age knows that this is false. In the Sanhedrin court and Roman courts, law, dignity, and decorum ruled. (52) "...Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" (Mark 14:61). No Jew, especially a priest, would use the expression, 'Christ, Son of the Blessed,' or imply that the messiah was the son of God. (53) "And Peter followed him afar off, even into the palace of the high priest:...." (Mark 14:54). No trial was ever held at the residence of the high priest. All meetings of the Sanhedrin were held in the hall adjoining the temple. A trial at any other place would have been illegal. (54) "And they compelled one Simon a Cyrenian, who passed by, coming out of the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to bear his cross" (Mark 15:21). Stating that Simon was compelled to carry the cross is improbable since in executions of this kind the criminal was always required to carry it himself as a mark of disgrace. (55) "And now when the evening was come, because it was the preparation, that is the day before the sabbath" (Mark 15:42). The sabbath began at sunset on the day that Jesus is declared to have been crucified. Jewish law would not permit a dead body to be exposed on the sabbath. Since crucifixion is a lingering death lasting several days, it's unlikely the Jews would have demanded such a death when they knew he would have to be taken down in a few hours. (56) "And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat the passover with you before I suffer" (Luke 22:15). The Synoptics say that the trial was held during the feast of the Passover. Yet, that could not be because no trials were held by the Jews during this feast. (57) "But you have a custom that I should release one man for you at the Passover; will you have me release for you the King of the

Jews?" (John 18:39) and "Now at that feast he released unto them one prisoner, whomsoever they desired" (Mark 15:16). There is no historical authority whatever for this alleged custom. No Roman government could have safely adopted it. (58) "And as soon as it was day, the elders of the people and the chief priests and the scribes came together, and led him into their council, saying, 'Art thou the Christ? tell us'" (Luke 22:66-67). (a) Here Jesus is questioned by the Sanhedrin, yet a Jewish court did not question a prisoner. He could not even plead guilty. (b) According to the Synoptics Jesus had no lawyer which Maimonides said would have been against Jewish law. (c) According to the Synoptics the trial lasted only a few hours. Yet, Jewish law required at least 2 days for a capital offense--one day for the prosecution, one day for the defense. (d) The Synoptics say that the trial was held on Friday the day before the Sabbath. Yet, no trial for a capital offense was ever allowed to begin on the day before the Sabbath. (e) By having Jesus appear before Annas, Caiaphas, Pilate, and Herod, they subjected him to four trials in one day which would have been illegal. (f) According to Luke the trial might have occurred during the day, while Matthew and Mark say it started in the night. Could the trial have been held as the latter allege? No, because Jewish law prohibited the opening of a trial at night. The Sanhedrin could not hold a session before 6 A.M. or after 3 P.M. (59) "Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged him. And the soldiers plaited a crown of thorns, and put it on his head and they put on him a purple robe, and said, Hail, King of the Jews! and they smote him with their hands" (John 19:1-3). Jesus is said to have suffered indignities, not at the hands of a Jewish mob, but at the hands of a Roman court, from which the Jews had absented themselves and whose proceedings they could not witness. Yet, every lawyer knows Roman courts were models of business for 2,000 years. Scourging was often inflicted by the Romans before execution but never before conviction and sentencing. (60) "And from thenceforth Pilate sought to release him: but the Jews cried out saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend:...." (John 19:12) and "Then delivered he him therefore unto them to be crucified" (John 19:16). (a) Between the Pilate of the NT and the Pilate of history there is little in common. The NT Pilate is subservient to the Jews, acceding to their every wish. The real Pilate hated Jews and was cruel towards them, which provoked his recall. It is declared that Pilate desired to release Jesus but could not. Who ruled Judea, Pilate or the Jews? According to the Evangelists the Romans ruled Judea, while the Jews ruled the Romans. (61) "Again the high priest asked him, and said unto him. Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am: and ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power,.... Then the high priest rent his clothes, and saith, What need we any further witnesses? Ye have heard the blasphemy: what think ye. And they all condemned him to be guilty of death" (Mark 14:61-64). (a) Jesus, it was charged, had declared himself to be the son of God. This, if true, would not have constituted blasphemy. It was no offense against the law for a man to claim that he was the son of God. All men, especially all good men, were recognized as the sons of God. Referring to Christ's claim a Jewish writer said, "no law, no precedent, and no fictitious case in the Bible or the rabbinical literature, can be cited to make of the expression a case of blasphemy" and even if he had been proven guilty of blasphemy, he could not have been put to death, for blasphemy had ceased to be a capital offense. And is it reasonable to suppose that the Romans would have condemned a man to death for an offense against a religion in which they did not believe, but which they regarded as one of the vilest of superstitions? (b) Jesus had a trial before the Sanhedrin also in Matt. 26:57-75 and Luke 22:54-71. Yet, it was about this time (30 A.D.) that the Sanhedrin ceased to have jurisdiction over capital offenses. After its jurisdiction ceased Jesus could not have been tried before it; and before its jurisdiction ceased he would not have had a subsequent trial before a political figure such as Pilate.

As one authority noted, anywhere from 14 to 27 infractions of Jewish law exist in connection with Jesus' trial. The meeting was held at night, in the residence of the High Priest, during Passover, and under circumstances that precluded a quorum of 23. No defense witnesses were called, condemnation and execution occurred on the same day, and the penalty, crucifixion, did not match the crime, blasphemy.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #186 from Dr. PR, Pastor of the Bible Baptist Church, Author of Biblical Commentaries, and Founder of the Pensacola Bible Institute, Pensacola, Florida

(In late October, 1986, the editor of BE debated PR on national radio in what turned out to be a rather acrimonious conversation. I sent a letter to PR, along with a copy of BE, suggesting we meet again under more civil conditions. What follows is his reply--Ed.). Dear Mr. McKinsey. I received your note. All I can say is I feel very sorry for a man like yourself who is under the illusion that anyone could be "civil" to a man who thinks he is qualified to correct the Bible when he obviously is not able to read his own language. "Civility" to such a character is a little too much to ask. In thirty-six years of teaching the Bible and teaching Hebrew and Greek, plus manuscript evidence and problem texts, I don't believe I have ever encountered a more ignorant man or a man more ill-equipped to give an opinion about the scripture.

I looked at your little paper today for the first time (#47) and saw the old resurrected ghosts of Bob Ingersoll and Tom Paine and all the other hair-brained idiots that our freshmen students are taught to correct. Many of our freshmen students do not even have a high school education. Without wasting your time or my time in going through all the bunk you wrote down, notice that the very first so-called "contradiction" which you mentioned (If Terah was 70 years old when his son, Abraham, was born--Gen. 11:26--and Abraham left Haran at age 75 after his father died--Gen 12:4, Acts 7:4, then Terah lived to be 145. Yet, Gen 11:32 says Terah died in Haran at age 205--Ed.) has been answered by every book on apologetics written since 1850. You are more than 130 years late in your reading. Any child could solve the problem which you call "an historical problem."

Following the footsteps of men as uneducated, and as unlearned, and as unread, and as incompetent as yourself, you have assumed that Abraham was born first because his name was listed first. It doesn't take a man with a fifth grade education to see that Japheth is the first-born among Noah's three sons and he's never listed first. As a matter of fact, he's always listed last, as you find it in Gen. 10:1, 9:18, and 5:32. There is not only no contradiction in regards to the time that Terah died and Abraham left, but there isn't the slightest semblance of any "problem" at all anywhere in the entire passage in any of the verses. This is typical of your entire paper or, as far as that goes, your entire ministry. I would suggest that until you are able to read and do research work that you not demonstrate your ignorance on a nation-wide scale with a newspaper about "Biblical Errancy." Any man who can't read the book he professes to be correcting is in foul shape.

Editor's Response to Letter #186

Dear PR. The rudeness of your diatribe is only matched by the inadequacies of your erudition. (1) You said that civility to a character such as myself is a little too much to ask. After having read your book Science and Philosophy and having met you on the radio, I'd say civility to anyone is a little too much to ask of you. Your puerile propensity for pejoratives is something only the uncouth could envy. I feel sorry for anyone who is incapable of discussing even the most cherished beliefs without vituperation and vilification. One can totally disagree with someone's philosophy and still be civil my friend. Ask Reagan and Gorbachov! You need a course in decency more than apologetics. I would suggest you read the Bible less and How to Behave more. (2) I seriously doubt that your students are exposed to the biblical criticisms of Paine and Ingersoll. Organizations and publications engaged in propagandistic activity rarely provide an adequate hearing for the other side. That's simply not their cup of tea. Your institution may be an exception but I doubt it. (3) You chose to attack my Terah-Abraham problem and said

it's "been answered by every book on apologetics written since 1850." Apparently you aren't very well acquainted with apologetic works, PR, because many avoid the topic entirely. Moreover, "answers" have been around from the beginning, not just 1850, but they don't make any more sense now than when first devised. (4) Your defense of the Terah-Abraham problem lacks merit for several reasons: (a) You began by saying I "assumed Abraham was born first because his name was listed first" when no such assumption was either expressed or implied. In fact, it's quite irrelevant to the argument. What difference would the order of births make? Gen. 11:26 says, "When Terah had lived 70 years, he became the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran" and clearly shows Abraham was born sometime during Terah's 70th year. That's all that's needed. (b) You not only used Noah's sons to make an irrelevant point about the sons of Terah but erred in the process. You said "it doesn't take a man with a 5th grade education to see that Japheth is the first-born among Noah's three sons." From whence did that conclusion arise? The Bible doesn't say Japheth was the first-born of the three. In truth, Gen. 10:21 in the RS, LB, ML, Masoretic Text, Good News, AS, NAB, BEB, and the NASB versions say the opposite; Shem was the older brother of Japheth. Apparently you have received something less than a fifth grade education. You said "any child could solve the problem which you call an historical problem." Since you didn't "solve" it, and any "child" can, I can only assume your capability is below that of a child. Your approach reminds me of your response on the radio when I asked you how the perfect Adam, created by the perfect God, could have sinned. You said it doesn't say he was created perfect; it says he was created innocent. Although I let the point go unchallenged, I should have asked where the Bible ever says Adam was created innocent. The word "innocent" never appears in the KJV of the Book of Genesis. In light of your desire to read words into the text that aren't there, PR, you should teach courses in eisegesis, not exegesis. (5) If all of your refutations of my comments on the Bible are as weak as the one presented, I can only conclude the words "bunk," "ignorant," "incompetent," "uneducated," "unlearned," "unread," "ill-equipped," and "hair-brained," could be more appropriately assigned. (6) You said "many of our freshmen students do not even have a high school education." If the caliber of your institution's scholarship and objectivity is comparable to what you have demonstrated so far, I can understand why. (7) You concluded that "this is typical of your entire paper or, as far as that goes, your entire ministry." How anyone could come to such a conclusion after having read only one issue out of 48 and having participated in only one radio exchange is perplexing to say the least. (8) And finally, you said "any man who can't read the book he professes to be correcting is in foul shape." Judging from your demeanor, I'd say foulness lies more with your manners and objectivity than my shape. I thought pastors were supposed to be models of rectitude. Dedication to one's beliefs is one thing, PR, fanaticism for the cause is another, and the line between them is often vague and easily crossed.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #187 from JL of Phoenix, Arizona

Dear Dennis.... I am thinking of writing a pamphlet in response to the books of Josh McDowell, which seem to be widely used by Christian apologists. I was somewhat impressed with them when I first read them until I began to dig deeper. I then found that McDowell's arguments are based on fringe bible scholarship, bogus probability arguments, Christian interpretations and forgeries, quoting out-of-context, very loose interpretations of prophecy (compare his analysis of the Tyre prophecies in Ezekiel to yours), and blatant falsehoods. An example of a blatant falsehood in Evidence That Demands a Verdict is on page 73 (1972 Edition) where he says that Quirinius was governor of Syria around 7 B.C.E. "based on an inscription found in Antioch ascribing to Quirinius this post." The Antioch inscription says no such thing, as I found by checking Ramsay's translation (the very source McDowell cites). It only states that Quirinius was elected duumvir of the colony of Pisidian Antioch in Galatia. Ramsay concocted an argument

from this that Quirinius was governor of Syria at that time, but it's a very weak one. I've thought of several titles for an anti-McDowell pamphlet, such as "Christianity: A Verdict That Demands Evidence"....

Letter #188 from JJM of Center Line, Michigan

Dear Mr. McKinsey: Perhaps this is germane. Christians of every hue say that human life comes from God; for this reason, abortion is murder. Very well! But if God creates a life and sends it where He knows it will be killed, then how is He any different from David, who sent Uriah the Hittite to where he knew he would be killed (2 Sam. 11)? David sinned once this way (and had, at least, a discernible motive)--but how many aborted babies are there which God has had killed this way? If Christians really believe in absolute morality, then shouldn't they show it here--by holding God at least as responsible for murder as David is held?

Editor's Response to Letter #188

Dear JJM. Whenever you see a biblical problem, you should always ask yourself, "What will apologists say to this." It's like war. Before you fire something their way, make sure you know what they have available for retaliation. One reason I devote so much time to apologetic writings is to make sure I know the number, strength, position, accuracy, and direction of their arguments before engaging in verbal exchanges. I dislike surprises, especially on the radio. They are not only embarrassing and demoralizing but indications of poor preparation on my part.

Anyone following this strategy in this instance will see that competent apologists wouldn't have much difficulty with your example. They'll simply say, "God did not intend for the babies to die; David did intend to kill Uriah. God sent babies to where he knew they would be killed, as did David, but he did not send them there to have them killed. That was man's doing. Your example highlights the importance of engaging Bible believers in dialogue because it enables people such as you and I to improve our analysis and exposition of the Bible. Please accept my comments in the spirit in which they are offered.

Letter #189 from John Sikos, P.O. Box 443, Romeo, Michigan

Dear Dennis. I have just one thing to add to Mark Potts' Letter #182 in the December issue. If God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit are distinct, yet one, and if both God and Jesus either have or are spirit, then consider Luke 4:1 which says Jesus is "full of the Holy Ghost." I wonder--is the Holy Ghost ever full of Jesus?

Editor's Response to Letter #189

Dear John. The problem I have with questions such as this, and there are hundreds one could pose, is that they are troubling but not disabling. Apologists can either dismiss the question with a brief yes or no or ask why it is of importance and move on. The Bible remains intact unless a contradiction emerges.

Letter #190 from BR of St. Cloud, Minnesota

Dear Dennis. I continue to read your publication "religiously" and believe you are in some respects a national treasure. I also believe that your impact will be felt long after your're gone, a thought I'm certain you don't find disappointing. I've been with you on this venture from the beginning....

Editor's Response to Letter #190

Dear BR. You're only too kind. Accolades of that magnitude are always appreciated.

Issue No.50

February 1987

Biblical "History" (Part Four of a Four-Part Series)--This month's commentary will begin with a final listing of biblical events for which there is little or no extrabiblical corroboration and conclude with an enumeration of the problems associated with many population figures throughout the OT. (62) "But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year,...." (John 11:49 RSV). This language implies the high priest was appointed annually, whereas he held his office for life or until removed. Caiaphas had been high priest for many years. (63) "He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation;...." (John 11:51-52). Jews knew that prophesying was not a privilege or part of that office. A high priest did not assume the role of prophet, much less would he have given utterances to the prophecy ascribed to Caiaphas. It would have been foreign to the Jewish mind. For even one person to have been put to death to save all of Israel would have been murder. (64) "Herod and Pilate became friends with each other that very day for before this they had been at enmity with each other" (Luke 23:12). To the day of Pilate's recall by Rome they were enemies. Herod was continually plotting to unite his Galilee with Pilate's Judea, which his father had promised him. (65) "Now in the 15th year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee...and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene; Anna and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness" (Luke 3:1-2). (a) How could John have gotten the word of God during the reign of Lysanias in Abilene when Lysanias had been dead for 34 years when Jesus, a contemporary of John, was born. Lysanias was put to death at the instigation of Cleopatra 60 years before Jesus began his ministry (Josephus, Antiq. B 15, Ch 4, Sec 1). (b) At the time mentioned by Luke the territory of Abila or Abilene was no longer a tetrarchy. (c) Two people never held the office of high priest jointly. It would have been the same as having two popes. (66) And lastly, Isaiah said, "He (Cyrus--Ed.) is my (God's--Ed.) shepherd and shall perform all my pleasures: even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid" (Isa. 44:28). How could Isaiah have written this since he died around 698 B.C., and Cyrus' decree in favour of the Jews returning to Jerusalem did not occur until 536 B.C., 162 years later? As with other predictions, biblicists will say it's merely an accurate prophecy, while some knowledgeable authorities say it was written long after the event happened.

Population Figures--A final aspect of the problems within biblical history concerns the accuracy of several population statistics: (67) "...all the souls of the house of Jacob, which came into Egypt, were threescore and ten (70--Ed.)" (Gen. 46:27) versus "...for every one (after the Exodus--Ed.) that went to be numbered, from 20 years old and upward,

(was--Ed.)...six hundred thousand and three thousand and five hundred and fifty men" --603,550 (Ex. 38:26). For each man in the 603,550 figure one can safely assume there was at least one woman and three children (totalling, 3,000,000 people). This would mean 70 people went down into Egypt in Gen. 46 and approximately 3,000,000 emerged nearly 215 years later. The sons of Jacob had approximately 5 sons each. If all of Jacob's grandsons also had had 5 sons each and so on for 4 generations and nobody had died, which is false ("And Joseph died, and all his brethren, and all that generation"--Ex. 1:6), there would have been only 6,500 males by the time the Exodus occurred. Any rational increase in these numbers would not change the totals very much, even if all of the 70 were Jacob's grandsons and each had had 5 sons etc. The biblical scholar,

Joseph Wheless, says that for 3,000,000 people to have left 4 generations later, each of the 55 males of the first generation would have to have had 40 children (20 boys and 20 girls) and so on each generation. It's especially difficult to see how the Israelites increased to 3,000,000 in light of Deut. 7:7 which says, "The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people." (68) "And it came to pass the selfsame day, that the Lord did bring the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their armies" (Ex. 12:51). (a) It would have taken several days if not weeks for the message to have reached the people in the outlying districts and even more time for people to have assembled and left. The pharaoh told them to leave the night before. Imagine assembling 2 to 3,000,000 people in one night in that day and age! (b) Assuming it took 1 hour to mobilize and 8 hours to collect the things mentioned in Exodus 12:35-36 ("And the children of Israel did according to the word of Moses; and they borrowed of the Egyptians jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment: and the Lord gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent unto them such things as they required. And they spoiled the Egyptians") and assemble, they would have had 15 hours left to leave Egypt which would have required them to move at more than 60 miles per hour according to one source. (c) If they had marched in close order as many as 50 abreast, with only a yard interval between ranks, there would have been 48,284 ranks forming a column 28 miles long. (69) "And gather thou (Moses--Ed.) all the congregation together unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. And Moses did as the Lord commanded him; and the assembly was gathered together unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation" (Lev. 8:3-4) and "The length of the court shall be an hundred cubits and the breadth fifty (150' X 75')..." (Ex. 27:18). Gathering over 600,000 men in front of a tent in a court only 150 by 75 feet is highly improbable in light of the fact that this many people would make a dense 1/4th mile square mass. Actually, there would have been more than 2,500,000 people involved extending over several miles. (70) "These be the words which Moses spake unto all Israel..." (Deut. 1.1). How could one man have spoken to and been heard by more than 600,000 people, let alone 2,500,000? (71) "When the Lord thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou (the Israelites--Ed.) goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou;..." (Deut. 7:1) versus "The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people" (Deut. 7:7). If each of the 7 nations had more constituents than the Israelites, then the latter defeated approximately 18,000,000 people. (72) "The Lord made not this covenant with our father, but with us (the Israelites--Ed.) even us, who are all of us here alive this day" (Deut. 5:3). Moses made this statement 38 years after the covenant was made at Sinai and after thousands of Israelites had wandered in the wilderness for the same period; yet no one who received the covenant had died. (73) "And ye shall compass the city, all ye men of war,...and the 7th day ye shall compass the city 7 times,..." (Josh. 6:3-4) and "it came to pass on the 7th day, that they rose early about the dawning of the day, and compassed the city after the same manner 7 times only on that day they compassed the city 7 times" (Josh 6:15). Some observers feel Num. 26:2 & 51 show there were over 600,000 men in the Israelite army and ask how that many men could have gone around a city 7 times in one day in that era. (74) "Then he numbered the young men of the princes of the provinces, and they were 232: and after them he numbered all the people, even all the children of Israel, being 7,000" (1 Kings 20:15). How could the Israelites have been the chosen people when they went from over 2,500,000 to 7,000? (75) "This was the muster of them...Adnah the commander, with 300,000 men of valor, and next to him Jehohanan the commander, with 280,000, and next to him Amasiah...with 200,000 mighty men of valor. Of Benjamin...with 200,000 men...and next to him Jehozabed with a 180,000 armed for war" (2 Chron. 17:14-18 RSV). How could they have assembled an army of 1,160,000 in that area? (76) "And the space in which we came from Kadeth-barnea until we were come over the brook Zered, was 38 years; until all the generation of the men of war were wasted out from among the host, as the Lord swore unto them" (Deut.2:14).

All of the 603,550 fighting men died within the 38 year period but not Moses who wrote the verse. (77) And finally, "there went forth a wind from the Lord, and it brought quails from the sea, and let them fall beside the camp, about a day's journey on this side and a day's journey on the other side, round about the camp, and about 2 cubits (1 cubit = 18 inches) above the face of the earth. And the people rose all that day, and all night, and all the next day, and gathered the quails; he who gathered least gathered 10 homers; and they spread them out for themselves all around the camp" (Num. 11:31-32). (a) A homer is about 10 bushels; so that the least gathered by anyone was 100 bushels or about 800 gallons. Estimating 15 quails to the gallon gives 12,000 per person. (b) Another scholar noted that a biblical day's journey is 44,815 meters or 49,296 yards or 28 miles according to the Jewish Encyclopedia. Such an area would have had 780 square miles of solid quail 36 inches high.

These figures and conclusions, like many others found throughout the four-part series on biblical "history" are based on the analyses of many observers of the extrabiblical scene.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #191 from Robert M. Bowman Jr., Associate Editor at the Christian Research Institute, San Juan Capistrano, California

Dear Mr. McKinsey. Thank you for responding to my letter of April 2, 1986, in your July 1986 issue of BE. I would like to comment on your response. My first question had to do with the motivation and sanity of the biblical writers. You answered that because the identity of the writers is in many cases uncertain, their motives and sanity cannot be ascertained with any certainty. In the majority of cases I think we can know who wrote what book (See: Donald Guthrie's New Testament Introduction, for example). Moreover, it seems to me that when reading a book (or a newsletter!) we ought to assume the author's sincerity and sanity unless and until evidence arises to the contrary. Still, your answer amounts to "I don't know," and that's fair.

My second question concerned how prone to error you consider the biblical writers to have been. You answered that it didn't matter, because one error would falsify its inerrancy, and went on to say, "If you are only concerned with numbers then I can say that I can't think of any book I've read that's had more problems than the Bible." Now, let me explain my reason for asking the question. If you were saying--as so many scholars, theologians, and lay people are saying today--simply that the Bible has some errors in it, that it isn't perfect, then I could understand that (though I wouldn't agree). But you seem to be saying that the Bible is chock-full of errors--that, in fact, it is filled with a disproportionately high number of errors. If it was merely a human book, just another collection of human ideas and stories, then we would indeed expect it to contain some goofs. But we would not expect it to contradict itself with every new sentence. Yet your newsletters (I have seen half a dozen of them) give exactly that impression of the Bible. This leads me to suspect that there may be something faulty in your methodology. If you said, "I've found a couple hundred contradictions and errors in the Bible," I'd say, "Really, let's look at some of them." But you seem to think there are thousands of bloopers in the Bible. This makes me wonder if perhaps you aren't trying too hard to find errors in the Bible.

My suspicions are confirmed when I discover that you think Jesus contradicted Himself over and over again. For the sake of argument, let's concede that Jesus might have contradicted Himself a few times; if He were only a mere, ordinary human being, that would be expected. But it would not be expected that nearly every statement of Jesus recorded in the Gospels would contradict another statement of His. Yet, that is the impression one gets from your newsletter. I'm just an ordinary guy, but I can string together a few sentences without contradicting myself....

Editor's Response to Letter #191

Dear Robert. I'm sorry for this late reply to your letter but we are so inundated with correspondence that much of it could never be answered unless BE were expanded. As far as the specifics of your analysis are concerned, several warrant comment. (1) You said that "in the majority of cases I think we can know who wrote what book" and mentioned a corroborative source when, in fact, the authorship of every book in the Bible is a matter of dispute among scholars. I can't think of one book whose author is known for certain and, like you, I have authorities to buttress my point. That's the problem with an extrabiblical topic such as history. None of us were there and it ultimately comes down to whose sources, whose scholars, you want to believe. (2) Your comment that "we ought to assume the author's sincerity and sanity unless and until evidence arises to the contrary" is misleading because the writing, itself, may bring the author's sanity into question. The books of Daniel, Ezekiel, and especially Revelation, are sufficient within themselves to bring the author's mental stability under scrutiny. I'm reminded of the comments by Ingersoll ("Read the Book of Revelation, and you will agree with me that nothing that ever emanated from a mad house can more than equal it for incoherence" ("Interviews," Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 5, p. 273), Thomas Jefferson ("It is between 50 and 60 years since I read the Apocalypse--Revelation--and I then considered it merely the ravings of a maniac.... What has no meaning admits of no explanation"), and Thomas Paine ("It's impossible to tell where revelations stop and hallucinations begin"). "Evidence to the contrary" arises as soon as you read the writing. (3) Although I'm among those who contend the Bible is a veritable miasma of problems, I wouldn't say it "contradicts itself with every new sentence." That's going too far. Projecting that impression is not our intent. Virtually any book on a library shelf has some truth in it. If you obtained the impression from BE that "nearly every statement of Jesus recorded in the Gospels would contradict another statement of His," for example, then you read more into the narrative than was there. (4) Your comment that the large number of problems attributed to the Bible by BE "leads me to suspect that there may be something faulty in your methodology" exposes a distinct bias on your part. Why assume something is wrong with my methodology rather than the Bible itself. After all, we have presented more than enough data to substantiate our position. (5) It's not a question of whether I think there are "thousands of bloopers in the Bible." The evidence shows as much and many are ideologically fatal. That's what is crucial. Finding problems is not nearly as hard as you imply and I'm under little stress while so engaged. Moreover, the number of errors and contradictions has no relevance to how hard I'm trying; they either exist or they don't. (6) You admitted "that Jesus might have contradicted Himself a few times if He were only a mere, ordinary human being." But the point is that he is supposed to be God incarnate; so how could he ever contradict himself, especially in God's perfect book?

Letter #192 from VT of Huron, California

Greetings. Regarding Issue 45, Sept. 86, Letter #167 from Mark Potts. In regard to Gen. 6:9 ("Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations and Noah walked with God") (which apologists were asked to reconcile with "all have sinned" in Rom. 3:23--Ed.), this verse seems to be rather interesting or confusing to both Mr. Potts and yourself. Without a proper education in the field of HOMILETICS (the branch of theology dealing with the writing and preaching of sermons--Ed.) it is impossible to speak with authority. However, I do believe we can trust such scholars as F.W. Farrar, H. Cotterill, T. Whitelaw and others.... "Was a just man" does not mean spotless innocence (Knobel); but upright, honest, and virtuous.... He was just by reason of his faith in God.... PERFECT implies `COMPLETE, WHOLE. Perfect in the sense not of SINLESSNESS, but of MORAL INTEGRITY (Generius, Calvin)...Noah was a preacher of righteousness. The conclusion: Noah, it is obvious, was not a man whose character was shaped by his contemporaries. In this regard, Noah was a "just man that walked with God"...Noah was

perfect in the sense that his heart was right with God...I trust this little note of EXPLANATION will SUFFICE. I know much, much more can be said about and to the subject, but this is (I believe) enough to set the record straight. Do you agree?

Editor's Response to Letter #192

Greetings: Unfortunately, VT, your little note doesn't set the record straight or suffice for many reasons. First, what does homiletics have to do with the problem? Exegesis (the critical analysis of a word or passage, esp. in the Bible) and apologetics (the branch of theology having to do with the defense and proofs of Christianity) are the real areas of concern, not homiletics. I fail to see the relevance of writing and delivering sermons. Second, most of your letter dealt with the word "just" and had to be deleted because it was irrelevant to the issue. You built and fought a strawman because I focused entirely on the word "perfect" which you discussed only briefly. Third, interestingly enough, you failed even in your employment of the word "just" because if it involves being upright, honest, and virtuous without perfection, then everyone is included. We are all upright and honest to some degree. No one is totally dishonest or immoral. Fourth, you tried to show that "perfect" did not involve "sinlessness" but proved the opposite by saying "perfect" means complete moral integrity. How does that differ from sinless perfection? Either Noah was morally perfect or he wasn't. There is no inbetween, and if his moral integrity was complete, then he was sinless, i.e., morally perfect, not a sinner, which would violate Rom. 3:23. Fifth, why would Noah have been chosen to be on the ark to begin with if he wasn't morally perfect? If he was not morally perfect then he was morally imperfect, in which case he was no different from the rest of his contemporaries and had no more right to be on the ark than they did. To say that he sinned, but less than others, is no answer because he would still have been a sinner and not always have "walked with God." His difference from others would have been one of degree not kind. If Noah was not an example of "spotless innocence" as you claim, then how could his heart have always been "right with God" as you allege?

Letter #193 from EB of Canton, Michigan

Dear Dennis. Some time ago I wrote to you about answering some questions I got from work. The main question was about the location of Zebulun (which was involved in a prophecy on page 2 of Issue #10--Ed.). Gen. 49:13 says, "Zebulun shall dwell at the shore of the sea; he shall become a haven for ships, and his border shall be at Sidon." You went on to say how this prophecy failed. You also wrote me and said, "Two Christian atlases clearly show Zebulun does not touch any sea." My born-again boss said it did touch the sea, and quoted Matt. 4:13-15 ("And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zabulon and Nephthalim: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, the land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan,...."). Would you respond to him? Keep up the great work.

Editor's Response to Letter #193

Dear EB. In the first place, your boss apparently ignored my suggestion that he consult some standard biblical atlases such as Westminster's Historical Maps of Bible Lands and Standard's Bible Atlas and relied on another biblical verse instead. That's always the problem with extrabiblical subjects. Many biblicists don't care about outside information except when favorable and operate on the premise that if it says the Bible is wrong, then it's false, and that's that. In this instance, your boss not only failed by ignoring some standard historical maps but by relying on Matt. 4:13-15 to salvage his position. Matthew says, "and dwelt in Capernaum, which is upon the sea coast, in the borders of Zebulun and Nephthalim." Capernaum is a city on the Sea of Galilee within the province of Naphtali which also borders the Sea of Galilee. It is not within

Zebulon, an adjacent province to the west of Naphtali that touches no seas. Because Capernaum is on the eastern side of Naphtali and Zebulon is on its western side, Capernaum can not be in both provinces simultaneously. Consequently, Matt. 4:13 does not prove Zebulon touches the sea. Secondly, if your boss had closely read Matt. 4:15 he would have noticed that it says "the land of Zebulon, and the land of Naphtalim by way of the sea." In other words, Naphtali was "by way of the sea" or on the sea coast, not Zebulon. Thirdly, although the original prophecy in Gen. 49:13 said the borders of Zebulon would extend to Sidon on the Mediterranean, there are no extrabiblical maps or internal verses showing Zebulon extending to Sidon which is far to the northwest. And finally, since your supervisor relied partly upon Matt. 4:15, he should also note that Zebulon and Naphtali, which are west of the Jordan River, could not have been "beyond the Jordan" (Matt. 4:15) unless the speaker was east of the River, which is unlikely.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #194 from VM of Del Mar, California

Dear Dennis. I must say I thoroughly enjoy your newsletter, but I think it would be much more to your advantage to concentrate more on errancy itself and less upon topics outside the Bible. Key Christian doctrines should be examined and exposed as absurdities, as well as contrasted with the contradictory views of other sects (e.g. Jesus is God vs. Jesus is not God) and all the while there should be a chance for apologists to be heard. Anything else (i.e. Christian bashing, biblical morality, etc...) is superfluous, and does not really relate to the issue at hand; namely, "is the bible the perfect word of God?" Problems also arise when we try to step outside the Bible to prove it is false. For example: in BE #3, you criticized the God of the OT for ordering horses to be hamstrung (Josh. 11:6). Unless you're a vegetarian, are you really in a position to speak out against "cruelty to animals"? Ironically, it's the God of the OT who advocates vegetarianism as an ethical ideal (Gen. 1:29-30, Isa. 11:6-9, Deut. 8:7-9)---this would make a great subject for ignored teachings. This is precisely the dilemma: in terms of morality, the Bible contains everything from hardcore pacifism and vegetarianism to human sacrifice and rape. Thus its teachings have not only moved the "pious sadists" of the Middle Ages, but Tolstoy, Gandhi, and da Vinci as well. Rather than evaluate the bible on emotional appeal (which can never really work, since it contains a lot of "inspirational" passages alongside the filth), it's better to judge it objectively and critically. In general, you're doing a terrific job, and keep up the good work!

Editor's Response to Letter #194

Dear VM. We agree on most of your comments. I've repeatedly stressed the importance of using the Bible against itself although many people rely primarily upon extrabiblical data to refute the Book and want BE to follow their lead. The Babylonian influence on the Canon's formation and the authorship of various books, for example, just don't carry the weight of internal inconsistencies. Although occasionally discussed in BE, I leave such topics to the Higher Critics and others. That's why I haven't been totally comfortable with my recent commentaries on biblical "history." Although my sources may be totally accurate, biblicists will probably reply that, "Our authorities, our sources, say something quite different and we choose to believe them." The best way to make an historical case would be to show that all the historians of that era substantiate your position which would be rare. Oddly enough, the contradictory aspects within the Bible often provide protection against external assaults. If someone contends scripture supports war, slavery, and immorality, for example, defenders can always provide verses to the contrary. The old adage that you can prove anything you want from the Bible has a good deal of truth. Only when one goes within the Book and compares verse with verse do contradictions become weaknesses. External strengths are internal failings. Since few people really know the

Book and even fewer critics have focused primarily on internal difficulties, the Bible has been relatively free of effective opposition from the beginning.

I must take issue with a couple of your points, however. I don't feel one needs to be a vegetarian to speak against cruelty to animals any more than one needs to be a pacifist to speak against a war or a teetotalist to speak against alcoholism. If we have to be perfect models to oppose an activity, then we're all in trouble. Secondly, the verses you suggested could not be included in Ignored Teachings under VEGETARIANISM because they do not clearly teach such a doctrine.

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Alcohol--Probably no chemical in the history of mankind has been more involved with the destruction of human life than alcohol. Throughout the ages groups of one sort or another have arisen to fight its pernicious influence and religiously-oriented bodies have been no exception. Biblicists have viewed themselves as being in the forefront of the abstinence movement via such organizations as AA and the WCTU (Womens' Christian Temperance Union). Although one need not exhibit much wisdom to see why people should be encouraged to eschew alcohol, as exceptional degree of insight is needed to see how the Bible can be of assistance in this regard. Only by the selective use of verses can one invoke the Bible as an anti-alcohol source. Because alcohol is a sociological problem of the first magnitude, an exhaustive biblical discussion of the issue is in order. All of the verses in opposition to its consumption will be listed first, followed by all those advocating its employment. Both categories can be subdivided into verses that are forceful and those less assertive. Verses most in favor of the teetotalist position are: "Moreover, wine is treacherous; the arrogant man shall not abide" (Hab. 2:5 RSV) and "It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth,...." (Rom. 14:21) and "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging; and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise" (Rom. 20:1) and "A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober,...not given to wine,...." (1 Tim. 3:2-3) and "For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God;...not given to wine,....sober, just, holy, temperate" (Titus 1:7-8) and "Do not drink wine nor strong drink, thou nor thy sons with thee, when ye go into the tabernacle of the congregation lest ye die: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations" (Lev. 10:9) and "Who has woe? Who has sorrow? Who has strife? Who has complaining? Who has wounds without course? Who has redness of eyes? Those who tarry long over wine, those who try mixed wine. Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly. At the last it bites like a serpent, and stings like an adder" (Prov. 23:29-32 RSV).

Verses opposing the consumption of alcohol with less definitiveness are: "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess..." (Eph. 5:18) and "Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkard,...shall inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6:10) and "Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the heart" (Hosea 4:11) and "For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink..." (Luke 1:15) and "These also reel with wine and stagger with strong drink; the priest and the prophet reel with strong drink, they are confused with wine, they stagger with strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in giving judgment" (Isa. 28:7 RSV) and "Thou hast made thy people suffer hard things; thou hast given us wine to drink that made us reel" (Psalm 60:3 RSV) and "But Daniel resolved that he would not defile himself with the king's rich food, or with the wine which he drank" (Dan. 1:8 RSV) and "...when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries" (1 Peter 4:3) and "Then said the Lord unto me, Go yet, love...an adulteress, according to the love of the Lord toward the children of Israel, who look to other gods, and love flagons of wine" (Hos. 3:1) and finally, "When either man or woman shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a

Nazarite,.... He shall separate himself from wine and strong drink, and shall drink no vinegar of wine, or vinegar of strong drink, neither shall he drink any liquor of grapes, nor eat moist grapes, or dried. All the days of his separation shall he eat nothing that is made of the vine tree,...." (Num. 6:2-4). The weakness inherent in some of the latter lies in the fact that they seem to oppose drunkenness and excess rather than drinking per se.

On the other side of the coin are those verses that advocate indulging and they too can be divided into stronger and weaker comments. Among the former are: "Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy heart. Let him drink and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more" (Prov. 31:6-7) and "Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works" (Eccle. 9:7) and "Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities" (1 Tim. 5:23) and "Thus saith the God of Israel, Every bottle shall be filled with wine:..." (Jer. 13:12) and "...every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money come buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk...." (Isa. 55:1) and "Yea, the Lord will answer and say unto his people, Behold, I will send you corn, and wine, and oil, and ye shall be satisfied therewith" (Joel 2:19) and "I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel...and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof...." (Amos 9:14) and "...then you shall turn it into money, and bind up the money in your hand, and go to the place which the Lord your God chooses, and spend the money for whatever you desire, oxen, or sheep, or wine or strong drink, whatever your appetite craves..." (Deut. 14:25-26 RSV) and "Therefore God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine" (Gen. 27:28) and "On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wine...." (Isa. 25:6 RSV) and "Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine,...." (1 Tim. 3:8) and "...not given to much wine...." (Titus 2:3).

And finally, there are verses that support drinking but with less assertiveness: "And wine that maketh glad the feast of man...." (Psalm 104:15) and "...in the holy place shalt thou cause the strong wine to be poured unto the Lord for a drink offering" (Num. 28:7) and "Behold that which I have seen: it is good and comely for one to eat and to drink,...." (Eccle 5:18) and "the vine said unto them, Should I leave my wine, which cheereth God and man...." (Judges 9:13) and "...he will love you, bless you; he will also bless your grain and your wine...." (Deut. 7:13 RSV) and "Melchizedek King of Salem brought forth bread and wine: and he was the priest of the most high God" (Gen. 14:18) and "For how great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty! corn shall make the young men cheerful, and new wine the maids" (Zech. 9:17) and "in that day the mountains shall drip sweet wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the stream beds of Judah shall flow with water...." (Joel 3:18 RSV) and "...after that the Nazarite may drink wine" (Num. 6:20) and Lev. 23:13, 2 Sam. 6:19 and 2 Chron. 2:10.

Judging from the above, one can see the Bible's teachings on the consumption of alcohol are inconsistent and contradictory. Last month's comment to the effect that there is a "good deal of truth in the old adage that you can prove anything you want from the Bible" is borne out by this example. If one seeks a verse in favor of drinking it's available; if one seeks the opposite, it's there, too. As in the case of war, immorality, slavery, brutality etc., if someone chooses to attack the Bible from the outside, biblicists have plenty of verses to utilize in support of either position as expediency dictates. Because of the extremely contradictory nature of biblical pronouncements, the Bible is made to order for this kind of assault. But when one goes within the Book and simply asks, "Should I drink or shouldn't I," he finds no consistent response; he's left hanging. Because the overwhelming majority of the people do not know the Book very well and are not aware of its contradictions, they are satisfied with whatever answer apologists provide and given the impression the Bible is the wisest of all volumes. Failure to take cognizance of this fact has been one of the most important mistakes of freethought advocates

throughout history. The latter have concentrated on the wrong strategy and addressed the wrong issues. There is more than enough information within the Book to refute its validity and keep one busy for a lifetime. It isn't necessary to focus primarily on externals although they should be included.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #195 from RJS of Burnsville, Minnesota

Dear Dennis, I enjoyed issue #49. The section on the gospel versions of the trial of Jesus and violations of Jewish law is excellent. But most of all I liked the letter from "Dr. PR" who is the embodiment of the fundamentalist spirit. Many of these Bible thumpers find abuse much easier than argument. Ironically, I think both of you are wrong about Abraham and Terah! Pastor PR's apologetic is silly, as you point out, but your original criticism is based on the assumption that Abraham left Haran after Terah died. But the Genesis account might not be strictly chronological. That is, it is perfectly good narrative technique to organize a story around people or events rather than being a slave to chronology. (My book about the flat-earthers will be organized that way.) The narrator completes the story of Terah, including his death, and then begins the story of Abraham. We cannot exclude the possibility that the two stories overlap in time.

Pastor PR's Science and Philosophy must be a pearl of great price. No doubt I could dig out his identity, but it is easier just to ask you. Who is he, and how can I get his book?

Editor's Response to Letter #195

Dear RJS. I appreciate your compliment but must take exception to your analysis of the Terah/Abraham problem. You have devised the kind of defense I would expect from a typical apologist and, with all due respect, I think you should have read the text closer. Your criticism of my "assumption that Abraham left Haran after Terah died" is best addressed by reading the words themselves. Acts 7:4 in the RSV says, "Then he (Abraham--Ed.) departed from the land of the Chaldeans, and lived in Haran. And after his father died, God removed him from there into this land (Israel--Ed.) in which you are now living." The Living Bible's version of Gen. 11:31-12:4 clearly states the same. "Then Terah took his son Abram...to go to the land of Canaan; but they stopped instead at the city of Haran and settled there. And there Terah died at the age of 205. After the death of Abram's father, God told him, Leave your own country behind you...and go to the land I will guide you to.... So Abram departed as the Lord had instructed him...." Your "being a slave to chronology" comment reminds me of the common apologetic rationalization of the inconsistencies among the gospel narratives. One must assume narrations are arranged chronologically unless good evidence exists to the contrary; otherwise, chaos will reign. Every reader would be free to arrange events in any order he or she deemed desirable.

As far as PR's Science and Philosophy is concerned, I wouldn't waste my time. If I hadn't received a free copy, I probably would have never read it. Far too many other books merit more immediate attention.

Letter #196 from A and A

Dear Dennis. I thoroughly enjoy your publication. Let me quibble. Jews did practice crucifixion at least one time; the Hasmonean monarch, Alexander Jannaeus crucified 800 pharisees (89 BC), an event which may have inspired I Enoch 37-31 (I think you mean 37-41--Ed.) according to my source, The Jews in the Roman World by Michael Grant.

Also, it is hair-splitting to say Herod the Great was not a King. The Romans had puppet kings. You recognized that he was a king by your reference to the Kingdom of Herod (#37 on page 1 of Issue #49). Now that I've put forth my petty criticism let me again congratulate you for your brave and scholarly work.

Letter #197 from RCC of Nagasaki, Japan

(On page 2 of Issue #49 BE said Assyria never had a king named Pul--Ed.). Dear Dennis. Regarding #(49) "Pul the king of Assyria came against the land...." (2 Kings 15:19). In 74 BC a former soldier named 'Pulu' ascended the throne of Assyria. He took the name "Tiglath-Pileser III and subdued Palestine in 733 B.C. Tell el-Mutesellim, Stratum II has evidence of this. PULU became 'Pul' in Hebrew. Cuneiform tablets found in palaces on the Tigris River tell the same story as the OT. My reference is The Bible as History by Werner Keller, translated from the German. Thank you for your fine periodical.

Letter #198 from KB of Los Angeles, California

Dear Dennis. My jury is still out regarding your new format....Regarding Issue #49 by the numbers: (32) You will probably get a lot of flack on this. Per Josephus Antiquities XIV. I.3. "Herod son (of Antipater)...came...to be king of the Jews...." Marc Anthony did appoint Herod tetrarch (XIV. XIII,l), but this did not exclude Herod's claim to the title of King.... (41) The swine of Matt. 8:32 and Mark 5:11 are in the gentile area of the Decapolis, near Gadara; so neither their keepers nor the users would be Jewish....

Editor's Response to Letter #198

Dear KB. Your historical sources, like those of the two prior letters (#196 and #197) are at odds with those I consulted. So whom should we believe? I could research the matter further as could you, but would the average person be materially swayed by an historical exchange of this nature. I enjoy history immensely and was a philosophy/history major in college, but these are not the issues of greatest importance to the average believer in the Bible. Like many other extrabiblical subjects they are not sufficiently demonstrable and/or persuasive to be placed on the front burner.

Letter #199 from Ed McCartney, P.O. Box 79024, Lakewood, Ohio 44107

Dear Dennis...In issue #46, page 2, point (12) you added up the men on both sides for battle to 1,200,000 in 2 Chron. 3:3. The total population is not given. I understand that, unless everyone fought, the population is greater than the number in the army. I do not know what the population was. I do not doubt the number of fighting men (1,200,000--Ed.) the Bible gives.... You said, "Palestine could have barely supported 2,000,000." How do you reckon that? You said, "Palestine, a poor miserable little country..." You may be describing its conditions at present. If so, are you saying that back in Abijah's time the land was as desolate as it is now? I checked an atlas published two years ago and it says the population of Israel is 3,878,000.

Editor's Response to Letter #199

Dear Ed. Even though the area under discussion is far more affluent and fertile today than nearly 2,500 years ago, the entire population has barely reached 4,000,000. Yet, you choose to believe ancient Israel fielded an army far larger than that which executed the allied invasion of Europe on June 6, 1944 (D-Day).

Letter #200 from FW of Eufaula, Oklahoma

Dear Dennis. Herewith my renewal. I continue to be interested (enjoy is not an appropriate word) in your detailed focusing on discrepancies in the Bible. I have only "exposed" your writings to one "fundamentalist" couple and they accuse you of taking things out of context--a claim you've refuted many times. I trust your honesty but would feel better discussing the pros and cons with some truly open-minded people if I could find them!

Recently the Methodist Church in whose musically excellent choir I sing (tho I haven't joined the church) has started a Sunday School class for "skeptics" like me. The leader is a questioner who has a strong background in theological, philosophical and psychological training. We are fortunate to have him. So far no central direction of study has emerged and maybe we will be "thrown out" when our liberalism becomes known to the church fathers before such a direction shapes up. I can envision information derived from your letter being useful from time to time....

With reference to your question in Issue #46 about God having performed one OT good, honest, just act. Assuming it happened miraculously as related in 1 Kings 17:16, the oil and meal not failing for many days; would that not qualify? How about the cloud by day, fire by night and manna during the 40 years wandering in the wilderness, and the parting of the Red Sea prior to that? I have the feeling you'll feel none qualify but they come to me so I've jotted them down for what they're worth--if they really happened.

Editor's Response to Letter # 200

Dear FW. I appreciate the implicit kindness in a couple of your remarks but have two points I'd like to make. First, "discrepancies" is a word favored by apologists because it tends to minimize contradictions and ameliorate inconsistencies. Hopefully an oversight on your part rather than a conscious intent to mislead accounts for its

employment. Countless biblical problems are far more than mere "discrepancies." They are major problems with serious consequences. Second, the acts you related with respect to the parting of the Red Sea, the gift of manna, etc. are only a few of many acts of favoritism shown by God toward the Israelites. If the OT God were as good, honest, and just as you believe, then why did he repeatedly favor the Jews over the Hivites, the Jebusites, the Amorites and other tribes? What had the Jews done to earn the title of "God's Chosen People?" Why were they selected over everyone else? That doesn't sound like goodness and justice to me. That sounds like what we have in abundance already. Why weren't the other tribes forgiven repeatedly for their constant violations of God's laws? God's preference for the Israelites is all too evident throughout the OT. I thought we were all supposed to be God's people and He was no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34)? No doubt the Hivites, Jebusites and Amorites had troubles too. Why weren't they showered with favors?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #201 from Jim Lippard, P.O. Box 37052, Phoenix, Arizona 85069

Dear Dennis.... According to Exodus 9:1-7, the fifth plague killed all of the field livestock, horses donkeys, camels, herds, and flocks of the Egyptians. In Exodus 14:6-9, 17-18, 23, 25-26, and 28 the Egyptians chased after the Hebrews with chariots and horseman. I guess the 5th plague didn't inconvenience the Egyptians much, since they were apparently able to quickly replace all their dead horses.

John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world..." but 1 John 2:15 says, "Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the father is not in him." Looks like another case of "do as I say, not as I do."

A biblical Catch-22: Luke 4:26 says, "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple." But 1 John 3:15 says, "Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him."

Letter #202 from RH of Shreveport, Louisiana

Dear Dennis. Many thanks for the continued excellence of BE. It is a monthly delight. I have one quibble--the banner headline showing the ripped Holy Bible. You are after all trying to get people to read the thing, not to rip it up (or burn it!) and I think the symbolism is bound to put off some believers who won't get any further. I am astounded monthly by your depth of Biblical knowledge--you are doing a valuable service. Congratulations on the computer and printer; looks swell.

Editor's Response to Letter #202

Dear RH. I can't think of a better symbol to represent this publication than a Bible torn in two by its own contradictions, errors, and fallacies. One can't "water-down" the external appearance in order to attract readers since they will quickly comprehend the philosophy contained therein anyway. The caption (The Only National Periodical....) alone will reveal the general tenor of what is to be expected. If you are trying to placate everyone, you have embarked on a journey to nowhere. We tell people what they ought to hear, what they need to hear, not what many want to hear. Millions have been deceived from the beginning and there is no other way to correct the situation than by giving them some unpleasant information. Like needed surgery, it's painful, but they learn to adapt. If you try to be all things to all people, you'll end up being nothing to anybody. Incidentally, Haley's Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible, which is an apologetic classic available in most Christian bookstores, also has a ripped Bible on the cover.

Letter #203 from LBH of Huntsville, Alabama

Dear Dennis. I always enjoy BIBLICAL ERRANCY and Issue #49 was no exception. I thought it unusually informative. However, I offer one criticism. Please do not subject us to such "tripe" as supplied by Letter #186 from Dr. PR of the Pensacola Bible Institute. Vituperative comments such as his seem "out of place" in a publication intended to inform on a very important subject. Dr. PR's comment rubbed me quite the wrong way and added nothing of value to your excellent publication. Please keep up your

good work.

Letter #204 from DP of Lakewood, New Jersey

Dear Dennis...In reading various issues here and there while keeping in mind the purpose of BE, it must be admitted that you've rendered a far more unique, original, and valuable service to knowledge, insight, and the Bible's real innermost secrets than any other publication or periodical I've encountered in over 30 years of freethought readings--since 1955 anyway. The latter include Herbert Cutner's Jesus: God, Man or Myth?, Thomas Paine's The Age of Reason, Ludwig Buchner's Force and Matter, Kersey Graves' The World's 16 Crucified Saviors, and all 12 volumes of Ingersoll's Works plus scads and scads of other immortals' works over the years. Add

the fact that you furnish "chapter and verse," provide reasoned, calm, balanced, well-stated explanations with convincing, unswerving, dedication to logic and present evidence that's unimpeachable, and, at least to anyone who's unafraid to think freely, far more proof that the Bible's a worthless guide on any subject it touches, be it morality, ethics, science, geography, history, etc. It's unfortunate that BE isn't available as a course either in high school or college for without any doubt whatsoever, it would free more minds of the Bible's stranglehold on society than thousands of fulminations hurled at religion by atheists! If there were years enough left for me (having hit the age of 59), aside from a half-dozen or more other freethought projects I'm still trying to maintain in balance, I'd commence with #1 and put'em all on floppy discs and probably around the middle of the next century issue them in book-form....

Whether fortunately or otherwise a Freethinker isn't made or "born" overnight--it's a struggle to get rid of the beliefs of babyhood foisted when one's in no reasoning position to understand what's being drummed, brainwashed, and indoctrinated into the mind--yet once the underlying factor of fear is uncovered, exposed, and unearthed to the bright, shining, clear, glorious sunlight of reason, logic, common sense, evidence, and proof, turning back is impossible and that I've never regretted!

To make a short story even shorter, Dennis, since it all revolves around BE, you're doing exactly and precisely what I'd have loved doing myself--only I have neither the ability nor the talent, nor anything else in fact, to accomplish what you do: so I'm going to promote your BE in whatever way I can and by sheer dint of reprinting and distributing, others will learn about the Book which they tout as Gawd's word. Little do they know they don't know a thing about it.

EDITOR'S NOTE: (1) Several readers call on a regular basis to discuss strategy, tactics, beliefs, and other topics of major concern. Because we like to keep abreast of what people are saying and doing throughout the Nation, calls are welcome, especially from activists. A kind of semi-organizational consensus seems to be coalescing. (2) Most information in BE's commentaries comes from three large loose-leaf binders compiled over many years. At the current rate of utilization and barring any unforeseen circumstances, the notebooks will be exhausted sometime in 1991. At that time BE will adopt one of two major programs currently under consideration, either one of which will take us well beyond the turn of the century. On the other hand, they could be combined in which case the amount of material would be virtually unlimited. Creation of the most detailed, comprehensive, and accurate refutation of the Bible in the English-speaking world is one of our key objectives. (3) If you need a speaker, a panelist, or a debater for your church, college, or organization, we are willing to go anywhere to present BE's philosophy. Just let us know. (4) We'd again like to thank those who have helped advertise BE and facilitate our appearances on the media.

April 1987

Issue No. 52

Genesis Questions--The Commentary in Issue 21 discussed the scientific problems generated by the creation accounts in the Book of Genesis, while Issue 22 noted the numerous contradictions within and between the two accounts in chapters one and two. Each not only disagrees with the other but itself as well. In addition to the difficulties posed in Issues 21 and 22 there are some significant general problems that need to be addressed and a lesser number of queries that are just bothersome. Verses within the former are: (1) "...and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth,...." (Gen. 1:28). How could the earth be re-plenished unless it had been plenished before Adam and Eve? How do you replenish something that has never been plenished to start with? (2) "And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made;

and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made" (Gen. 2:2). How could God be masculine unless he had the physical attributes or organs of a male? What makes God masculine? (3) "And the earth was without form and void...." (Gen. 1:2). How could something even exist without some kind of form? (4) "...and it shall come to pass, that every one that findeth me (Cain--Ed.) shall slay me. And the Lord said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold...." (Gen. 4:14-15). Since the only people in existence at that time, other than Cain, were Adam and Eve, who was it that God thought might slay Cain? Abel had already been slain. (5) "And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod...." (Gen. 4:16). How do you leave or escape from the presence of the omnipresent? (6) "And Cain knew his wife; and she conceived and bare Enoch; and he builded a city...." (Gen. 4:17). Where did Cain get his wife and how could one man build a city? If she is his sister, as some biblicists allege, then apparently we are all products of incest.

Verses giving rise to lesser problems are: (1) "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it" (Gen. 2:17). Why would God prevent man from knowing good from evil? (2) "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). If the only places in which something can exist are heaven, hell, and earth, where was God when he created them? (3) "And the LORD said unto Cain, Where is Abel thy brother?" (Gen. 4:9). Why would an all-knowing (omniscient) God need to ask questions? He already knows the answer. (4) "...a vagabond shalt thou (Cain--Ed.) be in the earth...And the Lord said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him" (Gen. 4:12, 15). How could God be the epitome of justice and rectitude when he not only failed to adequately punish Cain for killing Abel but promised him protection from potential slayers.

Gambling--As is true of alcohol, it's hard to see how biblicists can oppose gambling when many biblical verses show it was commanded by God or performed by his spokesmen and chosen people with apparent impunity. Divine commands are evident in Joshua 14:2 ("By lot was their inheritance, as the Lord commanded by the hand of Moses...."), Joshua 21:8 ML ("The Israelites granted to the Levites these cities and their pastures by lot, as

Page 2 the Lord had commanded through Moses"), and Num. 26:52, 55-56 ("And the Lord spake unto Moses saying...the Land shall be divided by lot: according to the names of the tribes of their fathers they shall inherit. According to the lot shall possession thereof be divided between many and few").

Gambling, or the casting of lots, was done by God's chosen in Joshua 18:10 ("And Joshua cast lots for them in Shiloh before the Lord...."), Josh. 18:6 ("...that I may cast lots for you here before the Lord our God"), Josh. 18:8 ("...that I may cast lots for you before the Lord in Shiloh"), Josh. 19:51 ("...divide for an inheritance by lot in Shiloh before the Lord...."), 1 Sam. 14:42 RSV ("Then Saul said, 'Cast the lot between me and my son Jonathan.' And Jonathan was taken"), Acts 1:26 RSV ("And they cast lots for them, and the lot fell on Matthias and he was enrolled with the eleven apostles"), 1 Chron. 24:5 LB ("All tasks were assigned to the various groups by coin toss so that there would be no preference...."), 1 Chron. 24:30-31 LB ("...These were the descendants of Levi,...they were assigned to their duties by coin-toss without distinction as to age or rank. It was done in the presence of King David,...and the leaders of the priests and Levites"), 1 Chron. 25:8 RSV ("And they cast lots for their duties, small and great, teacher and pupil alike"), 1 Chron. 26:13-14, Neh. 10:34, Judges 20:9 RSV, and 1 Sam. 10:20-21 RSV. Proverbs 18:18 ("A coin toss ends arguments and settles disputes between powerful opponents") even implicitly advocates gambling as a way to settle conflicts.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #205 from JW, President of Alpha and Omega Ministries of Phoenix, Arizona

Dear Mr. McKinsey. I briefly respond to your comments found in the October, 1986 edition of Biblical Errancy. I simply intend to correct a number of logical and factual errors present in your rebuttal. First, you did not at all deal with the facts that I brought up relevant to our main discussion, that being your original charge that Jesus and Paul did not agree on the wording of the 6th commandment. I pointed out that both said the same thing--ou phoneuseis. Your reply involved a number of issues, most of which lie outside the realm of a brief reply. You spent some time discussing the subject of textual criticism, and later said that "the problems associated with lower (textual) criticism seem to elude you, JW." I am enclosing two papers that should be sufficient enough to demonstrate my proficiency in the realm of textual criticism. Instead of proving your point, your comments demonstrate a lamentable lack of knowledge of the field. Such comments as your disbelief that the original writings ever existed, that textual criticism involves "educated guesses," that Geisler and Nix have no way of proving that most errors are the result of copyist errors, etc. simply prove beyond a shadow of a doubt to anyone who has studied the field that you have not. I would challenge you to dispute the findings of such scholars as Bruce Metzger, Kurt Aland, or F.F. Bruce in regards to this science. Your lack of understanding of the subject is clearly demonstrated by your comment concerning Geisler and Nix's comment about the variation in the text providing the means of its own correction...Your example of the homicide detective demonstrates your misunderstanding of the subject.

You made at least three major errors in this section: (1) there is no textual variation at Isaiah 7:14 ("Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold a virgin--almah in Hebrew--shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel"). The Hebrew is almah, the Greek (LXX--Septuagint) is parthenos. The dispute is on rendering, not text. If you insist on saying there is a textual difficulty here, please provide the textual sources you are relying on. I am referencing Kittel's Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia, 1983, page 685, and Rahlf's Septuaginta 1979, pg. 575, and F. Delitzsch, Commentary on the Old Testament: Isaiah, pages 216-217. (2) You intimated that I have "picked inaccurate manuscripts among the thousands available." May I ask you to provide a single textual source giving a different reading other than ou phoneuseis at either Matt. 19:18 or Romans 13:9? (Thou shalt not murder or Thou shalt not kill?--Ed.). I have consulted the Textus Receptus, the Stephens Text, the Majority Text, Westcott and Hort, the UBS 3rd Edition (corrected), and the 26th edition of the Nestle-Aland text--all indicate that there are no textual variants at this point whatsoever--all read ou phoneuseis. (3) You postulated a difference in meaning between the two instances of the same word. Could you please provide lexicographical support for this? You said that "context is a major factor." Since the context of these two instances is the same, how could this change the meaning?

The facts are quite clear: (1) Both Paul and Jesus said the same thing; (2) Both quoted the same passage in the same context; (3) the text at this point is perfectly pure--there are no textual variations known; (4) there is no lexicographical data that would support the idea of "different meanings" for identical usage of the same word in the same grammatical form. Hence your original charge is again shown false....

Editor's Response to Letter #205

Dear JW. After several months of correspondence it's rather obvious, but unfortunate, that you have a notable array of shortcomings including a failure to listen very well, a strong propensity to belabor points that have already been answered, a tendency to uncritically parrot pat answers learned in Bible class and/or seminary, a deceptive and dishonest inclination to build strawmen for appearances sake, a poor grasp of logical processes in key areas, an attraction to glittering generalities rather than evidence, and a lamentable lack of comprehension of the overall

imbroglio in which you find yourself. You hear what you want to hear, what you have been told to internalize. Your letters exude a distinct aura of *deja vu* and reek with examples of each failing. Apparently, you still don't understand the problem but I'll go through it one more time as succinctly as possible. Hopefully the audience can endure the repetition. I'm tempted to say, Just re-read our correspondence and you'll see the error of your ways, but I don't think you'd do that any more than you'd read all of our back issues as I suggested. First, I never said, much less insisted, there was a textual variation in the Hebrew at Isaiah 7:14 nor did I say there was a textual variant between Matt. 19:18 KJ ("Thou shalt not murder") and Rom. 13:9 KJ ("Thou shalt not kill"). You attributed a position to me and then proceeded to dismantle your strawman. I never said the dispute was over text rather than rendering nor did I say how the contradiction arose. All I said was that a contradiction existed. Specifically, I stated the following which you chose to ignore. "You said there was no difference between Matt. 19:18 and Rom. 13:9 because both came from 'ou phoneuseis' in Greek.... The translators of the KJV say 'murder' is the proper word in Matt. 19:18, while 'kill' is the best term to use in Rom. 13:9. Are you saying they don't know the difference, that they don't know how to translate? Are you saying you know Greek and Hebrew better than those who assembled the KJV? They say there is a difference, while you say there isn't....several of the newest versions agree with the King James.... The dispute as to whether 'almah' in Isaiah 7:14 means a 'virgin' or a 'young woman' has never been resolved. I could become one of the world's greatest Hebrew/Greek scholars and still find many knowledgeable people who disagree with my interpretation. So who is right? Who knows Greek and Hebrew best?....Many of these men have devoted decades to these languages (far more years than the 24 you have lived--Ed.)" (Issue #44, p. 4). Later on page 4 of Issue 46 I provided three reasons translators may disagree with your equating of Matt. 19:18 with Rom 13:9: (a) you picked inaccurate manuscripts, (b) you chose accurate manuscripts with identical words having different meanings, or (c) the original text is so imprecise as to be susceptible to several interpretations. As I stated months ago, your disagreement is with your colleagues as much as me. If all the manuscripts say "ou phoneuseis" as you contend and the words have identical meanings as you allege, then you have only scaled two lesser hurdles to reach an even higher barrier, namely, what does the Greek mean. If scholars can't agree on how to translate the manuscripts, even though there are no textual differences, then what the text says is of no consequence. Locating the problem's source is of less importance to this publication than noting the fact that it exists. If recognized experts give contradictory interpretations of the same words, then we have a problem equal in magnitude to that of contradictions between manuscripts. That's the hurdle you either refuse to recognize or can't surmount. If you think you have the solution then tell us what Matt. 19:18, Rom. 13:9, and Isa. 7:14 say in English. Whatever response you give will prove you view yourself as more knowledgeable in Greek and Hebrew than recognized experts in the field. If so, I again recommend that you write your own version of the Bible as did Wycliffe, Tyndale, Knox, Lamsa, Moffatt, and Fenton. If you're as capable as you seem to believe, then follow their lead and by all means send me a copy. You don't seem to realize that translating or rendering is as serious a problem as disagreements among manuscripts. Contradictions in one instance are as fatal as in the other. What difference would it make if there were no contradictions among the manuscripts if authorities still couldn't agree on what they said; the practical result would be the same.

You erroneously created a strawman when you said I accused you of picking "inaccurate manuscripts among the thousands available." In point (b) above I repeated my original charge that your fellow apologists many so contend. You also erred with another strawman when you said I "postulated a difference in meaning between the two instances of the same word," i.e. "ou phoneuseis." I postulated nothing of the sort. I originally said in point (c) above that your critics or fellow apologists may see a difference in meaning between two instances of the same word. On page 4 of Issue 46 I noted that the word "pound" could have many different meanings. Your problem is with your colleagues while BE is primarily concerned with the bottom line, the

contradiction that's present. Whether it's among manuscripts or interpretations of those manuscripts is of secondary importance. The result is the same. People don't know what to believe. Even if the Greek/Hebrew manuscripts were in unison throughout, which is by no means true, the Bible would still be of no value in many areas because of contradictions within and between versions.

Second, with reference to these same verses, I stated that the problems associated with lower (textual) criticism seem to elude you, JW" and you responded by sending me two of your papers on textual criticism. How two textually critical papers on topics A and B, assuming they are valid throughout, proves your analysis with respect to topic C is correct, eludes me, JW. Using that kind of logic I might as well not grade Johnny's paper because he got 100's on the last two. Isn't that known as a non sequitur?

Logic is also sadly deficient when you challenge me "to dispute the findings of such scholars as Bruce Metzger, Kurt Aland...." You mean I'm supposed to research their data? That's your responsibility, not mine. Since the burden of proof lies on he who alleges, you, not I, are obligated to provide the findings. Imagine a defense attorney in court doing nothing more than saying, "I have three witnesses corroborating my client's testimony. Prove them wrong." What do you think the judge would say? I seriously doubt he would instruct the prosecutor to research their data to see if it's true.

Third, and in close conjunction with what has gone before, is your attraction to glittering generalities and summations to the jury without evidence. You said I "did not at all deal with the facts...relevant to our main discussion" which is wholly inaccurate. I not only dealt with them but did so in some detail. The problem is that you didn't like what you heard and chose to ignore that which did not fit your preconceptions of biblical criticism. I again recommend that you re-read our dialogue, especially my responses in Issues 44, 46, and 47. You made a blanket indictment of some comments I made on page 4 of Issue 46 without providing evidence to the contrary. Specifically, you denounced my disbelief that the original writings ever existed, my belief that textual criticism involves educated guesses, and my assertion that apologists can't prove with certainty that most contradictions are the result of copyist errors. Yet, you provided nothing more than another demeaning generalization with respect to my knowledge of the field. It's not that I "demonstrate a lamentable lack of knowledge of the field" but that you demonstrate not only a lamentable lack of evidence for your sweeping generalizations and those of the people you quote but a mindset indicative of those who have been told what to accept as valid criticism and reply. Your repetition of the common apologetic defense that variations in the text provide "the means of its own correction" is not only notably unsubstantiated by concrete examples but exposed by my "homicide detective" analogy. Following your logic, one could more accurately recreate the "original manuscripts" as the number of contradictions and inconsistencies between and within manuscripts increased. I've never seen a solid example of this apologetic ploy which receives a lot of play but no proof. It's comparable to saying that "the more chaotic things become the clearer they are."

Incidentally, you built another strawman by intentionally giving a misleading impression of what I said regarding the original writings. I did not flatly state they never existed. I said there is little reason to believe they did. As in an earlier discussion of Jesus, which you apparently refuse to read, I never said he didn't exist; I said there is practically no extrabiblical evidence that he did.

In essence, then, if you want to contend there is no contradiction in the Greek manuscripts between Matt. 19:18 and Rom. 13:9 while admitting these verses should be stricken from the Bible because reliable, non-contradictory interpretations don't exist, I have no objection in this instance or others we could discuss. The result is the same. The verses mean nothing because

nobody definitely knows what they are saying; only contradictory translations exist. Again, if you're sure you know their correct meaning, then, by all means, translate them into English.

I look favorably upon this discussion in general and the kill/murder example in particular because they strike at the heart of the Greek/Hebrew escapist defense and the basic fallacy contained therein. The principle underlying this discussion is also applicable to other verses of crucial importance.

In concluding, several additional observations are in order. First, you're not really interested in objective scholarship and a comprehensive discussion of the Bible, JW, as much as forcing me to say uncle on one point. This accounts for your narrow focus and intense concentration. Your limited range of concern and failure to confront the substantive problems I've posed in prior issues only confirms my belief that you're insecure in other areas and, like VT in earlier issues, are desperately trying to put me on the defensive. VT became almost obsessed with his "Sabbath Days Journey" problem to the exclusion of all else. If I followed that tactic, many an apologist could be nailed to the wall while many readers would become thoroughly bored with the repetition. One might have some respect for your scholarship if you discussed a far wider range of issues as do more capable apologists such as Gleason Archer, Josh McDowell, and Norman Geisler. They exhibit more intellectual honesty by facing a much broader spectrum. On page 5 of November's issue (#47) I said "I'd especially like for you to address more substantive problems such as most of those posed on pages 2 and 3 of issue #34." So far, your silence has been deafening. Literally hundreds of statements with respect to the Bible's validity have been made throughout the history of this publication and the fact that your criticisms have been so narrow in scope is practically an endorsement of the 98% outside your purview. Second, having read several issues of Alpha and Omega's publication and witnessed the dearth of meaningful material contained therein, I'd say you'd do well to look homeward before complaining about other periodicals being intellectually wanting. And finally, please don't send critical letters while asking that they not be published. We prefer open debate so all can judge for themselves. Moreover, insufficient time is available for protracted off-camera discussions with single individuals.

Letter #206 from DC of Angwin, California (Part a)

Dear Sir. You have me confused on a point. I just received the full set of back issues of your "Biblical Errancy" which I had ordered and paid for, and have started to read through. Very interesting. Very enlightening. But, like I say, you have me confused on one point: about whether or not God is a liar (forgive, please, the extreme blasphemy of such a concept) or not. In your Issue #3, for March 1983, page 6, lines 20 and 21, you say God cannot lie, by definition. But on page 5 of that same issue, in the 13th to 15th lines of your response to letter #3, you tell us how God has:--(1) Deceived (Jer. 4:10, 15:18, 20:7, 2 Chron. 18:22, Ezek. 14:9; 2 Thess. 2:9-12);--(2) Told people to lie (Ex. 3:18, 1 Sam. 16:2);--(3) Lied, Himself (Gen. 2:17, 2 Sam. 7:13); and--(4) Rewarded liars (Ex. 1:15-20). Could you please straighten me out on this? Thank you.

Editor's Response to Letter #206 (Part a)

Dear DC. The problem is not particularly profound. Biblicists claim to have God's word in written form. If so, then how could the Book possibly portray God in the manner contained therein? How could a perfectly moral being have committed all the deeds attributed to him. Either it's not his book and he's been libeled or his character leaves a lot to be desired. And that's putting it mildly. All of this, of course, rests on the assumption that he exists to begin with.

Letter #206 Concludes (Part b)

Also, to what God should I pray now? For the past 4 1/2 decades I have been a baptized member of a Very Fundamentalist Christian denomination; but my recent discoveries have disrupted my faith in it and the Bible, and the literally-interpreted Bible's God.

Editor's Response to Letter #206 (Part b)

I'd recommend you cease praying and start relying on your own efforts, DC. Work, sacrifice, planning, and sticktuitiveness are the main passports to happiness and good fortune. Prayer, on the other hand, is often little more than a lazy man's way of seeking something for nothing.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #207 from Mark Potts, 8510-A East 66th Pl. So., Tulsa, Oklahoma 74133

Dear Dennis. In letter #175 OR states that "When the human being reaches the age of accountability God's unmerited favor and mercy is no longer any good." If God's favor and mercy wear out after a few years, how long can his salvation last?

Moreover, OR's apology fails to explain the related problem of what happens to adults who never get to hear about Jesus. And you don't need to point to remote times and places to find such people. One of my aunts lived in Japan for a few years, and told me that many Japanese strenuously avoid learning anything about Christianity. Consequently, in modern Japan adults die every day in complete ignorance of the gospel. What happens to them? Antibiblically yours,....

Letter #208 from RCC of Nagasaki, Japan

Dear Dennis. Enjoying the latest issue, #48, as I do all of them. Letter #177 didn't look quite right. In 1 Cor. 15:5 Jesus is seen of Peter, then of the twelve, after His death. This is as related in Luke 24 etc. Except there weren't twelve. Judas was gone and Matthias hadn't been elected yet to replace him. There were only eleven....

Letter #209 from JW of Raleigh, North Carolina

Dear Dennis....I'm sure you don't need convincing that there is a serious, even desperate need for the type work you're doing. The results of the refusal by "bible-believing" Christians to honestly and critically examine the moral and religious claims and assertions of their faith are cropping up in the headlines every day. And I agree with you that the only way to reach these "believers" is to go on the offensive, to expose their theological assertions as fallacious, irrational, dangerous, and--not to put too fine a point on it--fundamentally immoral.... Your newsletter is excellent, and considering the vast amount of territory there is to cover, I'm glad to see that it deals with several different topics at a time. You might want to consider soliciting contributions from your ex-Christian readers on how and why they came to their senses. In my case, I was unable to reconcile the image of God as a concerned and loving father as proclaimed by Jesus with the capricious horror of the doctrine of predestination and election (Rom. 9:9-24). As far as I'm concerned, all other "problem" passages in the bible pale by comparison. The implications of such a belief are petrifyingly monstrous, with ramifications that most literal-minded fundamentalists haven't even begun to grapple with. It's bad enough to be asked to accept the fact that some people (including children and infants) will be tormented eternally in hell, but to be asked to love and praise a God who condemns the vast majority of mankind to such a fate **EVEN BEFORE THEY'RE BORN** is going too far.... Thanks again for your courage and efforts on behalf of reason and sanity....

Predestination (Part One of a Two-Part Series)--One of the most prominent figures in modern church history, John Calvin, is strongly associated with a belief that is repugnant to most of Christendom, i.e., predestination. Most biblicists believe that God knows what will occur prior to the event but leaves man free to make the choice. In other words, men are free to choose what God already knows will happen. Calvin, on the other hand, stressed biblical pronouncements to the contrary. God doesn't just know ahead of time; he determines it; he fixes it; he plans it; it's his idea. In reality, Calvin viewed free will as myth. In so doing he highlighted one of the most serious, most prominent contradictions in biblical theology--free will versus determinism. His opponents rightly observed that the abolishment of free will destroys moral responsibility. But unfortunately for them literally scores of verses substantiate his position. An exhaustive list in descending order of strength would include the following: (1) "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world,.... Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ himself, according to the good pleasure of his will" (Eph. 1:4-5), (2) "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son,.... Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called...." (Rom. 8:28-30), (3) "And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord; and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed" (Acts 13:48), (4) "But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth" (2 Thess. 2:13), (5) "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his (not our--Ed.) own will" (Eph. 1:11), (6) "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10), (7) "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you" (John 15:16), (8) "For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:9 RSV), (9) "A man's heart deviseth his way: but the Lord directeth his steps" (Prov. 16:9), (10) "He will carry out what he has planned for me, and of many such matters He is mindful" (Job 23:14 Mod. Lang), (11) "Only, let every one lead the life which the Lord has assigned to him, and in which God has called him" (1 Cor. 7:17 RSV), (12) "...your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be" (Psalm 139:16 NIV), (13) "Man's goings are of the Lord; how can a man then understand his own way?" (Prov. 20:24), (14) "And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matt. 24:31), (15) "...whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world,...." (Rev. 17:8), (16) "And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:15), (17) "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him" (John 6:44), (18) "...no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father" (John 6:65), (19) "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39), (20) "Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails" (Prov. 19:21 NIV), (21) "The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord" (Prov. 16:33), (22) "Man's days are determined; you have decreed the number of his months and have set limits he cannot exceed" (Job 14:5 NIV), (23) "From one man God made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live" (Acts 17:26 NIV), (24) "...for that that is determined shall be done" (Dan. 11:36), (25) "Therefore I endure all things for the elects' sakes that they may obtain the salvation which is in Christ...." (2 Tim. 2:10), (26) "And a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, even to them

which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed" (1 Peter 2:8), (27) "For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men,...." (Jude 4), (28) "Blessed is the man whom thou chooseth, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts" (Psalm 65:4), (29) "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ,...chosen and destined by God the Father...." (1 Peter 1:1-2 RSV), (30) "Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began" (2 Tim. 1:9), (31) "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47), (32) "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord...." (Psalm 37:23), (33) "Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'" (Matt. 25:34 RSV), (34) "...but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (John 15:19), (35) "All that dwell upon the earth shall worship him (the Devil--Ed.) whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8), (36) "Jesus said to them, 'You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father'" (Matt. 20:23 NIV), (37) "They (Herod, Pilate, the Gentiles and the people of Israel--Ed.) did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen" (Acts 4:28 NIV), (38) "He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen...." (Acts 10:41 NIV), (39) "Who (Jesus--Ed.) verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you" ((1 Peter 1:20), and (40) "Then the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou comest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations" (Jer. 1:4-5).

Next month's commentary will provide a more extensive list of predestination verses having to do with the elect, the chosen, the called, the given and conclude with some general verses having a decidedly deterministic flavor. Predestination is of critical importance to Christian theology because of its impact on concepts such as heaven, hell, sin, salvation, faith, works, rewards, the Atonement, the Devil, the Decalogue, the Crucifixion, and so forth.

REVIEWS

On page 278 in *False Doctrines Answered* apologist John R. Rice confronted the predestination issue by saying, "It is true the saved are God's elect, 'chosen...in him before the foundation of the world' as Ephesians 1:4 tells us. But it is wrong to make their election a whim of God whereby He saves some, compels them to be saved, and damns some whom He has decided He does not wish to save. (This is known as unconditional election--Ed.). No, election is not 'unconditional.' It is simply that God knows who will trust Him when they hear the Gospel and chooses them to be carried through till they be 'conformed to the image of His Son.' Rom. 8:28-30 tells us so: "...For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called....' God gives the order of things here. First, foreknowledge, then predestination, then calling, then saving,.... To ignore or to change the inspired, divine order is false doctrine." In essence, Rice seeks to shift the focus of predestination by saying it only means the elect will be "conformed to the the image of Jesus" after God realizes who will follow him when they hear the gospel. And since he knows that from the beginning, they are, in effect, predestined. This is typical of the more devious rationalizations theologians create and is fatally flawed in several respects. First, and most important, Rice deceptively misquoted Eph. 1:4 which says, "According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world that we should be holy...." He omitted the first four words which clearly show God chose those to be saved before the foundation of the world. They weren't just chosen "in" him; they were chosen "by" him. The difference is critical. When Rice says, "It is simply that God knows who will trust Him when

they hear the Gospel and chooses (predestinates--Ed.) them to be carried through" ...he is trying to create the impression that God merely knows the future; he doesn't create it, which flies in the face of Eph. 1:4. Secondly, Eph. 1:4-5 shows Rice himself created a false doctrine by altering the so-called "inspired, divine order." Eph. 1:4 says being chosen came first which the next verse (1:5) equates with being predestined. Foreknowledge isn't even mentioned. And thirdly, how could "foreknow" precede "predestinate," whether it be a general predestination of everything by God or the more narrow predestination of believers being "conformed to the image of his Son" preferred by Rice. If God knows it, then it's simultaneously predestined.

On page 395 in *The Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* apologist Gleason Archer highlighted the contradiction involved when he said, "...there is no room for personal merit in the matter of our election. It is all a matter of God's mere good pleasure.... To sum up, then, God chooses from all eternity those who will be saved; and the sole basis of His choice is His mere good pleasure,...." Sounds like a good Calvinist! But, then, he turned around and said, "Yet God never chooses those who do not and will not believe in Christ; only those that do will He bring to Christ for salvation. But what...causes a sinner to open his heart to God's truth...is not really spelled out in Scripture." Yes, it is and Archer stated as much a few sentences earlier. "God chooses from all eternity those who will be saved. So Archer's concluding statement ("all we can be sure of is that God...has not made their choice for them. Each man bears full responsibility for his own choice....") is decidedly at odds with his own summation, Eph. 1:4, and other verses.

On pages 117 and 119 in *Questions Non-Christians Ask* apologist Barry Wood made some enlightening comments in this regard: "How do you leave room for man's free will to accept or reject God's call? We must admit this is a difficult thing to understand. Just read Romans chapters 9 through 11 and see if Paul understood it. He didn't! He was left with a paradox.... I know this is a mind bender but we humans, in our limited knowledge, must wrestle with the profundity of God's ways with us."

A couple of other fundamentalist authors are much more candid than Rice, Archer, and Wood. They frankly admit the problem has no solution and believe resolution will only occur "in eternity." "It is not contradictory therefore, but rather complementary, to hold that man determines his own decisions and actions and yet also to recognize that God in some inscrutable way has foreordained those very things. Although admitting we cannot really understand this paradox, we can accept both aspects of it by faith and then act accordingly, trusting God to make it all clear in eternity" *The Bible Has the Answer* by Morris and Clark, p. 141. "...we cannot, in our present finite understanding, completely resolve the mystery surrounding God's 'determinate counsel and foreknowledge' (Acts 2:23)...." (Ibid. p. 142). Yet, we are told by their book's title that the Bible has the answer. On page 172 in *508 Answers to Bible Questions* M.R. DeHaan, M.D. went even further by saying, "You are, of course, dealing with a difficult subject which I believe we will only fully understand when we reach glory. We are not required to reconcile predestination and free will. We are expected to believe it." How's that for unbiased, demonstrable scholarship! Reminds me of the Trinity miasma. We are being told to believe in a square circle, or what is euphemistically called a mystery, that will only become comprehensible "in eternity."

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #210 from LB of Luck, Wisconsin (Part a)

Dear Dennis. Several years ago I became involved in a debate with two local biblicists over the topic of alcohol. At this time I was just becoming a freethinker and therefore did not attack the bible for its inherent contradictions but tried to refute those passages which supposedly preach

total abstention. Besides the ones you mentioned, a minister wrote to me about Hab. 2:15 ("Woe unto him that giveth his neighbor drink, that putteth thy bottle to him, and maketh him drunken...."), Isa 5:11-12 ("Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, till wine inflame them! And the harp, and the viol, the tabret, and pipe, and wine, are in their feasts: but they regard not the work of the Lord,...."), Isa. 5:14, Isa. 5:22 ("Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink"), Prov. 20:1, Jer. 35:6 ("But they said, We will drink no wine: for Jonadab the son of Rechab our father commanded us saying, Ye shall drink no wine, neither ye, nor your sons for ever"), and Jer. 35:19.

I agree with the BE viewpoint that the Bible can be used to prove anything, but in a discussion with biblicists this usually will not sway them. I believe you should have examined this alcohol topic more closely so it could be of use to people who debate biblicists. If it is possible to refute those verses which oppose alcohol one would have the best line of defense in a debate. The biblicists I encountered had defenses for those verses which proscribe (I think you mean "prescribe"--Ed.) alcohol.

Editor's Response to Letter #210 (Part a)

Dear LB. To begin with, the verses you received from a minister are not as strongly opposed to alcohol as the ones I quoted in Issue #51. Your minister should have read BE as he apparently doesn't know the best verses in his favor. Most of the verses he sent you are either weak or irrelevant: Isa. 5:14 and Jer. 35:19 have nothing to do with alcohol; Prov. 20:1 appeared in Issue #51; Isa. 5:11-12 and Hab. 2:15 were omitted because they appear to oppose drunkenness rather than drinking per se and the latter also appears to oppose giving drink to others rather than drinking yourself, and Jer. 35:6 was omitted because Jonadab is not god and there is little evidence his commands have divine sanction. Isa. 5:22 is the only verse that probably should have been included in Issue #51. Secondly, BE is less concerned with "refuting" than "exposing." Contradictions are more concerned with revealing conflicts between verses than disproving the validity of a particular verse.

Letter #210 Continues (Part b)

Their main argument is that of the distinction made between "wine" and "strong drink." Accordingly "strong drink" was generally a mixture of equal parts of water and wine. The wine used during Passover was supposedly mixed in a ratio of 3 parts water to one part wine, according to the Talmud. One minister supplied me with a tract that went as follows; "The Greek word 'oinos' which in the NT is translated 'wine' was a generic term that referred either to fermented intoxicating wine or plain unfermented and unintoxicating fresh grape juice. So just because it says Jesus turned water into 'oinos' doesn't mean He turned it into intoxicating wine. There is not the slightest indication by which any honest minded man can contend that it was intoxicating wine."

Editor's Response to Letter #210 (Part b)

You have given the standard apologetic rationalization for this problem, LB. Essentially it's little more than an attempt to rewrite the text as expediency dictates by making the Greek word "oinos" mean either fermented or unfermented juice. Of course, as is often true with the Greek/Hebrew escapist defense the tables can be easily turned. If biblicists are going to arbitrarily insist that "oinos" means grape juice whenever they desire, then I'm going to claim all those verses in which the consumption of wine (oinos) is condemned are actually referring to grape juice.

Biblicists focus on Jesus turning water into wine when the problem is much broader. Many OT verses such as Eccle. 9:7, Prov. 31:6, Amos 9:14, and Deut. 14:26 advocate the consumption of wine and "oinos" isn't even involved. In those instances, "wine" comes from the Hebrew word "yayin" which means wine (fermented). According to Webster's Dictionary, wine does not exist until fermentation occurs. On page 1630 of the 2nd College Edition wine is defined as "the fermented juice of grapes used as an alcoholic beverage...anything having an intoxicating or exhilarating effect." Apologists would have us believe Greeks don't know the difference between wine and grape juice.

Letter #210 Concludes (Part c)

They also attack 1 Tim. 5:23 ("Drink no longer water but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake....") vehemently. One claims it to be "an admonition to a specific individual in a specific situation and not to be applied universally." The other compares it to an injection of morphine that a doctor might prescribe in a time of illness, thus not to be taken regularly. So as a whole they refute those claims that the bible endorses alcohol and that leaves one with only the tee-totalist verses. I am a relatively new reader of BE and would appreciate it if you would expand on Issue #51 to make it pertinent to topics that biblicists would argue with, especially the concern over the existence of "new wine" being non-alcoholic (Mark 2:22)....

Editor's Response to Letter #210 (Part c)

The assertion that 1 Tim. 5:23 only applies to a specific person is a weak defense because the sky's the limit when we start down that road. I could just as easily assert that hundreds of other biblical teachings only apply to those being addressed and have no continuing applicability. The Sermon on the Mount, for example, only applied to those whom Jesus addressed at that particular time. As far as the medicinal aspect is concerned, that's not only assumption but still an endorsement of alcoholic consumption. In regard to Mark 2:22, why would new wine be any less alcoholic than old wine? In essence, they certainly haven't "refuted" claims that the Bible endorses imbibing.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #211 from BP of Gainesville, Florida

Dear Mr. McKinsey...I have thoroughly enjoyed reading your publication....Unfortunately I have not been a close student of the Bible so I often miss the subtleties of your more hair-splitting articles. I appreciate the importance of your approach, however, because the learned fundamentalist apologists I have met certainly can quote their Bibles. I have taken more of a Feuerbachian approach to most of the believers I meet--pointing out the manner in which their religious projections reflect the contradictions of an alienated and traumatised world. I like Weston LaBarre's definition of religion as "the ghost dance of a traumatized people" with all the efficacy of a Melanesian cargo cult. I know that you would probably reject the anthropo-psychosocial approach as perhaps being too abstract. You may have done this before, but could you possibly reiterate why?

In addition, I would tremendously enjoy a closer scrutiny on your part to the free will/determinism debate. The Bible looks to me like an open and shut case of predestination. I often ask believers if they think they're willing participants in a rigged scenario....

Editor's Response to Letter #211

Dear BP. You're correct. We don't propound the anthro-psycho-social approach for many reasons. First, it's wholly non-persuasive in most cases. Second, beyond telling people their religious beliefs emerge from alienation and dissatisfaction with their plight in life, what are you going to say? That which follows will be little more than variations on the same theme. Third, such as approach entails degrading and demeaning your listeners by giving them the impression they are sick and in need of mental health treatment. Whether true or not, that's certainly no way to win friends and influence people. Fourth, and very important, it makes no attempt to re-educate individuals with respect to basic beliefs or expose and explain the errors of their ways. Fifth, with all due respect, BP, it's a rather lazy strategy. Instead of getting in and among those who need help, you're doing little more than throwing rocks at a distance. There is no substitute for work, research, and study. If you're going to influence millions of people, there is no way to avoid one overriding fact. You must know the Bible as well as, if not better than, its proponents, and you must know its problems and convey them to its adherents. And lastly, your approach is actually more emotional than rational, although elements of both are present.

Incidentally, if BE engages in "hair-splitting" then so do lawyers in court. The only alternative to detailed presentations and methodical proofs are the glittering generalities with which many publications abound. And they aren't all religious by any means. Many people can't separate opinions from proofs and most periodicals would be dramatically reduced in size if the former were eliminated. More often than not your audience is going to say PROVE IT in no uncertain terms.

In closing, hopefully this month's commentary as well as that which follows will cover the free will/determinism issue to your satisfaction.

Letter #212 from John Wallach, 117 Camden St., Raleigh, North Carolina 27601

Dear Dennis. In regard to Letter #114 (Issue #34), I honestly don't see how you can claim "there is nothing in scripture to justify changing the sabbath from saturday to sunday." Hasn't anyone ever bothered to tell you that Paul's pronouncements are scripture. Never mind that 95% of what Paul has to say flatly contradicts the OT patriarchs, the prophets, and even Jesus himself (Matt. 5:17-19), or that he cavalierly dismisses and invalidates both the objective and subjective experience of God of every Jew from the day of Abraham to the present, when he casually reveals ...that God never expected the law to be kept in the first place! As he sees it, the law was given "that offense might abound" (Rom. 5:20). I'm sure it would come as quite a surprise to Moses that even as God dictated the exhaustively detailed law to him, that he neither expected nor intended for it to be kept, that mankind was really being put on hold until Jesus could arrange to have himself born and crucified. Really, Dennis, if you insist on approaching the scriptures rationally what hope is there for you.

Letter #213 from AH of Sonoma, California

Dear Dennis.... Just wanted to let you know how much I enjoyed #51. I now have 2 "most favorites," #8 and now #51. #51 has the kind of commentary that most anyone can use to challenge fundamentalists. This morning at a coffee shop I asked a woman I know from having seen her reading her Bible in the coffee shop, what the Bible position was on alcohol. She admitted she didn't know. I suggested she read all the verses you listed in #51 against drinking. (I made a book mark and listed the pros on one side and the cons on the other) and I gave it to her with the con side up. I told her I was interested in having all these verses typed out on a single sheet of paper. She said she would be delighted to type it out. I went back to doing my paperwork and she started looking up the verses and writing them down. Well she's real fast and turned the book work over and started on the other side. I wanted to save that for tomorrow, but

no luck. After the 3rd verse on the other side she got the drift, got mad, came over to my table, dropped my book mark, and said, "No thanks," turned around, and left.

Letter #214 from OG of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Dear Dennis. First of all, congratulations on your continued success with the newsletter! The new computer printout looks great; much neater than before. Also, the content is still as tough, sensible and helpful as when you first started.

I have this rather strange habit of getting up early on Sunday mornings to watch the preachers--just to make sure they don't try anything sneaky; you understand. About two weeks ago, Jerry Falwell announced that the Bible is free from error and that if any viewers were confronted by skeptics, they should send in the questions that were raised and the Old-Time Gospel Hour people would answer them (I forgot what the context of all this was). Not wanting to let an opportunity like that slip by, I whipped out my back issues of BE and fired off a letter. I'm still waiting for a reply....

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Issue No. 54

Predestination {Part Two of a Two-Part Series}--In addition to verses in last month's Commentary on predestination several terms clearly strengthen the deterministic aspect of biblical teachings. Each is employed repeatedly and shows that God selects many, if not all, of those to be saved or brought within the realm of God's people. First are the elect, those drawn out by God. If they are selected by him then their salvation is determined more by God's acts than their own deeds and beliefs: "Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded" (Rom. 11:7), "Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of (by--Ed.) God" (1 Thess. 1:4), "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth" (Isa. 42:1), "For Jacob my servant's sake, and Israel mine elect, I have even called thee by thy name...." (Isa. 45:4), "and then shall he send his angels and shall gather his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven" (Mark 13:27), "...mine elect shall inherit it, and my servants shall dwell there" (Isa. 65:9), "...but for the elect's sake, whom he hath chosen, he hath shortened the days" (Mark 13:20), "And shall not God avenge his own elect" (Luke 18:7), "Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect?" (Rom. 8:33), "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved...." (Col. 3:12), "If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened" (Matt. 24:22), "...mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands" (Isa. 65:22), "...if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (Matt. 24:24), "...to reduce, if it were possible, even the elect" (Mark 13:22) and (Rom. 9:11, 11:28-29). Second, are the chosen, who like the elect are singled out for preferential treatment: "So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called but few chosen" (Matt. 20:16, 22:14), "Yet the Lord set his affection on your forefathers and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations, as it is today" (Deut. 10:15 NIV), "Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance" (Psalm 33:12), "For the Lord hath chosen Jacob unto himself, and Israel for his peculiar treasure" (Psalm 135:4), "The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of his mouth" (Acts 22:14), "So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace" (Rom. 11:5), "Yet now hear, O Jacob my servant, and Israel whom I have chosen...Fear not, O Jacob, my servant; and thou, Jesurun, whom I have chosen" (Isa. 44:1-2), "From Paul, the slave of God and the messenger of Jesus Christ. I have been sent to bring faith to those God has chosen...." (Titus 1:1 LB) and (Deut. 7:7). Third, are the called, who may be the chosen: "For ye see your

calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called" (1 Cor. 1:26), "Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called" (1 Cor. 7:20), "Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God" (1 Cor. 7:24), "...it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace" (Gal. 1:15), "That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory" (1 Thess. 2:12), "they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance" (Heb. 9:15), "...knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing" (1 Peter 3:9), "But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus...." (1 Peter 5:10), "...give diligence to make your calling and election sure...." (2 Peter 1:10), "Among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ" (Rom. 1:6), "But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks...." (1 Cor. 1:24) and (Rom. 9:24). And fourth, are the given, those whom God singled out for special consideration by giving them to Jesus for salvation. As is true with the elect, the chosen, and the called, God, in effect, either predestines many to salvation or strongly influences the outcome. Certainly anyone given to Jesus by God is provided a decided advantage. In essence, God is not only playing favorites but materially determining the outcome: "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me: and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37), "this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing...." (John 6:39), "Thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him" (John 17:2), "I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me: for they are thine" (John 17:9), "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou has given me, that they be one as we are....those that thou gavest me I have kept...." (John 17:11-12), "...whom thou hast given me" (John 17:24) and "I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word" (John 17:6 NIV).

Whether they be the elect, the called, the chosen or the given, the hands of predestination are unmistakable. To the extent that God determines the players and their roles, it's out of man's control. And to the extent it's out of his control, man becomes little more than a participant in a play whose scenario has already been written.

And finally, some verses just exude an aura of predestination although with less force than that which has gone before: "...but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven" (Luke 10:20), "This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge...." (Acts 2:23 NIV), "But in fact God has arranged the parts of the body (of Christ--Ed.), every one of them, just as he wanted them to be" (1 Cor. 12:18 NIV), "we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began" (1 Cor. 2:7 NIV), "truly the Son of man goeth, as it was determined" (Luke 22:22), "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth" (Rom. 9:18), and (Heb. 12:22-23, 1 Sam. 12:22, Psalm 86:13, Dan. 5:23).

In summary, then, Scripture clearly shows that predestination is an inseparable part of biblical theology.

Sinless Perfection--Interestingly enough, according to the Bible no biblicalist is a Christian because none abide in Christ. Since none abide in Christ, how anyone can ever be saved becomes a logical question. Why can't people abide in Christ? Because everyone commits anti-social behavior, or what biblicalists refer to as sin, and that excludes them summarily: "Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him" (1 John 3:6), "No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God" (1 John 3:9 NIV), "We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin, the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one does not touch him" (1 John 5:18 NIV). Obviously, then, no one has ever been born

of God since all biblicists continue to sin, regardless. Until someone can demonstrate sinless perfection, abiding in Christ remains illusory.

And to make matters even worse from the biblicist's perspective, James 2:10 NIV says, "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it." Also note Matt. 5:19. Since every believer repeatedly stumbles on one point or another, all believers are equally immoral. In other words, while John alleges that any sin obviates any possibility of one abiding in Christ, James asserts everyone commits the most heinous of acts.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #215 from EMT of Cottonwood, Arizona (Part a)

(Although BE does not normally discuss allegedly divine books other than the Bible, on pages 2 and 3 of Issue #23 we did list some problems within the Book of Mormon. EMT appears to be a Mormon and sent the following reply--Ed.). At long last there is something atheists and evangelical christians can agree on--attack the Book of Mormon. Atheists and agnostics, ignorant of the existence of God, have their obvious reasons. Evangelicals do so because the B of M claims to be an extra-biblical authority. In my opinion they really attack it because it does not teach their doctrine of original sin. In fact the LDS (Latter Day Saints) church teaches that the "Fall" of Adam was necessary. This obviously negates the evangelical position that we are groveling, sin-ridden creatures by nature.... Issue #23 of BE says the Book of Mormon "...is viewed by many as comparable in weight to the Bible...." This is technically not true. Joseph Smith taught that the Bible was the Word of God only as it was translated correctly. He placed no such qualification on the Book of Mormon. He called it the most perfect book ever translated from ancient records. However, that does not mean that certain passages cannot be changed. In fact, anti-Mormons gleefully point out the large number of changes that have been made in it.

Editor's Response to Letter #215 (Part a)

Technically, it is true, EMT. Apparently you missed the point. Nearly all biblicists, not just Joseph Smith, believe the Bible is the word of God only to the extent that it is translated correctly. You'd get very little disagreement on that point. You said the B of M was translated from ancient records so, to be logical and consistent, Joseph Smith must consider the B of M to be God's word only to the extent that it is translated correctly. How does that differ from the typical Christian view of the Bible? The fact that he views it as "the most perfect book ever translated from ancient records" means nothing because that is precisely the view many biblicists have of the King James Version.

Letter #215 Continues (Part b)

Point (a) in BE [According to Alma 7:9-10 Jesus was supposed to have been born in Jerusalem not Bethlehem--"...for behold, the kingdom of heaven is at hand, and the Son of God cometh upon the face of the earth. And behold, he shall be born of Mary, at Jerusalem..., she being a virgin...who shall be overshadowed and conceive by the power of the Holy Ghost"] fails to quote in full the passage in question--Alma 7:9-10. This is a technique often used by anti-Mormons, but I was surprised to see it being used in BE. You should have added the following words which I've underlined: "...he shall be born of Mary, at Jerusalem which is the land of our forefathers, she being a virgin...." Surely Joseph Smith knew as well as any Bible student that Jesus was born in Bethlehem not Jerusalem. If he was just concocting a book that he wanted to foist off as being from God, I'm sure he wouldn't have put in "Jerusalem." The gold plates were referring to a

geographical area not to a city when they said "the land of our forefathers," a land which Bethlehem belonged to.

Editor's Response to Letter #215 (Part b)

The words in question were left out because I didn't feel they were germane to the issue, EMT. Upon closer examination of the B of M, however, I notice that Jerusalem refers to both a land (1 Nephi 7:2, Alma 21:1, 3 Nephi 20:29) and a city (Alma 21:24, 3 Nephi 9:7, 1 Nephi 1:4) in which case your point has some credibility. However, you have only leaped from one problem to another. I have never heard of the "land" of Jerusalem. Can you name one reputable biblical atlas or scholarly work that delineates a "land" of Jerusalem that also encompasses Bethlehem?

Letter #215 Continues (Part c)

Point (b) in BE [According to Mosiah 26:23 God created sin. "For it is I that taketh upon me the sins of the world; for it is I that hath created them...."] says that Mosiah 26:23 says God created sin. You are simply mis-applying the pronoun "them." If you'll read the whole chapter you'll see that "them" refers to "they who were baptized in the waters of Mormon."

Point c ["The List of the 12 disciples in the Book of Mormon in no way resembles that of the Bible"] says Jesus named different apostles when he came to the Americas. Of course he did. How on earth would Peter, James, and John et.al serve their missions in the Old World and the New World at the same time?

Editor's Response to Letter #215 (Part c)

You should have stopped at point (a), EMT. Mosiah 26:23 clearly says God created the sins of the world. The only plural antecedent to which "them" could reasonably refer is "sins." You'll have to go back many verses to find another plural antecedent. Moreover, this verse as well as those going before are already using "him" to refer to the baptized people you mentioned. "Them" is referring to sins, not people. People are already being referred to in the singular. Your exegesis envisions a poorly constructed sentence.

As far as point (c) is concerned, I made no reference to the Americas or Jesus entering same. The list of names is found in 3 Nephi 19:4 and makes no allusion to the New World or a second list of twelve apostles. Where are you getting such notions? There is certainly no biblical list of another twelve. Moreover, if this is a second group of 12 apostles, then there was a second Last Supper because that appears to be occurring in the prior chapter.

Letter #215 Continues (Part d)

Point (d) accusing the Book of Mormon of fostering racism can only be answered by a good deal of rationalization. I do not believe that God curses people by giving them a black skin....I can only hope the Church will change which I believe it is doing. When the scriptures of the Church were revised in 1982 one passage which said the Lamanites would become "white and delightsome" has been changed to read "pure and delightsome." When Joseph Smith translated these offensive passages did he let his 19th Century world view get in the way? I do not know. Please note that the church dropped its barring of black people from full church participation on Sept. 30, 1978....

Editor's Response to Letter #215 (Part d)

"Rationalization" is an appropriate choice of terms for your approach, EMT. In the first place, it's not a matter of what you believe but what the book says, and the B of M clearly promotes racism with such statements as: "And the skins of the Lamanites were dark, according to the mark which was set upon their fathers, which was a curse upon them because of their transgression and their rebellion...." (Alma 3:6). If you don't feel the LDS church is promoting racism, then why did you say, "I can only hope the church will change"? Although your church is to be commended for altering its policy, the fact remains that it's doing so despite the B of M not because of it. Your leaders are engaging in the same kind of dishonest revisionism with reference to the B of M that biblicists employ with respect to the Bible. When a problem becomes irreconcilable they simply rewrite the script. If your leaders no longer bar black people from full participation, then they left the book as far as that topic is concerned.

Letter #215 Concludes (Part e)

I disagree with your point (f) that the Book of Mormon is anti-Semitic. The passages you cite refer only to those Jews who were evil. As far as Jews as a whole are concerned, the Mormon Church recognizes them as a special people of God....I thank you for listening. I enjoy BE and I'd like to subscribe.

Editor's Response to Letter #215 (Part e)

Second Nephi 10:3 shows you have erred, EMT: "Wherefore, as I said unto you, it must needs be expedient that Christ...should come among the Jews, among those who are the more wicked part of the world; and they shall crucify him...and there is none other nation on earth that would crucify their God." The word "nation" as well as the contrast created between Jews and the rest of the world show the entire Jewish community is included. There is nothing in this verse or others quoted in the 23rd issue that would lead one to believe only evil Jews were intended. Incidentally, we're glad you chose to subscribe.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #216 from RB of Sugar Grove, Pennsylvania

Dennis McKinsey: I want to thank Jim Lippard (Letter #201, BE #51) for pointing out that Exodus 9:6 (in the TEV, ML, NEB, NASB, and the NIV--Ed.) has all the Egyptian livestock, including horses killed off in a plague; yet soon after, in Ex. 14, Egyptian chariots and horsemen are in action. An honest look at this case spells doom for any inerrantist reading of it. However, watch for a superficial biblicist "trap." The fundie will often just switch translations in order to pick a reading more favorable to his position; this is the fallacy of employing the "Skip to the Most Convenient Version Evasion Maneuver." In this case he may cite the KJV, where Ex. 9:3 lists cattle, horses, asses, etc. separately in the threat of destruction, but only with "all the cattle" is the actual killing done in Ex. 9:6. Thus horses are not explicitly killed in the KJV; the RSV agrees. It is useful to have some familiarity with many versions. First ask the biblicist which is his Bible of choice; then zero in on the inevitably numerous contradictions that his version features most strongly....

Besides the horse contradiction there is a second one in this Exodus story and even the King James and the Revised Standard are not off the hook on this one. Ex. 12:29 clearly states in both versions that in the final plague all the first born of the Egyptians' "cattle" were killed--when several plagues prior to this we were told that "all the cattle" (9:6) of the Egyptians had already been wiped out....

Letter #217 from PK of Fergus Falls, Minnesota

Dear Mr. McKinsey. I read your excellent speech in FREETHOUGHT TODAY. I agree that freethinkers must get out there and argue. If we don't use our freedom of speech, we will lose it....If I think I might be cut off right away in a conversation, I use one of these one-liners for the first statement I make: "Do you consider the premeditated mass murder of humanity in the biblical flood to be a good moral example" and/or "Do you consider the infinite torture of human beings by the biblical Jesus to be a good moral example?" The infinite torture of even one human being would be an infinite crime against humanity. They must think of these as good moral examples or else they are not Christians. They sometimes answer that we are judging by "mere" human criteria, not "god's" criteria. But if such acts do not even meet "mere" human criteria for morality, how can they meet a pretended "higher" criteria? "Lower" criteria must be met before one moves to "higher" criteria. Infinite torture is the worst possible moral example. "Thou shalt not kill" sounds hollow when uttered by a premeditated mass murderer of humanity. Actions speak louder than words. Is it any wonder that the mental hospitals and prisons are full of good religious inmates? Keep fighting. I think we have more input than we realize.

Letter #218 from BG of Morrow, Ohio

(On Tuesday, April 14, 1987, the editor of BE appeared for 3 1/2 hours on WLW radio in Cincinnati, Ohio--Ed.). I agree with you completely on the facts you presented on the Mike McConnell show today. I also lecture on Bible Errancy although I am a firm believer in God and the historical Jesus. It's a shame that the average Christian is not exposed to the facts you detailed....The greatest biblical scholars today are the ones backing you up. Perhaps it would help your cause to reference some of them during your talks and in your newsletter so that people don't get the opinion that you have some ax to grind. The Anchor Bible covers many of your points and its authors are Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish scholars with impeccable credentials....Bible criticism is over 100 years old and was really meaningfully started by Julius Wellhausen in the 19th Century when he showed that Genesis was a compilation of two versions of some Sumerian myths with additions by 3 other sources.... Many of the contradictions and discrepancies in the Bible are not mistakes in translations but willful acts by various men to inflict their views on the unsuspecting masses.... It was truly sad to hear the rambling nonsensical comments some of the callers made in their pitiful attempts to rebut your facts. If they had read the Sumerian and other stories the Bible writers used to base their Adam and Eve, Noah and the Flood, Tower of Babel, etc. stories on, they would have rejected the latter out of hand....

Editor's Response to Letter #218

Your comments are generally valid and most considerate BG except for your belief that meaningful biblical criticism began with Wellhausen in the last century. Actually it's been around from the beginning but unfortunately critics and critical writings have all too often met a common fate. Openmindedness and objectivity have never been a hallmark of biblically-dominated societies.

Letter #219 from CHF of Minneapolis, Minnesota

Dennis. I saw and heard you speak at the FFRF Convention last October. What you said and what you are doing has given me ideas....I am a former minister. I came from a religiously liberal community and attended a liberal seminary which used higher criticism in the study of biblical literature. The latter was looked upon as a record of the developing, changing, and evolving thought of peoples over the centuries. As it has grown and changed in the past, so could it be expected to continue to grow and change. In this atmosphere, religious faith is not anchored to

the ignorance and superstition of the past, nor is it bothered by the contradictions, inconsistencies, and unpalatables in biblical literature. Persons of this persuasion feel and argue that because medicine began with witchdoctors, medicine is not therefore discredited, and neither should all religion be so treated....One of the things clergy with a liberal religious schooling learn is that the conservative schools do not include the literature of higher critical scholars or expose their students to their arguments. Students are given a proof-text theology. I feel it will take more than BE to erode the religious beliefs held by those of liberal convictions. And I am not going to say that breaking in on the conservatives will be easy. But because of the desire to be honest which I found in those conservatives with whom I associated, I feel that BE might very likely get to them. I know that there are hard-heads...out there among the fundamentalists who can never be reached, but I am willing to risk losing on them in a try for BE exposure for those who can be reached.

What I have done is to go through the Yellow Pages of the telephone directory's church section and make a list of the ministers whose names accompany the church listing, selecting particularly churches known to be conservative or fundamentalist. For each of these I want to place a six month subscription.... I prefer that my name be kept anonymous and not exposed to those to whom BE is mailed. It is my thought that if other people around the country would subscribe thusly many people would quickly begin to get exposed. If this tactic gained momentum, significant things might start to happen....These are small investments in an enormous cause.

Editor's Response to Letter #219

Your assistance is most appreciated and your efforts are to be applauded, CHF. I only wish more people would follow your strategy. However, the liberal position you project with respect to the Bible's validity also has some major drawbacks which will be addressed in BE. Although we focus primarily on the inerrantist position, any philosophy viewing the Bible as "God's Word," the product of supernatural forces, the result of divine influence, or inerrant is subject to scrutiny. Fundamentalists and BE agree on one point. How do you know what's true if you begin to admit certain parts are false. Where do you draw the line? Where do you stop? In effect, you'll end up with as many bibles as you have readers and everyone will judge for himself what he chooses to follow and believe. We intend to expand on this subject later.

July 1987

Issue No. 55

Paul--The Deceptive Disciple {Part One of a Six-Part Series with a Mid-point Digression}--Issue 8's Commentary (See also: Letter #22 in Issues 10 and 11) focused on some inaccurate comments by Paul and concluded with an assurance that "more will be said later about his shortcomings." Fulfilling that commitment is of crucial importance to a thorough critique of Christianity in general and the Bible in particular since no figure in history, with the possible exception of Jesus, contributed more to the formulation of biblical theology. Any critique of the Bible would be remiss without an exhaustive listing of his failings which, generally speaking, can be grouped under five broad headings: (a) statements in which Paul not only contradicts other parts of Scripture but himself as well, (b) misquotations of biblical verses, (c) accurate quotations corrupted by misinterpretations, (d) inaccurate, misleading or ill-conceived comments, and (e) quotations of non-existent verses (non-quotes). [Note: For purposes of discussion we are willing to grant the common apologetic belief that Paul wrote the entire NT except for the Gospels, Acts, and the 8 books following Hebrews]. Category (a) comprises the largest number of examples: (1) "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb.

9:27) versus "...we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed" (1 Cor. 15:51), "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death, and was not found, because God had translated him...." (Heb. 11:5), "And Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him" (Gen. 5:24), "...behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went by a whirlwind into heaven" (2 Kings 2:11), and "...the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:16-17). We are told all men must die but given examples of people who didn't. (2) "...how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures...." (1 Cor. 15:3) and "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22) versus "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin" (Deut. 24:16). (3) "...and to God the Judge of all...." (Heb. 12:23) versus "Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world?" (1 Cor. 6:2). (4) "Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath" (Eph. 4:26) versus "Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry; for anger resteth in the bosom of fools" (Eccle. 7:9), "Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go" (Prov. 22:24) and "He that is slow to anger is better than the almighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city" (Prov. 16:32). (5) "...who (God--Ed.) alone has immortality...whom no man has ever seen or can see" (1 Tim. 6:16) versus "And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel; for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved" (Gen. 32:30), "And the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend" (Ex. 33:11), "...I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up...." (Isa. 6:1), "...for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (Isa. 6:5), and (Amos 7:7-8). (6) "For there is no respect of persons with God" (Rom. 2:11), "...God accepteth no man's person...." (Gal. 2:6), "...knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him" (Eph. 6:9), and (1 Peter 1:17) versus "...for the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Rom. 1:16) and "as it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated" (Rom. 9:13), "Thou shalt be blessed above all people...." (Deut. 7:14), "Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace" (Rom. 11:5), "For thy people Israel didst thou make thine own people for ever...." (1 Chron. 17:22), "...the Lord hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth" (Deut. 14:2), and (Psalm 138:6, Rom. 2:11, 11:7, Gen. 13:14-15). If God does not play favorites, why are some given preference? (7) "...Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife" (1 Cor. 7:27) and "For I would that all men were even as I myself (single--Ed.)...I say therefore to the unmarried and widows. It is good for them if they abide even as I" (1 Cor. 7:7-8) versus "Then the Lord said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him'" (Gen. 2:18 RSV). (8) "Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run that ye may obtain" (1 Cor. 9:24) versus "So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy" (Rom. 9:16). (9) "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12), "Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation...For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners" (Rom. 5:18-19), "Therefore as by one man's offence death reigned by one;...." (Rom. 5:17), and (Rom. 5:15, 1 Cor. 15:21-22) versus "The soul that sinneth it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son...." (Ezek. 18:20) "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin" (Deut. 24:16), and (Deut. 32:4). (10) "...Thou shalt not covet...." (Rom. 13:9), "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house,...nor anything that is thy neighbor's" (Ex. 20:17) and (Rom. 7:7) versus "But covet earnestly the best gifts...." (1 Cor. 12:31) and "Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy,..." (1 Cor. 14:39). (11) "You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men" (1 Cor. 7:23 RSV) versus "Slaves, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing the Lord" (Col. 3:22

RSV). (12) "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:2) versus "For each man will have to bear his own load" (Gal. 6:5). (13) "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness...." (Gal. 5:22) versus "And the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he judged Israel, and went out to war...." (Judges 3:10), "And the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and he went down to Ashkelon, and slew thirty men of them, and took their spoil...." (Judges 14:19), "...and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him,...and he found a new jawbone of an ass,...and slew a thousand men therewith" (Judges 15:14-15), and "the Spirit of God came upon Saul...and his anger was kindled greatly" (1 Sam. 11:6). (14) "Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge" (Heb. 13:4) versus "And the Lord said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms...." (Hosea 1:2) and "Then said the Lord unto me, Go yet, love a woman beloved of her friend, yet an adulteress" (Hosea 3:1). (15) "Thou, Lord, didst found the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of thy hands; they (the earth and the heavens--Ed.) will perish, but thou remainest...." (Heb. 1:10-11 RSV) and (Psalms 102:25-26) versus "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth forever" (Eccle. 1:4). (16) "By faith Moses left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king...." (Heb. 11:27) versus "And he (a Hebrew--Ed.) said, Who made thee (Moses--Ed.) a prince and a judge over us? intendest thou to kill me, as thou killest the Egyptian? And Moses feared and said, Surely this thing is known. Now when Pharaoh heard this thing, he sought to slay Moses. But Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh and dwelt in the land of Midian...." (Ex. 2:14-15). (17) "Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption" (1 Cor. 15:50) versus "...Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven" (2 Kings 2:11), "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death...." (Heb. 11:5), and "Enoch walked with God; and he was not; for God took him" (Gen. 5:24). (18) "That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such...." (1 Thess. 4:6) versus "...and they shall spoil those that spoiled them, and rob those that robbed them, saith the Lord God" (Ezek. 39:10) and "...ye shall spoil the Egyptians" (Ex. 3:22). Paul said don't defraud your neighbor while God ordered "robbing" and "spoiling." (19) "For it is not the man who commends himself that is accepted, but the man whom the Lord commends" (2 Cor. 10:18 RSV) versus "...for I ought to have been commended of you; for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles...." (2 Cor. 12:11), "For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles. But though I be rude in speech, yet not in knowledge...." (2 Cor. 11:5-6), "Seeing that many glory after the flesh, I will glory also" (2 Cor. 11:18) and (2 Cor. 11:30). How could Paul be accepted with such braggadocio? (20) "Who (God--Ed.) only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto...." (1 Tim. 6:16) versus "Then spake Solomon, The Lord said that he would dwell in the thick darkness" (1 Kings 8:12), "Clouds and darkness are around about him (God--Ed.)...." (Psalm 97:2), and "He made darkness his secret place; his pavilion round about him were dark waters...." (Psalm 18:11). (21) "Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not" (Rom. 12:14) and "See that none render evil for evil unto any man...." (1 Thess. 5:15) versus "Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: the Lord reward him according to his works" (2 Tim. 4:14). Paul preached forgiveness but sought the opposite for his offenders. (22) "For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God" (1 Cor. 15:9 RSV) versus "I think that I am not in the least inferior to these superlative apostles" (2 Cor. 11:5 RSV). (23) "Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities" (1 Tim. 5:23) and "Likewise must the deacons be grave, not doubletongued, not given to much wine...." (1 Tim. 3:8) versus "It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine...." (Rom. 14:21), "A bishop then must be...not given to wine,...." (1 Tim. 3:2-3), "For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God...not given to wine...." (Titus 1:7), "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging; and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise" (Prov. 20:1), "Whoredom and wine and new wine take away the heart" (Hosea 4:11) and (Prov. 23:31-32, Num. 6:1-4, Titus 2:3).

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #220 from BC of Cincinnati, Ohio

Dear Dennis. I was reading your Sample Issue and you do raise a lot of points of Bible Errancy. Yet you haven't proven the Bible wrong or that there is no God of creation. As you should know in order to have a Creation we have to have a creator. And this world isn't here by an explosion. God said His thoughts aren't our thoughts; His ways aren't our ways. And if we did know as much as he does, we would have no need of God's salvation.

The same goes for a small child. He doesn't know as much as the father knows. God made man to grow in truth and in knowledge, but only if we trust, believing in faith in Him. To give you an example: If there is a real God and his word is truth for Salvation to all to have eternal life and if there is a Judgment for all, who is really in trouble at the resurrection. The one who believed in works and faith or the one who didn't believe at all?? And if there is a God, He said, whoever isn't written in the Lamb's Book of Life is Condemned and have their part in the Lake of fire. Mr. McKinsey, you raise a lot of interesting points as I said before but don't you think God has a reason for everything man can't understand and know? Are we to challenge God? Judge God? May I ask if you believe in God and Jesus Christ our Saviour. I'm enclosing \$1 for the back issue on God's Nature.

Editor's Response to Letter #220

Dear BC. You should have read some prior issues of BE before sending your letter as many of your points have already been addressed. Your errors are numerous and indicative of one who has been thoroughly imbued with Christian ideology. First, after reading our sample issue you concluded that "we haven't proven the Bible wrong." I can only surmise that that's all you've read since the evidence presented by this publication throughout the years is decidedly to the contrary. Indeed, if one need only present a single biblical contradiction or error to prove the Bible wrong or errant, then that task was fulfilled years ago. Second, BE has never proved "there is no God of creation" because we have never attempted, nor are we obligated, to do so. You are required to prove he does exist; we are under no requirement to prove he doesn't. After all, you are the one bringing him up. A basic principle of science and logic says the burden of proof lies on he who alleges. Otherwise, I would have to disprove every dubious theory or belief known to man, no matter how extreme. Third, why do you assume creation or matter had to have a creator? Why couldn't it have existed from all eternity? Fourth, why do you assume your creator does not need a creator? Fifth, I never stated or implied that this world emerged from an explosion and, unless you are knowledgeable in astrophysics, I'd suggest you not be so confident in an area few people comprehend. Sixth, you asserted that "God said His thoughts aren't our thoughts...." when, in reality, all you have done is quote from a book evidence shows to be so permeated with problems and difficulties it couldn't possibly have emanated from a perfect being. Your comment that "God said...." discounts the entire history of this publication. If the Bible was God's word there would be no contradictions, errors, and fallacies contained therein. Seventh, your deprecation of man's knowledge and assertion that we must "trust" and "believe in faith" in God is nothing more than a subtle indoctrination to the effect that we must trust and believe in the Bible, since that is allegedly our conduit to him. Eighth, you resurrected the ghost of Pascal's Wager which was laid to rest on the 3rd page of the 22nd issue. You should read that analysis as it answers those who contend we should believe the Bible just to be on the safe side. Ninth, this publication takes no position with respect to whether or not a god exists so your questions in regard to judging and challenging miss the mark. However, we clearly take a stance with respect to the Bible's validity and its allegedly divine authorship. And lastly, for Jesus to be our saviour is out of the question when it comes from a book that is so much in question.

Letter #221 from EMT of Cottonwood, Arizona

Dennis... Looking at your question, "How could the earth be replenished (Gen. 1:28) unless it had been plished before Adam and Eve?" Leaving the Mormon claim aside that this planet was constructed of the ancient materials of other planets, let's look at the word "replenish." It is from the Hebrew word "male" or "mala'," and means: accomplish, confirm, consecrate, fill, furnish, gather together, replenish, satisfy, etc. The NIV uses the Hebrew to read "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth..." This is something that I think even you will agree that the human race has accomplished....

Editor's Response to Letter #221

Your observation is worthy of note because it highlights a major concern associated with biblical criticism, EMT, i.e., what version of the Bible should be employed. Regardless of the one used someone will prefer another. We have always concentrated on the King James because of its acceptance by the largest number of people, but, unfortunately, problems such as the one you've offered are unavoidable as long as disagreement exists on the source to be used. I'm willing to admit that "most versions do not say replenish" but I have no way of knowing what version you prefer. Of my 13 versions only three (the KJV, the ASV, and the Jewish Masoretic Text) say "replenish." The others duplicate your NIV citation. The fact that they are later creations tends to corroborate my earlier contention that apologists often rewrite the script when problems become irreconcilable. Before you and I could discuss the Bible we would have to agree on the version to be utilized. I'm not as concerned with the version used as making sure you don't leap from one to another as expediency dictates. For you or other biblicists to have 13 or more versions of every verse, any one of which could be chosen as conditions dictate, is a ground rule with which I would never agree.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #222 from Mark Potts, 8510-A East 66th Place South, Tulsa, Oklahoma 74133

Dear Dennis...I have a couple of remarks about your "Genesis Questions" in Issue #52. In Gen. 4:12 God prophesied falsely to Cain when he predicted that Cain would be a fugitive and a vagabond, because according to 4:16-17 he settled down in the land of Nod and built a city.

Also God's warning to Adam and Eve in Gen. 2:17 ("But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die") makes no sense. If Adam and Eve lacked moral knowledge before the Fall, how would they have known it was wrong to disobey God.

Incidentally, here's another curious point: If the Creation was originally perfect in every step and every aspect before the Fall, why did God declare in Gen. 2:18, "It is not good that the man should be alone" before the creation of Eve?

Letter #223 from AH of Sonoma, California

Dear Dennis...There is a guy here in the coffee shop with a gold cross earring and long blond hair reading a Bible and drinking lots of coffee. If he gets up to go to the bathroom, I'll place a copy of BE on his table. All the employees here at the Good Earth enjoy BE, even the Church goers, which confuses me. If they know the Bible isn't perfect and agree it isn't from God, why would they quote from it or use it as a valid source? The cashier quoted Jesus to me one day and I replied, "But Paul disagrees with him, now what?" She just looked confused. The next day I

gave her the copy of BE which had Jesus versus Paul. She said she enjoyed it and wanted to take it to her pastor....

Editor's Response to Letter #223

Dear AH. Letters describing encounters in which readers are seeking to influence, persuade, and inform biblicists have always been of special interest to me because learning the correct message and taking it to the other side go to the heart of this periodical. Too many freethought advocates think they have prevailed by merely keeping biblicists from converting them. That's not victory; that's capitulation, if not defeat. Success occurs when you convert them to your point of view not when you merely prevent them from converting you to theirs. That's why proselytization and a positive program of assertive re-education are needed. You are to be congratulated for using BE in the manner intended, although I'd prefer that you converse with biblicists more rather than just hand them literature to read. Questions will always arise which can only be answered by someone on the spot. No piece of literature can anticipate all the questions, doubts, and objections that will arise. There is no substitute for work, no short-cut to victory. Literature can be of great assistance but rarely does the job for you. The personal touch is crucial. All too often it's primary, not secondary.

Letter #224 from Mark Jacquemin, 4815 E. Thomas Rd. #241, Phoenix, Arizona 85018

When I was a young child I was forced to attend an Episcopalian church every Sunday morning. There are no words to describe how much I hated this church and its empty religion. When I reached the eighth grade I was told that I wouldn't have to go any more so I have never been back since other than to attend my sister's wedding. During the last couple of years of high school I started taking drugs. It is hard to explain but I feel that drugs somehow opened my mind up to religion, which I always hated so much. I also listened to rock music night and day, some of which spoke favorably of a higher power. This undoubtedly influenced me. One night in May 1970 when I was 18, I came home after smoking pot and really felt terrible. This was unusual as I had always had good experiences with drugs prior to that. I started to feel worse and suddenly the thought popped into my mind, "why don't you read the bible, maybe that will help." I was unable to find the family bible but I did find a paraphrase of the book of Romans. Prior to this night I had never read the bible in my life. I deliberately never listened to anything in church and so I was totally unfamiliar with the bible's contents. I read the first five or six chapters of Romans, all about "man's depravity," and really became convinced that my life needed to be changed. The next day I contacted a few of the believers at high school and they proceeded to tell me all about their version of the christian faith. They all went to a "charismatic pentecostal" church, composed of fundamentalists who also believe in speaking in tongues, healing, miracles, etc. So I became "saved," "born again," "justified," "filled with the Holy Ghost," etc. I began to read the bible, pray every day, attend a million church meetings, try to convert the lost etc. As soon as I got "saved" and indoctrinated, I felt that all churches but charismatic churches were false. I believed that the baptists, methodists, catholics, presbyterians, mormons and a million other sects did not follow the bible so I abhorred these institutions. Around 1975 I started to realize that most charismatic churches did not follow the bible either, so I read every book and listened to every tape that I could find about the "new testament church." I reasoned that the true church must be like the church in the book of Acts. I visited many churches that claimed they were like the new testament church. In 1977 I attended a bible school that claimed to have the "new testament order" so I could become a preacher. After bible school a few friends of mine and I started home bible studies but they never got off the ground. Around May 1985 I started reading literature that challenged the idea that the bible taught "eternal hell." These writings claimed the original writings of scripture had been corrupted by the King James Version and most of the modern versions of the Bible. It was claimed that the Hebrew word "olam" and the

Greek word "aionios" did not mean eternal. There are several versions that do not use the word "eternal": Young's Literal Translation, the Concordant Version, Rotherham's Emphatic Bible and the Emphatic Diaglott. So I became open to the idea that perhaps the bible taught the "annihilation of the wicked" (annihilationism--Ed.) or the doctrine of the restoration of all things, that all mankind and even fallen angels and satan would eventually be restored to God (universalism--Ed.). Around January 1986 I formally rejected the idea that the bible taught the doctrine of the "trinity," though I had felt very uncomfortable with that belief for years. In my thinking the trinity doctrine is polytheism, worshipping three gods, and obviously false. Around November 1986 the thought occurred to me that I had never really given the enemies of christianity a fair hearing, I had never even read their books. In a courtroom a judge listens to both sides before making a decision, but most christians, including myself up to that time, only read literature that confirms their beliefs and traditions. They are not open to change, so it is impossible to pursue truth impartially. From November 1986 to the present I have read numerous books by deists, agnostics and atheists, but there are five books that really stand out in my mind as destroying my faith in the bible as the "inerrant word of god." These were the first anti-bible books I read and they demonstrated to my satisfaction that the bible, though it may have some good morals and interesting stories, is basically a pack of lies, particularly its main theme, the pagan doctrine of the "atonement." The first book I read which challenged the scriptures was a small book on the history of Egypt. It pointed out that the uniqueness of christianity is a lie, that scores of pagan deities had a "virgin birth," "died as a ransom for mankind," and "rose from the dead." Many pagan deities were "god-men" and the doctrine of the trinity was very common long before the time of Christ. The second book I read was the Age of Reason by Thomas Paine. I don't see how anyone could read this book and honestly claim that christianity is true. Then I read a book on the "Dead Sea Scrolls" by Charles Potter that really attacked the doctrine of the deity of Christ, and pointed out how the NT is filled with mythology. Then I read "The Mistakes of Moses" by Robert Ingersoll, which pointed out that the so-called "chosen people of God" were really a bunch of savage pagan barbarians....

If anyone reading this still believes in the bible as nonfiction, rather than fictitious mythology, I would like to discuss the claims of the scriptures with him. I rejected the bible after very careful study, not from a desire to sin or displease the true God, if theism is true. I would particularly enjoy having an oral or written debate with anyone who believes in orthodoxy.

August 1987

Issue No. 56

Paul--The Deceptive Disciple (Part Two of a Six-Part Series)--Last month's commentary initiated a discussion of statements in which Paul not only contradicts other parts of Scripture but himself as well and this month's issue will continue that enumeration: (24) "For I know that in me (that is in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing...." (Rom 7:18) versus "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me...." (Gal. 2:20). Paul said no good thing dwells within him yet he has Christ within. (25) "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made...and this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law was 430 years after (Abraham--Ed.)...." (Gal. 3:16-17) versus "now the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, was 430 years" (Ex. 12:40) and "he said unto Abraham, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them 400 years...." (Gen. 15:13). How could the law have been given to Moses 430 years after the promise to Abraham when the Israelites were in Egypt alone 430 years (Ex. 12:40) or at least 400 years (Gen. 15:13)? (26) "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:31) versus "And David said unto God, I am in a great strait; let us fall now into the hand of the Lord; for his mercies are great: and let us not fall into the

hand of man" (2 Sam. 24:14). (27) "But to Israel he (God--Ed.) saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people" (Rom. 10:21) versus "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel...." (Num. 23:21). (28) "And after that (the destruction of 7 nations in Canaan by the Israelites--Ed.) he gave unto them judges about the space of 450 years, until Samuel the prophet" (Acts 13:20) [Note: Paul not only wrote much of the NT but made many statements in the Book of Acts--Ed.] versus "And it came to pass in the 480th year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt in the 4th year of Solomon's reign over Israel...." (1 Kings 6:1). If there were 476 years between the time the Israelites left Egypt until the 1st year of Solomon's reign and Judges ruled for 450 of these years, then Saul and David could have only ruled for an intervening total of 26 years. Yet, 2 Sam. 5:4 says David alone ruled 40 years. In addition, more than 40 years were consumed from the time they left Egypt in the Book of Exodus to the period in which they expelled the 7 tribes from Canaan as related in the Book of Joshua. (29) "For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now" (Rom. 8:22) versus "The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing" (Psalms 145:15-16). How could the whole creation groan in pain when God satisfies the desires of every living thing? (30) "tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them that believe" (1 Cor. 14:22) versus "If therefore the whole church be come together into one place and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad? But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all,...and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you...." (1 Cor. 14:23-25). Paul's logic leaves a lot to be desired. Speaking with tongues is for the unbeliever, but if you speak with tongues the unbeliever is unconvinced. Prophesying is not for the unbeliever, but if you prophesy the unbeliever is convinced. (31) "Who is the image of the invisible God...." (Col. 1:15) and "Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible...." (1 Tim. 1:17) versus "...for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved" (Gen. 32:30), "And the Lord spoke unto Moses face to face...." (Ex. 33:11), "...for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (Isa. 6:5), and (Judges 13:22). How could God be seen if he is invisible? (32) "For not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified" (Rom. 2:13), "Who will render to every man according to his deeds" (Rom. 2:6) and (2 Cor. 5:10) versus "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight...." (Rom. 3:20), "that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident...." (Gal. 3:11) and (Gal. 2:16). (33) "And I (Paul--Ed.) have hope toward God...that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust" (Acts 24:15) versus "In a moment...the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Cor. 15:52). In Acts Paul "hopes" there is a resurrection while in Corinthians he is sure. Which is the real Paul? (34) "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16) and "If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord" (1 Cor. 14:37) versus "That which I speak, I speak it not after the Lord, but as it were foolishly, in the confidence of boasting" (2 Cor. 11:17), "But to the rest speak I, not the Lord...." (1 Cor. 7:12), "Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgment..." (1 Cor. 7:25) and (1 Cor. 7:6). If all scripture emanates from God, how can Paul say on several occasions that he was not speaking for God? (35) "That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie,...." (Heb. 6:18), "In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie...." (Titus 1:2) versus "Now therefore, behold, the Lord hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets...." (1 Kings 22:23, 2 Chron. 18:22), "for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie" (2 Thess. 2:11), "O Lord, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived...." (Jer. 20:7), "if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the Lord have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand upon him...." (Ezek. 14:9), "Then said I, ah Lord

God! surely thou hast greatly deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, Ye shall have peace; whereas the sword reacheth unto the soul" (Jer. 4:10) and (Jer. 15:18, Gen. 2:17, 5:5). (36) "Moreover, Brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; And all were baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea" (1 Cor. 10:1-2) versus "And the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud went from before their face, and stood behind them: And it came between the camp of the Egyptians and the camp of Israel...." (Ex. 14:19-20) and "the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them.... But the children of Israel walked upon dry land in the midst of the sea...." (Ex. 14:28-29). Paul should be more concerned with his own ignorance. The cloud was before and behind them; they were not in it. And none of the "fathers" were baptized; none touched the sea. Actually the Egyptians were the ones "baptized." (37) "...so that no human being might boast in the presence of God" (1 Cor. 1:29 RSV), "Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger and not thine own lips" (Prov. 27:2) and Psalm 94:4) versus "What I am saying I say not with the Lord's authority but as a fool, in this boastful confidence; since many boast of worldly things, I too will boast" (2 Cor. 11:17-18 RSV), "You have made me act like a fool--boasting like this.... There isn't a single thing these other marvelous fellows have that I don't have too...." (2 Cor. 12:11, Living Bible) and "...but I (Paul -- Ed.) laboured more abundantly than they all...." (1 Cor. 15:10). (38) "Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews that were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek" (Acts 16:3 RSV) versus "But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised" (Gal. 2:3). Behaving according to expediency, Paul circumcised his companions as conditions dictated. His intentional deception of the Jews by circumcising Timothy is a case in point. (39) "For our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29) and "In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ...." (2 Thess 1:8) and (Heb. 10:27) versus "Now the God of peace...." (Heb. 13:20) and "The Lord is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy...and his tender mercies are over all his works" (Psalms 145:8-9). (40) "...and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour" (1 Cor. 3:8) and "Who (God--Ed.) will render to every man according to his deeds...." (Rom. 2:6) and (2 Thess. 3:10) versus "And I (God--Ed.) have given you a land for which ye did not labour, and cities which ye built not, and ye dwell in them; of the vineyards and oliveyards which ye planted not do ye eat" (Joshua 24:13). (41) "I take you to record this day, that I (Paul--Ed.) am pure from the blood of all men" (Acts 20:26) versus "And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women" (Acts 22:4) and "...many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them" (Acts 26:10) and "...Is not this he (Paul--Ed.) that destroyed them which called on his name in Jerusalem...." (Acts 9:21) and "Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord...." (Acts 9:1) and "...when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I (Paul--Ed.) also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him" (Acts 22:20) and (Acts 9:13, 26:10-11, 1 Cor. 15:9, Phil. 3:6, Gal. 1:13, 23, 1 Tim. 1:13). (42) "...while to the person who does not work by Law, but whose faith rests on Him who declares the ungodly righteous" (Rom. 4:5 Mod. Lang.) versus "He that saith unto the wicked, Thou art righteous; him shall the people curse, nations shall abhor him" (Prov. 24:24), "He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the Lord" (Prov. 17:15), and (Isa. 5:20-23). Since God declares the ungodly righteous, he must be not only cursed and abhorred by the people but abominable to himself. (43) "For there is no respect of persons with God" (Rom. 2:11), "...knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him" (Eph. 16:9), "...God accepteth no man's person...." (Gal. 2:6) and (Deut. 10:17, 2 Chron. 19:7, 1 Peter 1:17) versus "For thy people Israel didst thou make thine own people for ever; and thou, Lord, becamest their God" (1 Chron. 17:22), "For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God and the Lord hath chosen thee to be a

peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the earth" (Deut. 14:2), "Thou shalt be blessed above all people" (Deut. 7:14) and (Gen. 13:14-15, Rom. 1:16, 2:10, 9:13, 11:5, 7, Psalm 138:6). We are told by Paul that God does not play favorites when clearly he does. And finally (44) "...behold, I (Paul--Ed.) am going to Jerusalem, bound in the Spirit, not knowing what shall befall me there...." (Acts 20:22 RSV) versus "And having sought out the disciples, we stayed there (in Tyre--Ed.) for seven days. Through the Spirit they told Paul not to go on to Jerusalem" (Acts 21:4 RSV). Paul says the Spirit approved of his going to Jerusalem while the same Spirit told others to tell him otherwise.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #225 from Robert Bowman Jr., Associate Editor at the Christian Research Institute, San Juan Capistrano, Calif. (Part a)

Dear Dennis. I read your response to my letter of September 5, 1986, in the February 1987 issue of Biblical Errancy and would like to reply to your six points. (1) You say that "the authorship of every book in the Bible is a matter of dispute among scholars. I can't think of one book whose author is known for certain...." This is a good example of the extreme skepticism and fault-finding inherent in your approach to the Bible. Scholars with no ax to grind will tell you that, at the very least, it is regarded as certain that Paul wrote Romans, I & II Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, I Thessalonians and Philemon. Please supply me with a list of "authorities" who deny or express serious doubts about the Pauline authorship of these letters. I realize that most nonevangelical scholars today doubt the apostolic authorship of Matthew and John, the Isaianic authorship of Isaiah 40-66, and so forth; but your position is extreme and unscholarly. Also I have studied the writings of most of the famous nonevangelical biblical scholars, and they simply do not deal with the arguments presented by Guthrie, whereas Guthrie deals thoroughly with their arguments. Frankly, until you study carefully the arguments of such biblical scholars as Guthrie and F.F. Bruce...you don't know what you are talking about.

Editor's Response to Letter #225 (Part a)

Dear Robert. Apparently you have spent too much time reading a rather narrow range of apologetic literature. Greater consultation with the "higher critics" would probably have dissuaded you from such sweeping generalizations. You should devote more time to the writings of such knowledgeable analysts as Loisy, Sunderland, Renan, Gladden, Briggs, Wellhausen, Trattner, Wheless, Remsberg, Conybeare, and Cheyne. Contrary to common evangelical belief, Bruce and Guthrie do not have a corner on biblical scholarship. The following represent only some of the comments one could use to disprove your belief that little disagreement exists with respect to the authorship of various writings. "Says Prof. Charles A. Briggs; 'It may be regarded as the certain result of the science of the Higher Criticism that Moses did not write the Pentateuch or Job; Ezra did not write the Chronicles, Ezra, or Nehemiah; Jeremiah did not write the Kings or Lamentations; David did not write the Psalter, but only a few of the Psalms; Solomon did not write the Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, and a portion of Proverbs; Isaiah did not write half the book that bears his name. The great mass of the OT was written by authors whose names and connection with their writings are lost in oblivion.' Says Prof. Smith: "A large proportion of the books of the OT are anonymous.' Dr. Washington Gladden writing of the Books of Samuel says:...There is not the slightest reason for believing that the Books of Samuel were written by Samuel any more than that the Odyssey was written by Ulysses.... The fact that Samuel's name is given to the book proves nothing as to its authorship." J.W. Chadwick in his Bible of Today says:...The authors of Samuel, Kings, Chronicles are all unknown to us.... And with the Pentateuch it is just the same. The Yahwist, Elohist, the Deuteronomist...are all unknown to us." {The Bible by Jabez Sunderland, G.P. Putnam Sons, 1897, pages 48-50}

Comparable assertions exist with respect to the NT: "Many moreover, are of the opinion that not one of the Gospels is the work of the apostolic person whose name it bears, and that the apostle John, in particular, had nothing whatever to do with writing the Gospel attributed to him.... It follows that Luke wrote neither the 3rd Gospel nor Acts.... According to tradition Paul wrote 14 Epistles and the veracity of God demands the belief that all are truly his. But the Epistle to the Hebrews is positively not from him; the second to Thessalonians is almost certainly apocryphal; so is the Epistle to the Ephesians; many hold that the Epistles to Timothy and to Titus, in the main contents, cannot be his. And we have already pointed out in another work (The Birth of the Christian Religion) that there is much to be said against the full authenticity of the Epistle to the Romans, to the Corinthians, to the Galatians to the Colossians.... The Second Epistle of Peter is a barefaced forgery. The first Epistle is not more authentic.... The three Epistles attributed to John...are no more the work of the apostle John than is the Gospel itself. Need we add that the Book of Revelation is the work of a certain John who was not John the apostle?...." {The Origin of the NT by Alfred Loisy, MacMillan and Co. 1950, pages 13-15}. Before minimizing the source of these comments you might note what a knowledgeable scholar said about the author, Loisy. "It remains to acknowledge my indebtedness to the three greatest Christian scholars of our age--Alfred Loisy, Professor Harnack and J. Wellhausen." {The Origins of Christianity by F.C. Conybeare, University Books, Evanston and N.Y., 1958, page XXIX.

And before continuing to denigrate "most of the famous nonevangelical biblical scholars," especially those known as the "higher critics," you should seriously consider the following comments by Ernest Trattner: "It is sometimes thought--mostly however in half educated circles--that the men who undermined the old theology and exploded antiquated beliefs were relentless enemies of the church and the synagogue, a sort of mixed and rowdy group of infidels, atheists, anarchists, and libertines. Such has long been the popular and misleading impression which glances at all biblical investigation as a dark and sinister menace.

Nothing could be further from the truth. The founders of the science of Biblical Criticism were not only men of superb courage, with wide awake and unbefuddled power, but they were devotees of a very high type of religion.... These scholars were no ordinary group of thinkers. (Many were professors of religion and clergymen--Ed.). It is true they were often harsh and blunt--they had to be in order to speak their minds against contemporary dislike for reason and investigation. It is often a thankless and ungracious office to tell the world what it least wants to hear." {Unravelling the Book of Books by Ernest Trattner, Scribners and Sons, NY and London, 1931, page 279}

Letter #225 Continues (Part b)

Your criticism of the books of Daniel, Ezekiel, and Revelation is based, I would venture to say, on a complete lack of familiarity with the literary forms of the ancient Near East, and in particular with that form which has been dubbed "apocalyptic." If you were familiar with these literary forms, you would not have made the mistake that Ingersoll, Jefferson and Paine made in thinking the author of the Book of Revelation to be insane. No one in first or second century Judaism would have questioned the sanity of that author. Modern literary and other media art forms (music, films, etc.) employ equally weird symbolism to communicate ideas. While we may not find such art to our taste, it is narrow-minded and simplistic to dismiss all such works of art as the products of insane men. By the way, some have hailed the book of Revelation as "the only masterpiece of pure art in the NT" {See: William Barclay, The Revelation of John, Vol. I (Westminster, 1976), page 2}.

Editor's Response to Letter #225 (Part b)

Most of your comments are without merit and deserving of correction, Robert. First, your statement that I erred "in thinking the author of the Book of Revelation to be insane" like Ingersoll, Jefferson, and Paine is inaccurate. I said "the writing, itself, may bring the author's sanity into question. The books of Daniel, Ezekiel, and especially Revelation, are sufficient within themselves to bring the author's mental stability under scrutiny" and I reaffirm that observation. "I'm reminded of the comments by Ingersoll, Jefferson and Paine" was an addendum. I never flatly said the author was insane. For me to have directly stated as much would have been inappropriate as I have no more awareness of the mental state or motives of ancient authors than do you. In fact, why would you even make such a comment when your own letter on page 3 in the Feb. 1987 issue has the same question and my response. Your letter stated: "My first question had to do with the motivation and sanity of the biblical writers. You answered that because the identity of the writers is in many cases uncertain, their motives and sanity cannot be ascertained with any certainty.... Your answer amounts to 'I don't know and that's fair.'" How often must I address the same query? Second, your statement that "no one in first or second century Judaism would have questioned the sanity of that author" is rather presumptuous, wouldn't you agree. After all, how could you possibly know what was in the mind of, or speak for, every Jew living nearly 2,000 years ago? Third, your comment that my "criticism of the books of Daniel...is based, I would venture to say, on a complete lack of familiarity with the literary forms..." is nearly as tenuous, since you know little about my knowledge of ancient Near East literary forms. Of course, you covered yourself to some extent by saying: "I would venture to say" which concedes an element of guesswork. Fourth, you even admit these writings employ "weird symbolism" to communicate ideas, so don't be so eager to indict those who have doubts about the mental stability of the authors involved. Fifth, although "some may have hailed the book of Revelation as the only masterpiece of pure art in the NT" others clearly disagree. Martin Luther, who holds a position in Christendom immeasurably higher than that of William Barclay, stated in this regard: "About this book of Revelation of John, I leave everyone free to hold his own opinion.... I miss more than one thing in this book and it makes me consider it to be neither apostolic nor prophetic....there is no prophet in the OT, to say nothing of the New, who deals so exclusively with visions and images. For myself, I think it approximates the Fourth Book of Esdras; I can in no way detect that the Holy Spirit produced it....they are supposed to be blessed who keep what is written in this book and yet no one knows what that is, to say nothing of keeping it. This is just the same as if we did not have the book at all. And there are many far better books available for us to keep...My spirit cannot accomodate itself to this book...Christ is neither taught nor known in it....Therefore I stick to the books which present Christ to me, clearly and purely. {Luther's Works, Vol. 35, American Edition, Philadelphia, 1960, pages 398-99}. Luther subsequently stated: "This is the way it has been with this book heretofore. Many have tried their hands at it, but until this very day they have attained no certainty. Some have even brewed into it many stupid things out of their own heads. Because its interpretation is uncertain and its meaning hidden, we have also let it alone until now, especially because some of the ancient fathers held that it was not the work of St. John the Apostle.... For our part, we share this doubt." {Ibid. page 400} TO BE CONCLUDED

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter # 226 from SO of Tallahassee, Florida

Dear Dennis. First of all let me say how much I enjoy and look forward to BE each month. Along with Free Inquiry, BE is the most enjoyable periodical I receive and I receive a lot. As a graduate student at Florida State University I have ample opportunity to come into contact with Christian fundamentalists as a number of their associated organizations have chapters on campus, e.g., Campus Crusade for Christ, Students for Christ, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, etc. On several occasions I've found myself discussing biblical inerrancy with some of their

members. When challenged to provide examples of contradictions, I have sometimes found that I couldn't remember the exact chapter and verse references needed to prove my points. Hence, I decided to print some "business cards" with examples of biblical contradictions. Now, when approached by defenders of inerrancy I can quickly produce a precise, referenced rebuttal to their inerrancy claim. I've found this technique quickly cuts through all the rhetorical generalities about inerrancy and gets to the heart of the matter. I've enclosed one of my cards for you.

Editor's Response to Letter #226

Dear SO. Good thinking. I only wish more people were as innovative and energetic. If only we had hundreds, if not thousands, following your lead! You are correct. It's much better to deal in specifics than the escape hatches known as glittering generalities often preferred by apologists. My only reservation is that you appear to be acting only "when approached by defenders of inerrancy." I'd suggest a less passive and more active role of taking it to them with facts in hand. Don't wait for them to come to you. Incidentally, your opening remarks are only too kind.

Letter #227 from Mark Potts, 8510-A East 66th Pl. So., Tulsa, Oklahoma 74133

Dear Dennis....The biblicist view of morality makes no sense. Consider two separate questions: (1) Does morality matter according to biblicists? (2) Does the Bible provide a set of moral absolutes? The answer to both of these questions is apparently no. First, biblicists constantly judge the behavior of others as falling short of their moral ideal--whatever that is. (As BE has amply demonstrated, we certainly can't use JESUS as a perfect role model.) But this constant judging makes no sense, because people are not "saved" by their moral actions, only by their faith in Jesus. If Hitler had fallen on his knees in his bunker to accept Jesus before he died, he would have been as "saved" as any other Christian.

Secondly, biblicists maintain that the Bible gives us a set of moral principles that we have to follow. But the Law of Moses in the Pentateuch is full of rules which modern biblicists feel perfectly free to ignore. Why? Because Paul tells us time and again that the Old Law is no longer valid. Overnight, it seems the rules defining right and wrong radically changed. If the Law of Moses could be discarded like yesterday's newspaper, in what sense can any moral commandment in the Bible be absolute.

EDITOR'S NOTE I'm scheduled to speak at the Am. Rationalist Conv. in Chicago on 8/29/87.

September 1987

Paul--The Deceptive Disciple (Part Three of a Six-part Series)--This month's commentary will conclude an analysis begun two issues ago in which Paul not only contradicts himself but other parts of Scripture as well. (45) "Now when they {Paul and Timothy--Ed.} had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden by the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia" (Acts 16:6) versus "...but he (Paul--Ed.) himself stayed in Asia for a season" (Acts 19:22), "Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded...." (Acts 19:26), "And this continued by the space of two years; so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 19:10), and (2 Cor. 1:8, Acts 20:4, 18). Paul supposedly had the Holy Spirit; yet, he ignored its commandment not to go into Asia. (46) "Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?" (1 Cor. 11:14) versus "For, lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head...." (Judges 13:5), "All the days of his separation there shall no razor come upon his head: until the days be fulfilled, in which he separateth himself unto the Lord, he shall be holy and shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow" (Num. 6:5), and (1 Sam. 1:11). If long hair is a shame as Paul alleged, then why was it associated with holiness in the OT? (47) "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace...." (1 Cor. 14:33), "Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace...." (2 Thess. 3:16), "Now the God of peace be with you all" (Rom. 15:33) and (Heb. 13:20) versus "The Lord is a man of war...." (Ex. 15:3), "Blessed be the Lord my strength, which teacheth my hands to war, and my fingers to fight" (Psalm 144:1), "For our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29), and (Judges 9:23, 1 Sam. 16:14, 2 Thess. 2:11). (48) "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If any one destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and that temple you are" (1 Cor. 3:16-17 RSV) versus "And there came out a fire from the Lord, and consumed the 250 men" (Num. 16:35), "The Lord killeth, and maketh alive: he bringeth down to the grave, and bringeth up" (1 Sam. 2:6), "Who smote great nations, and slew mighty kings...." (Psalm 135:10), "See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me; I kill, and I make alive" (Deut. 32:39), and (Num. 21:6, 25:17, Joshua 10:40, 1 Sam. 15:18). If God destroys those who destroy God's temples, will he destroy himself? Or is this another example of: Do as I say not as I do. (49) "And every priest stareth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sin" (Heb. 10:11) versus "...and the priest shall burn them upon the altar...and the priest shall make an atonement for his sin that he hath committed, and it shall be forgiven him" (Lev. 4:35), "And one kid of the goats for a sin offering to make an atonement for you" (Num. 29:5), "And Aaron shall bring the bullock of the sin offering, which is for himself, and shall make an atonement for himself, and for his house, and shall kill the bullock of the sin offering which is for himself" (Lev. 17:11), and (Lev. 4:26). Paul said that sacrifices could never take away sins when the OT clearly stated sacrifices could atone for sins. (50) "The merchants among the people shall hiss at thee (Tyre--Ed.); thou shalt be a terror, and never shalt be any more" (Ezek. 27:36), "...and shall set thee (Tyre--Ed.) in the low parts of the earth, in places desolate of old...that thou be not inhabited....thou shalt be no more; though thou be sought for, yet shalt thou never be found again, saith the Lord God" (Ezek. 26:20-21) and Ezek. 26:14) versus "Now when we (Paul and his party--Ed.) had discovered Cyprus, we left it on the left hand, and sailed into Syria and landed at Tyre" (Acts 21:3) and "when we had finished our course from Tyre...." (Acts 21:7). How could Paul have sailed from Tyre in the NT when it was abolished in the OT? (51) "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners...his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper" (Psalm 1:1-3) versus "...some (the judges and prophets--Ed.) were tortured.... Others suffered mocking and scourging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated...." (Heb. 11:35-37 RSV). The judges and prophets Paul speaks of can not say that "whatsoever they did prospered." (52) "Death reigned from Adam to Moses,

even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression" (Rom. 5:14) and "Therefore as by the offense of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation.... For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners...." (Rom. 5:18-19) versus "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers, every man shall be put to death for his own sin" (Deut. 24:16, 2 Chron. 25:4, 2 Kings 14:6, Ezek. 18:20, Jer. 31:30) and (Rom. 2:6, Ezek. 18:4). (53) "The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh (whom Christians say is Jesus--Ed.) come...." (Gen. 49:10) versus "And afterward they desired a king: and God gave unto them Saul...." (Acts 13:21). Paul refuted Gen. 49:10. He noted that a king was established in the person of Saul before the advent of Shiloh. Apparently the sceptre had fallen before Saul appeared. (54) "...we speak not as pleasing men, but God which trieth our hearts" (1 Thess. 2:4), "Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ,...." and (Eph. 6:6), "...for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10) versus "Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved" (1 Cor. 10:33), "Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification" (Rom. 15:2), and "To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak; I am made all things to all men...." (1 Cor. 9:22). (55) "And Pharaoh charged all his people, saying, Every son that is born ye shall cast into the river" (Ex. 1:22) and "the woman conceived, and bare a son: and when she saw him that he was a goodly child, she hid him three months" (Ex. 2:2) versus "By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months by his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment" (Heb. 11:23). Paul's statement must be false. If the woman was not afraid, why did she hide her son, Moses? (56) "Who will render to every man according to his deeds" (Rom. 2:6), "...whose end shall be according to their works" (2 Cor. 11:15), "(For not the hearers of the law are just before God) but the doers of the law shall be justified" (Rom. 2:13), "Every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour" (1 Cor. 3:8) and (Gal. 6:7-8, Eph. 6:8, 2 Cor. 5:10, 1 Cor. 7:19) versus "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law" (Rom. 3:28), "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ...." (Gal. 2:16), "But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith" (Gal. 3:11) and (Heb. 10:38, 11:6, Rom. 11:6, 1:16-17, 3:20, 4:13, 5:1, 2 Cor. 5:7, Gal. 5:6). Paul repeatedly states that one's ultimate reward and salvation are based on faith, while simultaneously contending they are based on works and good deeds. In addition, that which follows shows Paul can't even come to a definite conclusion as to whether or not the Old Law should be heeded. (57) "...for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them" (Gal. 3:10), "...the doers of the law shall be justified" (Rom. 2:13), "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law" (Rom. 3:31), "Know ye not, brethren,...how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth?" (Rom. 7:1), "...so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things that are written in the law and the prophets" (Acts 24:14), "it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations in all your dwellings" (Lev. 23:14, 21, 31, 41) and (Rom. 2:25, 7:12, Gal. 3:12, 19, Acts 28:17,23, 1 Cor. 14:34) versus "But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter" (Rom. 7:6), "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law...." (Gal. 3:13), "...blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us...nailing it to the cross" (Col. 2:14), "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ" (Rom. 7:4), and (Rom. 6:14, 10:4, Gal. 2:16, 19, 21, 3:24-25, 5:2-4, 18, Eph. 2:15, Col. 2:16, Heb. 7:19, 1 Cor. 8:8--Also note: Acts 15:1-2, 28-29, 21:21, 24-25, 13:39, Rom. 2:27-29, 3:20, 4:14-15, 14:3-6, 14, 17-20, 23, 1 Cor. 7:18-19, 10:23-25, 27-29, 32-33, Gal. 4:21-31, 3:11, Phil. 3:7, 9, Col 2:20-23, 1 Tim. 4:4, Heb. 8:8). (58) Several problems accompany Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus: (A) "And the men which journeyed with him (a) stood speechless, (b) hearing a voice, but seeing no man" (Acts 9:7) versus "And when (a) we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me" (Acts 26:14) and "they that were with me

saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they (b) heard not the voice of him that spake to me" (Acts 22:9). (B) "Am I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor. 9:1) and "last of all he was seen of me also" (1 Cor. 15:8) versus "And he (Paul--Ed.) fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him; Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?...And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight" (Acts 9:4, 8-9). Nowhere in Acts 9:4-9 or Acts 22:7-9 and 26:14-15, which discuss the same events, does the narrative say Paul saw Jesus. Indeed, he had his eyes open only briefly and only heard him. (C) "...Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? and the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city and it shall be told thee what thou must do" (Acts 9:6) and "I said, what shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do, and when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came to Damascus" (Acts 22:10-11) versus "...rise and stand upon thy feet; for I (Jesus--Ed.) have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee;...the Gentiles unto whom now I send thee, To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light...." (Acts 26:16-18). Did Paul receive his specific instructions on the road to Damascus or later in the city? (D) Contrary to previously-quoted Acts 9:8, 22:10-11 and 26:19-20, which say Paul went straight to Damascus after his conversion, Gal. 1:15-17 ("But when it pleased God...to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: Neither went I up to Jerusalem...but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus") says he went to Arabia first. (59) "...and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor. 3:17) and "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Jesus Christ" (Gal. 3:28). One need only read Issue #8 to see widespread biblical support for slavery and female subjugation. (60) "...for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible...and the mortal must put on immortality..." (1 Cor. 15:52-53) and (Rom. 2:7 RSV, Rom. 6:23, 1 Cor. 15:16, 21) versus "For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same; as one dies so dies the other...man has no advantage over the beasts.... All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again. Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down to the earth" (Eccle. 3:19-21 RSV, 9:5-6) and (1 Tim. 6:15-16). (61) "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac...offered up his only begotten son...." (Heb. 11:17) versus "For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman" (Gal. 4:22) and "Abram was 86 when Hagar bare Ishmael to Abram" plus "Abram was 100 when his son Isaac was born unto him" (Gen. 16:16 & 21:5). Ishmael was 14 years older than Isaac, so Isaac couldn't have been the only son. (62) "...my (Paul's--Ed.) knowledge in the mystery of Christ which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets...." (Eph. 3:4-5) and "...even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but is made manifest to his saints...." (Col. 1:26) versus "For there is no respect of persons with God" (Rom. 2:11), "...knowing that your Master is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him" (Eph. 6:9) and (Deut. 10:17, 32:4, Col. 3:25). As was shown by #43 in the prior Issue, God clearly plays favorites. (63) "...if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law" (Gal. 3:21) versus "Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the Lord" (Lev. 18:5) and "For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them" (Rom. 10:5). Contrary to Gal. 3, Lev. 18 and Rom. 10 say the law can give life. (64) "For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than the necessary things; That ye abstain from meats offered to idols and from blood...." (Acts 15:28-29) and (Acts 15:20, 21:25) versus "Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience" (1 Cor. 10:25 RSV), "But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not are we the worse" (1 Cor. 8:8), "If one of the unbelievers

invites you to dinner...eat whatever is set before you without raising any question on the ground of conscience" (1 Cor. 10:27) and (Col. 2:16). Paul is contradictory with respect to whether all meats can be eaten. (65) "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Ex. 20:8) versus "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days" (Col. 2:16). (66) "For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all" (Rom. 11:32) and (1 Tim. 2:4) versus "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth" (Rom. 9:18). (67) "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves...for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (Rom. 12:19) versus "...yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge" (2 Cor. 7:11) and (2 Cor. 10:5-6). And lastly, (68) "there is none other God but one" (1 Cor. 8:4) and "But to us there is but one God, the Father...." (1 Cor. 8:6) versus "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...." (Gen. 1:26) and "the Lord God said, Behold the man is become as one of us to know good and evil" (Gen. 3:22). How can God be singular when he refers to himself as "our" and "us"?

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #225 from Robert Bowman Jr. of the Christian Research Institute Continues from Last Month (Part c)

My point was that your newsletter gave the distinct impression that the Bible "is filled with a disproportionately high number of errors." I would still like to know what explanation you would give for concluding that the Bible contains far more errors and self-contradictions than any other merely human book.

Editor's Response to Letter #225 (Part c)

Remember, Robert, the Bible is not a book; it's a compilation of books and writings. The myriad of difficulties contained therein are primarily attributable to the fact that you are dealing with a volume composed over approximately 1,500 years by 40 to 50 different writers, few of whom seem to be very concerned with what the others said.

Another major source of biblical inconsistencies lies in the tremendous amount of repetition from Genesis to Revelation. Deuteronomy repeats much of Exodus; the gospels are repetitious as is much of Proverbs, etc. Understandably, in the absence of correlation, inconsistencies are a foregone conclusion.

Letter #225 Continues (Part d)

I am not assuming the inerrancy of the Bible when I suggest that your methodology in biblical criticism is faulty. Rather, I am merely assuming the humanness of the Bible's authors. If they were ordinary human beings, they would not have contradicted themselves as often as you seem to think they do.

Editor's Response to Letter #225 (Part d)

First, you suggest my "methodology in biblical criticism is faulty" but provide no evidence to that effect. Your assertion rests more on opinion than proof. Secondly, why do you assume there are a limited number of times "ordinary human beings" can contradict themselves. I've never noticed any restrictions of that nature. The number of times people contradict themselves varies dramatically from person to person and group to group. The Bible's authors could easily be within one of the less consistent groups. That's quite understandable when you are dealing with a

volume composed over many centuries by many people. And finally, what you or I feel or "seem to think" is of little consequence. The question is what the facts show.

Letter #225 Continues (Part e)

The reason why you feel "little stress" when looking for errors in the Bible is that your methodology makes it too easy. I challenge you to take any collection of writings--say, the Encyclopedia of Philosophy edited by Edwards, or The Federalist Papers--and try to find enough contradictions to fill a page of your newsletter. I suggest you will find it difficult to do; and if so, it will be either because you adopt a different methodology or the Bible really is a different sort of collection of writings.

Editor's Response to Letter #225 (Part e)

I'd use the same methodology regardless of the book being analyzed, Robert; so that's not really germane. The other writings you mentioned could easily have less inconsistencies which would account for the fact that I couldn't "find enough contradictions to fill a page" of BE. That would have little to do with my methodology. It could be that they simply aren't there. That's why I could very well "find it difficult to do." Why imply my approach is different, flawed, or unfair. Why couldn't it just be that the Bible has a far greater number of problems than most books and in that sense it "really is a different sort of collection of writings."

Letter #225 Concludes (Part f)

I do not believe Jesus ever contradicted Himself. My point was that if He were only human, while He would probably have contradicted Himself occasionally, He would not have done so as often as your newsletters suggest.

Editor's Response to Letter #225 (Part f)

Again, what you or I believe is irrelevant, Robert. The question is: What does the evidence show? Secondly, you are again engaged in a numbers game of assuming that there are limits on the number of times mortals can contradict themselves. Why do you assume that because humans probably contradict themselves occasionally, Jesus and/or the Bible's authors could not have contradicted one another to a much greater degree? You are assuming the very point in dispute, namely, those connected with the Bible are somehow superior to, rather than equal or inferior to, the average human being.

Letter #228 from VM of Del Mar, California (Part a)

Dear Dennis...I really enjoy BE, and have been using some of your arguments in debates with Christians. The results have been interesting! In response to the question "What did Jesus do that had not already been done?" (BE #3), they claimed he not only had the power to forgive sins, but also allowed himself to be worshipped (Matt. 28:17); something which both the Old and New Testaments reserve only for God Himself (e.g., Rev. 22:8-9).

Editor's Response to Letter #228 (Part a)

Dear VM. Did the people with whom you conversed provide evidence of things Jesus did that corroborate his power to forgive sin. Apparently they merely "claimed" as much and "claims" or "assertions" prove nothing. Many people have claimed a wide assortment of powers. Charles Manson made some outlandish assertions as have many clergymen. That certainly doesn't mean

they are valid. Hundreds of people have claimed the messiahship throughout the centuries. "Claiming" is not "doing." I want to know what Jesus did to substantiate his powers, not what he or his followers alleged he could do. The people with whom you conversed haven't given an example of something Jesus did that was not only new and exceptional but directly related to this issue.

As far as being worshipped is concerned, the same standard holds. Anyone can allow themselves to be worshipped, urge others to worship them, or hold themselves up as worthy of worship. That proves nothing. The question is: What have they done that substantiates their elevation to such lofty heights. What they or others say in their behalf is of no import. Nothing is cheaper or more plentiful than words.

Letter #228 Concludes (Part b)

When I asked how Jesus could be the Jewish Messiah descended from David if Joseph was not his physical father, they replied that Joseph had adopted Jesus, and thus was recognized by Jewish and Roman law as his legal son. I wasn't sure how to respond to these rationalizations. Any ideas?...All in all, BE is quite remarkable...I look forward to the day you compile all your data into a single volume. Keep up the good work!

Editor's Response to Letter #228 (Part b)

Your apologetic acquaintance doesn't know the Bible very well, VM. To begin with, there is nothing in the gospels showing Joseph adopted Jesus. Indeed, evidence is to the contrary. The genealogies in Matthew 1 and Luke 3 clearly show Joseph is the physical, the biological father, of Jesus. Secondly, not only do prophecies say the messiah must be a physical descendant of David ("The Lord hath sworn in truth unto David; he will not turn from it; Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne"--Psalm 132:11) and (Psalm 89:3-4, 2 Sam. 7:12-13), but so does Paul ("Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh"--Rom. 1:3) and (2 Tim. 2:8, Acts 13:23). If Jesus was adopted by Joseph, how could he have been a physical descendant of David? And if he wasn't in the physical lineage of David how could he have been the messiah. Thirdly, I recommend you read to your friends the Commentary on the Virgin Birth in the 6th Issue, as it's directly applicable to this question. This entire topic will be discussed more extensively in a future commentary.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #229 from JG of Cincinnati, Ohio

Dear Dennis.... I have all 53 issues of BE. As they come through each month I become more and more impressed. You mentioned in an earlier issue about having materials available for two or more years. Isn't there some way you can consolidate this information into a well indexed reference book preferably aimed toward college classes?...The information you are putting out should be going to millions, not thousands. What this country needs is ONE well-organized, well-written explanation of biblical errors. Assuming this book were magically available, the next step would be promotion. The evangelists are already preparing to work over the Pan Am crowd when it arrives. Imagine even a small number of our group being there with a well-written flier to pass out in volume. It would contain information to catch the minds of the curious and doubters. This flier would then point to the one well-written book for those interested in more info....Please give at least some consideration to this idea....Keep up the good work; it's not just good, it's fabulous.

Editor's Response to Letter #229

Dear JG. Your project is only one of many we have been considering. You are by no means the only person who has suggested we write a comprehensive book encompassing BE. Unfortunately, time and money are limited.

EDITOR'S NOTE: We'd like to thank those who have arranged for me to speak on college campuses and elsewhere. Their assistance is invaluable. We'd also like to thank those who have increased our readership by word of mouth. People telling people about BE and what it has to offer is probably our single greatest source of subscriptions.

October 1987

Issue No.58

On Saturday, August 29, 1987, the editor of BE spoke before the American Rationalist Convention in Chicago, Illinois. We have decided to depart dramatically from our normal format by using the promised mid-point hiatus in the on-going revelation of Paul's inadequacies to give an edited and abridged account of what was said. A few comments that were not included but should have been are bracketed thus { }. The constraints of space usually account for the omissions (...). Because we intended to say a great deal in a limited amount of time, the speech was delivered in a considerably less formal manner than that normally exhibited by BE and words, but not meanings, have occasionally been altered. Oratorical flourishes of grandiloquent rhetoric were deemed less important than abundant and critical information.

SPEECH

Part One of Three Parts--I'd like to thank those who helped arrange my appearance here today, especially Eldon, who was very instrumental....Anyone who puts forth effort to arrange a speaking engagement is to be commended. (At this point some levity regarding several prominent figures and parachutes was attempted--Ed.)....My name is Dennis McKinsey, as some of you are aware...and my publication is entitled BIBLICAL ERRANCY. BE has a heading with a Bible split in half and that fits in very well with what the publication is all about. It's subcaptioned: "The only national periodical focusing on biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists." BE is a six-page, single-spaced, monthly newsletter that will be starting its sixth year in January. I might briefly describe the sections contained therein. It begins with a commentary in which I simply talk about parts of the Bible I feel have many problems. Next, I'll sometimes submit a book review section...in which I will critique apologetic writings.... Then I nearly always have a section entitled DIALOGUE AND DEBATE in which people write to me and state why they think I don't have it together and I promptly proceed to show them why they are mistaken. It's an inseparable part of the newsletter. I'm very dialogue and debate oriented as you will probably notice if you read the publication. Then I have a section called LETTERS TO THE EDITOR in which people are basically writing to me who agree with our perspective. And finally, sometimes a note will appear at the end. For instance, one appeared two issues ago announcing the fact that I was going to be speaking here.

Usually when I speak before audiences I focus on problems and contradictions in the Bible and provide a lot of quotes. But since most of you are probably sympathetic with what I'm doing, what I'd really like to do is concentrate on how we should approach people who support the Book. Consequently, this talk will focus on strategy and tactics. The purpose of BE is to provide the other side because people in the United States are hearing an entirely one-sided presentation of this Book. That's obvious; that's clear. All you need to do is watch TV and hear the radio....

All of the pros and none of the cons dominate. That's also true in churches, Sunday schools, and other {forums}. Even when you talk with people individually, it's {apparent} they have been indoctrinated. People have a right to know; that's their prerogative. If they still want to believe the Book after having heard what I have to say, I have no objection. But they still have a right to hear the other side {and that's not being provided}. This is of great concern to me. You just can't have a nation of 240,000,000 people in which 10's of millions are hearing a totally one-sided presentation of anything as important as the Bible, because many people approach events out of that context. They look at abortion, education, divorce, and politics, virtually any topic you want to name, from a biblical perspective. So it's imperative that we know the Book, that we confront it head-on. I teach a kind of Sunday-School-in-Reverse by telling people all of the things they should have heard in Sunday school but didn't.

WHY BE CONCERNED

Some of you might ask, "Why be concerned?...{If people want to believe that superstitious medieval nonsense, let them. That's their mistake. Answering} this is a separate speech within itself and I'm not going into all the gory details, but clearly some of them need to be highlighted. If biblicists believe what they are told it's going to affect you and me. You may not think so but it will simply because of the number of people involved. They have voting power, if nothing else, which can't be ignored. Ignoring them isn't that easy. A certain mentality {with several prominent features} emanates from those believing in the Bible: (1) They'll contend, for instance, that a better world is coming so why work to improve this one. They won't be involved in the improvement of social conditions or participate in such projects as VISTA and the Job Corps.... Even when they donate money to missionary programs in foreign countries they are not really doing so because they are concerned about the welfare of others. The primary reason is to ingratiate themselves so that others will listen to the message they are bringing. This exposes a subtle, if not insidious, philosophy. (2) People who rely on the Bible are going to depend on prayer and outside forces rather than their own efforts, which will make them easy to manipulate, especially by anybody who comes along and says he is going to lead them to the promised land. (3) They won't oppose wars {with real conviction} and might even welcome them for several reasons. First, death is merely a sleep to most of them although some believe that when you are dead, you're dead and that's it. ...most Christians believe that when you are dead you are sleeping and waiting for the day you arise. Second, since you are going to a better world, why be concerned {about your fate in} this one. Third, since...you can't really be destroyed regardless of what happens on the battlefield, why be concerned with the nuclear threat or be engaged in anti-nuclear activity. And lastly, why be concerned since Armageddon is inevitable {according to the Bible}. (4) They will oppose sexual equality. How any woman can support the Bible is hard to understand. I recently encountered one who argued that she still has equal status with men despite many verses I cited clearly showing the opposite. Paul's position on women is very demeaning. (5) Of extreme importance is the fact that they are going to believe that giving to "God's representatives," i.e. Falwell, Swaggart, etc., is actually giving to God. Buying their way into heaven is the unspoken motive and accounts in large measure for the fact that many clergymen are very well off. (6) Believers are going to feel that anti-social behavior can be exonerated by bequeathing wealth to the church, by repentance, by confession, by accepting Jesus, and by fulfilling rituals such as going to church. For many of them church-going will be viewed as a cleansing of their record on Sunday for all their evil deeds committed during the week. {Then they can return to their old ways the following week.} And that's not meant to be humorous, since a negative influence is unmistakable. People will seriously feel that confession or something of that nature will purify their account. {Such concepts could easily foster anti-social behavior as could the belief that good deeds are irrelevant to salvation.} (7) They will tend to rely upon supposed experts to interpret the Bible for them which will cause them not to view events objectively and independently but through the eyes of those who find them easy to

manipulate. (8) Feeling they have constant, eternal truths, they won't be open to change and new ideas.... Yet, anyone who knows anything about science knows there is nothing so permanent as change. (9) Because they believe in original sin they will view all people as inherently corrupt and associate with others on a basis of hypocrisy. The hypocrisy lies in the fact that while outwardly smiling and exhibiting the {expected} social graces, inwardly, they will look upon people as pieces of dung, to quote Martin Luther....and you can't work with a piece of dung except to change it {to fit your preference}. {Low self-esteem will be on the minds of many}. (10) They are going to be intolerant with all the accompanying war and conflict--the inevitable by-product of anybody with this type of philosophy. As is often discussed in freethought literature, they will feel they have the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. (11) As outlined in Matthew, they will view anti-social behavior as the result of things from within rather than without. If you have a bad person, conditions did not make him that way; it came from within. The problem I have with this is that if it's true then why does most of the criminal activity occur in the poorer sections of cities? What they are really saying is that those who live in the higher crime areas are inherently bad. Something is wrong with them, which I reject. Most anti-social behavior has more to do with the conditions in which people are raised than something innate. (12) Those who believe in the Bible are going to tend to look for a savior, somebody to lead them to the promised land. They are not going to rely upon their own wisdom and guidance. (13) And lastly, they will tend to view themselves as more worthy than others because they are supposedly the {people chosen by God to carry his message}. The Jews are a prime example. All one need do is read the OT to see that. These are only some of the reasons one could give for opposing biblicism.

TACTICS TO USE

Now I'd like to relate some tactics that I would use to oppose those who place reliance upon the Bible. As I said earlier, this speech will be tactically-oriented because you are probably sympathetic to what I am saying. What follows are those strategems that I use in my newsletter, on the radio, and on TV. I am especially fond of radio because it reaches a wide audience composed of many people who don't agree with me. I enjoy talking to people who are diametrically opposed to my position {because differences are clearly delineated}. I want to talk with the largest number possible and radio reaches many more than speaking engagements. I've been told by radio hosts that I'd be speaking to 100,000 or more at a time and I know I'm going to be affecting some. There is no way I couldn't. So what are some of the tactics I'd use. First, and this is very important, ask the right questions. That's absolutely crucial. In fact, I have it underlined. Even the order is important. If you talk with one of these people and your first two or three points aren't effective, he is going to turn you off, especially if they are easily answered. He'll lose interest and respect for you. For many of these people, when I come upon the scene, it's like holding the dike. Remember the Dutchman who stuck his finger in the dike. They feel that if I get through with one, the whole dam will go. So they will fight very hard in the early stages. I imagine Gordon has found that to be true, too, when he was on the radio. Second, focus on absolutes. In other words, concentrate on biblical statements that deal with words like "all," "each," "every," and "none." Absolutist type comments allow no escape by closing the door. All I need do is find exceptions, which isn't hard, and they're doomed. Third, there are some topics I would avoid when debating biblicists. I'm not saying they aren't important, because they are, as I've mentioned in BE. But I'd put them on the backburner for several reasons. Let me list some of them and then state why they are weak: The Babylonian influence on the formation of the Bible, the history of church atrocities and bad popes, pagan influences on early Christianity, the similarity of beliefs between Christianity and other religions..., dating the books of the Bible, determining who wrote what book when, historical disproofs of biblical history, OT references to murder, rape and incest, unless they are being advocated, the theological beliefs of our founding fathers, {the history of the Canon's formation}, and the Creation/Evolution controversy. I'm not

saying avoid these entirely by any means, but I am saying I would {assign them a secondary status} for several reasons: (a) Biblicists won't recognize outside information of this nature and will say, "I don't care what information you have, if it says the Bible is false, it's wrong, and that's that." They will turn you off. You can pile up a mountain of scientific and historical data but they won't recognize it.... (b) If you go into historical matter, all they are going to say is that we have our historians too.... The problem with history is that it really comes down to whom you want to believe because none of us were there. Years ago I taught history in high school and students called me on some points. I'd say, "Somebody said it but I'll admit I wasn't there. You just have to take the historian's word for it." (c) The main reason I would avoid these is that they simply don't carry weight with the public. I'm not talking about college-educated audiences and people of some scholarship; I'm talking about the average citizen on the street whom I try to reach. They won't recognize them as topics of substance. So, I stay almost entirely within the Bible and simply compare one part of the Book with another. You will find as you proceed that the Bible is its own worst enemy. I don't have something outside the Bible telling me the Bible is false; I have the Bible telling me the Bible is false. {And that is much more difficult to minimize or avoid}. When something in Mark is telling me the exact opposite of what's in John, biblicists have a problem. They are much more likely to wrestle with {dilemmas} of this nature. That's the type of problem that will stay with them after they leave the radio. They'll mull that over for awhile. Fourth, and last, start with simple problems; they lose less people. I learned years ago as a teacher that the more simple things are the less people you lose. Focus on problems...that the average person who has had no in-depth training can relate to. Let me give some examples, especially for people who have read the Book. Num. 23:19 says God doesn't repent but Ex. 32:14 clearly says he does. Ex. 33:20 says no man has seen God's face and lived while in Gen. 32:30 a man says, "I have seen God face to face and my life is preserved." Solomon had 40,000 stalls for horses according to 1 Kings 4:26 while 2 Chron. 9:25 says 4,000 stalls. (Incidentally, you'll notice that I'm a chapter-and-verse man; I get right in there among them. I not only don't run from the Book but enjoy discussing it.) Second Sam. 10:18 has two contradictions in one verse. It says David slew the men of 700 chariots and 40,000 horsemen while 1 Chron. 19:18 says it was 7,000 chariots and 40,000 footmen. One of the big problems with the Bible is that it constantly repeats itself, especially the Gospels. Christians would have done well to have gone through and eliminated everything that was repetitious but clearly they didn't have much coordination going on. It's ideal for people such as myself.

What follows is a good example of a problem that stirs up things on-the-air. Rom. 3:23 says, "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." "All" have sinned and come short of the glory. All means all; that's what it says. But Gen. 6:9 says, "Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations" and Job 1:1 and 1:8 say the same about Job. My question is: If these men were perfect, how can all be sinners...? The approach biblicists will usually employ is to play with the word "perfect." They'll contend Gen. 6:9 doesn't say Noah is perfect; it says he is complete. But that's in the newer versions which are trying to escape the problem by changing the wording. You'll find that Christians can't solve many problems so they will simply rewrite the script. A good example that comes immediately to mind is the kill or murder situation in the Ten Commandments. The latter tell people, "Thou shalt not kill," but this creates a problem for soldiers.... How could any army or police force be successful if its members believed "Thou shalt not kill"? So, many modern versions are changing "kill" to "murder" when the former is correct.

Sometimes I'll focus on problems that require little more than reason, logic, and common sense. Christians say, for instance, that you must have Jesus to be saved. That's an absolute rock-bottom requirement. Then what do you do about fetuses that die in the womb and babies that die in infancy; what do you do about people with low IQ's, the mentally ill, or those in the New World before the missionaries arrived.... Where are they going? They must go to hell. Why, because they didn't accept Jesus. But how could they? How, then, could God be just as related in Deut.

32:4?... I'm not talking about only 8 or 10 persons. I'm talking about millions. Imagine what the infant mortality rate is in some countries. How many foetuses die in the womb? Millions and millions.... According to fundamentalists foetuses are human beings; that's their argument. By saying people become human beings at conception rather than birth they have only compounded the injustice and their problem by adding millions of people. A lot of foetuses die in the 9 month interim.

Other problems are: Why are we punished for Adam's sin? That's his problem not ours. He ate of the forbidden fruit, we didn't.... Moreover, why are women punished for what Eve did? That's her problem. Where is the justice? If Adam was created by God, then Adam had to have been perfect. Then how could he have sinned? They say, "He had free will..." But I don't care how much free will he had, if he chose to sin then he wasn't perfect. If someone approaches me and says I'm perfect and five minutes later he sins, what better evidence do you need that he isn't perfect. He disproved his own point. Another problem is that we are punished for Adam's sin and Jesus is punished for ours. Supposedly, Jesus corrected the situation Adam created. Yet, we are told two wrongs don't make a right. We are being punished for Adam; that's wrong. Jesus is being punished for us; that's wrong. Yet, it's all corrected. Clearly two wrongs do make a right according to their theology. Not only that but Jesus supposedly died on the cross...for our sins and that's why many have a crucifix in their child's bedroom. Jesus stepped into our place. The problem I have with this is that no court in the land would accept such an arrangement... Suppose you were sentenced to die and your father voluntarily stepped in and said, "I'll sit in the electric chair for him." I don't know of a judge in the Nation who would agree. It has nothing to do with justice. It's a magnanimous gesture, but it has nothing to do with justice. {Any God who would accede to that just wants blood and doesn't care who dies as long as somebody pays.} When Jesus was on the Cross he said, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me." And he's supposedly our savior. Can you imagine a redeemer saying that. Those aren't the words of a savior but of a man who can think of a hundred places he'd rather be. He's not up there saving you or me; he's trying to save his own skin.

Another key problem is how God can talk to God.... When Jesus was on the Cross he said, "Forgive them Father, they know not what they do." I'll usually ask, To whom was he speaking," and they'll say, "He was talking to God." "But I thought he was God?" And they'll say, "Well, he is God." Then I'll say, "Now wait a minute. God is talking to God. How can God talk to God? That's two Gods." They'll say, "No, there is only one God but three persons." Then I'll say, "How can you have God out there somewhere talking to God here if there is only one God?" Incidentally, I've received calls and correspondence from several Moslems who agree with me. We have some Moslem subscribers and several have said they love BE not only because of its anti-Bible stance but also because most of my points are precisely the ones they have been making for centuries. The point about the Trinity is a good example. They consider the idea of the Trinity to be blasphemous; the whole idea that a man could be God is both heretical and absurd. One need only read Sura 5:72-75 in the Koran to see as much....

Another very important point with Christianity is the Resurrection. Paul said that without the Resurrection our faith is in vain. Christianity rises or falls on its existence. If Jesus didn't rise, there isn't any validity to Christianity. Even Christians will admit that. So all one need do is address the issue. (At this point all the problems associated with the Resurrection that were related in Issue #2 were repeated.)

I think the point that really strikes home is the next one. I have probably gotten more feedback on this one when I'm on-the-air as well as when I give speeches than any other. The Bible is God's word, that's what we always hear; the Bible is God's book. Let me read to you a list of the deeds that God committed somewhere in the Bible and I'd be glad to give chapter and verse {for

purposes of substantiation}. He does all of the following. Please bear with me; it's rather lengthy. (At this point I read the list of God's deeds related in Issue #3 with some additions.) Now can you imagine anyone, any person, saying, "Yes that's my book, that represents me, that's the way I am," especially a supposedly perfect being. I can't think of an individual in history, including Hitler and Ghenghis Khan, with a worse record. In fact, to go even further...I can't think of one good, decent act that God committed in the entire OT such that you'd want to hug him around the neck, kiss him on the cheek, and say, "Good job, well done, I'm proud of you." The Devil clearly comes out of the Bible looking much better than God. You'd almost think the Bible was written by the Devil about God.

After about an hour or so of talking to people, ...they will usually start asking questions like: who am I, where did I come from, why am I doing this, what do I hope to gain and, of course, the ever present, am I saved. They want to get away from the Book, to literally close it up, and begin discussing me. And I'm not being facetious. That's sad because it shows the extent to which they have been indoctrinated. Even the most intelligent believers don't really have much of a case when confronted with the facts.

APOLOGETIC ARGUMENTS

Knowing the apologetic arguments before you debate believers is quite important because I occasionally run into people who are knowledgeable.... You have to know what you are talking about because some can handle themselves better than others. You need to know their arguments before entering discussions. What then are the points they usually use? The most common ones are: (1) You are taking verses out-of-context. If I've heard that once I've probably heard it a hundred times. I'm supposedly reading the Book wrong because I'm taking one verse out and not taking account of those around it. Not true! If you go to Proverbs, for example, there is no context. It's just a series of statements that are often unrelated. Not only that but if you read the verses, that's clearly what they say, verbatim. I'm taking nothing out-of-context. That's an unfair criticism. (2) Another argument is that I'm focusing on copyist errors. They'll say the Book has mistakes, granted, but that's because somebody copied the original manuscripts incorrectly. But how do we know that? We don't have copies of the original manuscripts. Even they will admit there are no copies of the original writings of the Bible. So anything we have, any volume (The KJV, the RSV, the NASB, etc.)...is really a book composed by a group of people who are looking at a collection of documents that purport to be accurate representations of the originals. The problem is that you have thousands of the documents and who knows which ones are correct. It's often decided by vote.... How do they know they are copyist errors?.... (3) Another argument is that I don't know Greek and Hebrew. They claim you have to know these languages.... I've never portrayed myself as a scholar in either; but I don't have to be. One conservative scholar admitted as much when he said you don't need to know Greek and Hebrew because with good commentaries, good lexicons, and so forth you can critique the Bible quite well.... I don't need to know these languages to ask questions like most of those already posed. {Moreover, scholars don't agree on how verses should be translated. I could be the world's greatest Greek/Hebrew scholar and still have other experts disagree with my interpretations. So who is correct? If scholars agreed there wouldn't be so many versions with major differences.} (4) Another one you will hear is the "natural man" argument. I'm the natural man. First Cor. 2:14 says, "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God for they are foolishness to him, neither can he know them for they are spiritually discerned." In other words, you have to get into a particular mind-set, a certain mentality,...and then you will see the Bible is true, which is really a circular position. All they really are saying is that if you accept it as true, you'll see it's true and if you see it's true you'll accept it as true.... (5) Another one that was mentioned earlier today and is often posed to me is Pascal's Wager--You'd better believe it; you never know, it might be true; don't take any chances; be on the safe side. In the first place, if I believed

something for that reason and that reason alone, I'd be rather hypocritical, wouldn't you agree. Secondly, I'd have to believe thousands of religions at the same time just to be "on the safe side." And thirdly, how could I be a Moslem and a Christian simultaneously when one of them says that those who believe the Trinity have committed blasphemy and are condemned. A dichotomy is present. One excludes the other. So you have to take a gamble. All Christians are gambling whether they will admit it or not. And I'm not talking about just within denominations. I'm talking about being a Christian, period.... (6) Another defense I often confront is that I'm taking words too literally. "You have to realize there are symbolic meanings and metaphors"...is the common refrain. {This defense is usually employed when the common sense interpretation of the natural meaning of the words creates an obvious inaccuracy or absurdity}. Although valid in some instances, it's mostly employed for no other reason than to escape from a dilemma. {(7) A final argument I often confront is the assertion that I'm being petty. Of course, this is a matter of opinion. What is petty to one is a serious problem to another}....

(To Be Continued Next Month)

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Part Two of Three Parts--I spend a significant amount of time in Christian bookstores and libraries reading their apologetic works. One should prepare as would a general going into battle.... When you intend to fire something over, you have to know what could come back. {All teams in sports send out scouts to evaluate the opposition; businesses buy and analyze the opponents products}; the United States and the Soviet Union spy on one another constantly. They know they must discover what the other has before an exchange occurs. If you get on-the-air and somebody hits you with an argument you've never heard, you can be thrown off track and become unnerved to some extent. So I like to know their positions ahead of time. That is not to say you aren't going to lose some points. On a couple of occasions I have not fared too well. But I did my research and {was prepared the next time}. You have to study the matter and come back; you don't just quit. You "get your act together."

MY OVERALL STRATEGY

At this point I'd like to address something of great concern to me--the strategy we should follow in the freethought movement in general. First, proselytizing is a must. We have to go to them. Don't expect them to come to us because they are convinced they already have the truth. Why would they come to us? Why would they come to a meeting like this?... You must first show them what is wrong with what they have before they are going to accept or even be open to what we have. And this is certainly not being done. They have been indoctrinated to believe that we are {satanic} agents...so they are not going to come to us. That's one of the problems you have in even trying to talk to these people. You can't build a parallel mountain...and say, "Look at my mountain; isn't it better than your mountain. Why don't you climb my mountain instead of going up yours." You haven't shown them what's wrong with their mountain. And I think in nearly every instance this is what we have been doing. {Freethought groups have only been picking up people who have rejected religion in general and the Bible in particular for their own personal reasons}. New adherents have not come over because they were persuaded or shown the error of their ways by others. {All too often freethought organizations have been little more than psychological support groups providing a service to intellectuals and others of similar persuasion comparable to that rendered former fundamentalists by Fundamentalists Anonymous.} Second, you must start re-educating from the beginning. You must tell them what they should have heard but didn't, i.e., teach a Sunday-School-in-Reverse. Third, you must build bridges, not walls. No

put-downs. Don't do anything that will damage their self-image or self-respect. The idea is to persuade and convert not embark upon an ego trip. To demean, degrade, or embarrass them is not going to create empathy. Fourth, avoid humor. Generally I don't employ jokes, not because I'm not a lover of humor, but because if you do they are going to assume you don't understand because you haven't thought seriously enough about the topic. If you thought about it more deeply, you'd see it's true. So I give the impression I'm very serious, which is nearly always true anyway, and I'm trying as hard as I can to understand what I'm hearing.... Fifth, don't use profanity and dress decently. Do nothing that would confirm the image they have been given of the Bible's opponents. Sixth, return again and again to the topic, give them time to think about your points and return later with more problems. One of the difficulties I have is that members of the freethought movement will say, "I met a Christian, presented many of my best arguments, and, yet, he ignored everything and just walked away." My response is, "You must be kidding? You sought to convert somebody in 30 minutes from beliefs they have held for 30 years. That's not the real world, my friend." You must get that person out of what he was put in the same way he was put in it. How was he put in it? By going to Sunday school and church week after week after week.... You must give him some information, let him think about it; give him some more, let him think about it, etc. That's why I'd like to have some radio and TV programs that appear week after week, rather than going on-the-air once, hitting them with some concepts, and walking off. Seventh, you must ooze people away from the Bible. It's a long slow, gradual process of many revelations. {I dare say that's how all of us arrived at where we are today. None of us changed overnight.} Eighth, and very important, you must get into the Bible. You have to know the Book; that's crucial. A lot of studying is involved. You can't stand at a distance and just throw rocks. You also must assume that there are such things as the Resurrection, Salvation, the Messiah, Judgment Day, etc. for purposes of discussion in order to wean them from such beliefs. You shouldn't say, for instance, that the Resurrection is nonsense and that when you are dead you're dead and that's that, or that salvation is a myth and I don't want to talk about it, because that will lead nowhere. You must show why there are logical problems with each. Ninth, put vague topics on the backburner. And I can't think of one that's vaguer than eschatology.... They love to talk about what happens after you die and where the world is going. There is quite a stir in Christian circles today about eschatology and many books are coming out in that regard.... The subject is very imprecise and I can't think of two books in the Bible that are more nebulous than Daniel and Revelation.... Even Martin Luther rejected the latter...because, as he said, you don't even know what it is saying and Christ and the Holy Spirit aren't in it. So you must know when you are entering an area that can be symbolized or spiritualized as they involve subjects with escape hatches and back doors. Eschatology is one of the best. It has a multitude of fire escapes. And tenth, don't spend time debating atheism. When I go on-the-air the first question I'm usually asked is: Are you an atheist? The problem with this is that if I say yes, what's going to happen? I'm going to spend the rest of the program defending atheism and we are not even going to get into the Bible. Callers will start asking questions like: "How do you explain the design in the world....etc?" They will resurrect all the arguments we have heard many times before.... I won't be exposing their ideas; instead, they are going to be attacking mine. I'm not going to be on the offensive; they will be. I want to be on the offensive because that's where you succeed; you don't prevail on the defensive. So I constantly return to their beliefs, especially since that's what we are there to discuss anyway. Another problem with discussing atheism is that the burden of proof lies on he who alleges. If somebody tells me there is a God, I don't say there is or there isn't. What I do say is, "Prove it; you brought up the subject." If he says, "Prove there isn't one," that would be analogous to somebody telling me people live inside the planet Jupiter...and saying, "If I doubt it's true, prove they don't." What he is really saying is that until I prove they don't live there, they do, in fact, live there. That makes it true. As I said, the burden of proof lies on he who alleges. He brought up the subject so he must prove it. If we work on the theory that something is true unless I can disprove it, then every crackpot, weirdo, hair-brained, crazy idea is valid until I can disprove them. How am I going to prove somebody does not live inside the planet Jupiter? I

can't prove they are imaginary but, then, I'm under no obligation to do so. He, on the other hand, is required to prove they do. That's the essence of science. Assertions must be {demonstrable and} independently verifiable by different people.

I try to focus on pre-tested questions and usually have a certain number I feel really register. When I go on-the-air they are the ones I try to present. After giving my opening arguments on the radio, I usually discuss what interests callers because they usually have topics that "turn them on." You shouldn't talk about what strikes your fancy when it's of little interest to others. You have to develop a sense of what is activating the audience. As in teaching, you wouldn't teach first-graders the way you would seniors. {Both methods and content would vary dramatically.} And it's the same with the Bible. You shouldn't make the same type of approach to every group. You must be able to empathize and know when you are hitting home.... You must also realize that it's more than a debate with fundamentalists because people are on a broad spectrum in this country. They range all the way from fundamentalists to us and they are constantly evolving. Many points you'd make to liberals won't hold weight with conservatives and vice versa. I talk primarily to fundamentalists because I feel that affects everybody on the spectrum. If I show what is wrong with the Bible, everyone is influenced to some degree. They are all going to tend to move to the religious left. But I'd err if I made arguments only to the liberals. The latter won't disagree with you about many topics such as the Creation issue. They say the six days of creation are not referring to {literal} days, but each day represents millions of years. They symbolize the day. And Jonah wasn't swallowed by a whale or fish. {That's mythology}.... Many of them reject almost as many things of this nature as we do. They don't accept many of the miracles.... So you are not going to make a case with them when you oppose miracles. They will support you. The argument I make with them is: "Wait a minute! You don't believe in Noah and the Flood; you don't believe Lot's wife turned into a pillar of salt; you don't believe Jonah was swallowed by a whale; {you don't believe Adam and Eve were real people}? Then you don't believe in Jesus because Jesus said those happened. If you say those did not occur, then you are saying Jesus is a liar and you're no Christian. That's a valid criticism fundamentalists use against the liberals. I would agree with the conservatives on that point.... {Another reason for zeroing-in on the conservatives is that they are our most vocal opponents. Moreover, liberals are so divergent in their views that refutation of some leaves most unscathed.}

Knowing whom to talk to is very important. When I debate a hardened fundamentalist like Falwell or {Swaggart}, I know I'm not going to convert him. We must be realistic. He isn't going to convert me and I'm not going to change him. But while conversing with {biblicists} I have an audience that is reasonably open-minded, that broad spectrum I referred to earlier. By showing what's wrong with his views, I am going to influence listeners. I'm not interested in affecting him; I'm interested in showing what's wrong with what he believes in order to influence others. {My main focus is on the audience}. So I will usually talk to youth, or the hard core when I know other people less firm in their views, such as youngsters, are listening.

Another problem I find with people in the freethought movement is that they are too satisfied with fending people off. Christians will approach them at the door, for example, start a conversation, donate some literature,...and walk away. The freethought person will then think, "Whew, I got out of that one; he didn't change me any; I won that exchange." Oh no you didn't, you lost! You lost because their numbers are far greater than ours and we can only gain by increasing our supporters and reducing theirs. So you have to engage that person and bring him over to your side. That's a victory. Fending him off, merely keeping him from converting you, is not victory but defeat. With the numbers what they are, we are in trouble. I think of an encounter with Christians as I would a court trial. The Bible is the defendant; the apologist is the defense lawyer; I'm the prosecutor; the moderator of the program is the judge and the audience is the jury. That's the way I proceed. Sometimes you'll have trouble on-the-air...if you don't have a

neutral host. You have to watch the media people; some are tricky. Sometimes, for instance, they will want to know my points ahead of time. They will ask me, "What are you going to ask the Christian you are going to engage?" That's a silly question. That's comparable to asking the prosecutor before the trial what he is going to ask the defendant. I'm not going to tell him anything. My immediate reaction is, "I'll tell you what I'm going to ask if you will tell me what he is going to answer. Then he'll be back to square one. He'll have to know what my next question is going to be. I'd rather the host not pick the topics because they might channel the discussion, especially unsympathetic people, to where the Bible is not so vulnerable. I know where I feel it's weakest and that's where I want to go. Unsympathetic hosts will also often interrupt after my first point. That's another tactic that wouldn't be allowed in a court-of-law. A prosecutor is allowed to present his case; he's entitled to an uninterrupted 10 to 15 minute presentation, at least. Then, if people want to call in and...tell me where I'm wrong, I have no objection. But at least let me get my case out. Many don't even allow that. You present one point and they are immediately on top of you.... Reminds me of the TV program "Crossfire".... I tape record all of my appearances and will explain why later. (At this point I played an excerpt from one of my radio appearances to give some idea of what media confrontations entail).... That's where people are and that's what you must confront.

I might mention some other points about my radio appearances. When I go on the air I usually submit several requests to the host. First, I'd like to have a tape of my appearance. Second, I would like to put my name, address, and phone number out over the air. Third, I'd like to tell people that a free sample will be provided to anyone who writes. Fourth, I'd like to pick the opening questions. And lastly, I'd like to know if someone is going to be on as my opponent. Recently I went on a California station and wasn't told I would be debating the founder of the Pensacola Bible Institute until 5 minutes before air time.... I had already read one of his books and would like to have known he was going to be on so I could have talked to him about it.... One of the few Christian programs in the United States that has any intellectual merit is the John Ankerberg TV Show. The program is one-sided in orientation, of course, but Ankerberg does bring on people who present another point of view. He recently had Paul Kurtz,...the editor of Free Inquiry, for example.... When you go on such a program...you should not debate two people simultaneously. Paul was sitting on the stage debating a Christian professor...while he was also confronting Ankerberg who was out in the audience. That's two on one and two on one means you're allocated one-third of the time,...if everyone speaks the same amount. Winning is very difficult when your opponents have 2/3's and you receive 1/3 of anything. {In addition, nearly all of the audience was against Paul.} If I went on I'd be willing to engage anybody, {regardless of whom they chose}, but I would not debate half the {auditorium} simultaneously. Moreover, throughout most of the program Paul was on the defensive answering questions. They didn't debate the Bible {or the biblicists' perspective} as much as they debated humanism and whether or not it was a religion.... Paul was kind of sand-bagged.

WHAT'S NEEDED?

Moving on to the last part of my speech the question becomes, "What's Needed?" {This is of tremendous importance and merits special emphasis}. I think we need a national organization of knowledgeable experts to create literature, {give speeches}, and appear on the media before audiences. It should be a think-tank composed of people who know the book as well as believers with, if possible, a full-time paid staff. A tremendous amount of study and research are going to be required. As was stated in the introductory pamphlet announcing this convention, I'm battling the Bible as a force of one and that's the way I feel.... The sad part is that Christians already have these organizations. The Christian Research Institute, the Research and Education Foundation, and the John Ankerberg Show, to name only a few, are all set up for one basic purpose--to eradicate the opposition, figuratively speaking, and gain converts. Generally they concentrate on

the cults (Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian Scientists) and similar groups because...millions of people are involved. But if our organizations and numbers grew to such an extent that we became a real threat they would shift their focus and a lot more information would come out in opposition to us. A good example is a book that emerged recently entitled, *The New Atheism*, which attacked me, Gordon Stein, Paul Kurtz, MM O'Hair and some other advocates of freethought. Gordon wrote a response {in *The American Rationalist*}. Biblicists pay people to attack the opposition and we need {point men also}. We need institutes, courses, seminars, and relevant literature. This will probably sound immodest, but if you know {the Bible} and every issue of BE, I feel you will be well-prepared to confront the opposition. I feel that BE is the most comprehensive refutation of the Bible in the English-speaking world {and possibly the entire world}. At least that's what I hope to {possess eventually}. Other people have produced similar information but I can't think of anybody, including Ingersoll and Paine, who has created anything remotely approaching the volume of BE. A lot of time and energy is needed; sticktuitiveness is a must. It's going to be a long, protracted struggle with no place for a short attention span or sunshine patriots. Actually, it's going to be more like Valley Forge in the winter. {But it's still very satisfying and provides a strong sense of accomplishment. }

{After hearing all this}, many of you are no doubt thinking, "You mean I have to do all that; you mean I have to read, study, research, and so forth?" No, not necessarily. Suppose you don't really want to become knowledgeable to that degree in the Bible. Some people will admit that they just can't bring themselves to read it, especially the King James Version which is written in Elizabethan English with all those "thee's," "thou's," and "begat's." To them it's a drag and frankly I'm sympathetic. I can think of a hundred books I'd rather read than the Bible. It's not very interesting and the plot is often thin. In many places it's {repetitious} and about as exciting as reading a dictionary. But it has to be read. There is simply no way to avoid the Book because of its numerous supporters. Suppose you just can't bring yourself to study the thing.... Then, there are other activities you can engage in: (a) Call {colleges and other institutions} to arrange appearances {for our spokesmen}. (b) Call radio stations that have Christians on and say something like, "Don't you feel an obligation to provide balance and the other side down there? I'm tired of hearing about the 'merits' of religion and the Bible." That's when our panel of experts could come into play.... I'd like to have people other than myself doing this. (c) Provide funds and other physical services such as lodging and transportation. (d) Circulate public access tapes. (e) Ask 8 to 10 well-chosen questions. (f) Arrange speaking engagements. (g) Distribute anti-Bible literature at conventions and assemblies. (h) Send letters to the editors of newspapers. (i) And, re-educate those who come to your door. Don't shew them away.... Don't let Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses escape. {At our home they are invited in and} happily seated. After about 45 minutes, though, they nearly always {seek sanctuary}. As they start for the door...I usually suggest we meet again. Although they usually agree to a repeat engagement, it rarely occurs.

The organization I seek needs to meet periodically {so members can} compare notes on what works and what doesn't. That's why I record every appearance. The whole encounter resembles a football game. You go down to the locker room and replay the tapes to see how you did and what needs to be changed. Then you go out, play another game, come back, and view your tapes again.... Self-criticism is a must. You must recognize the subtle Christian and Jewish influences all of us carry. Most freethought people come from religious backgrounds and most of them have not left their past as much as they think. Reservations are dwelling within. A woman in Columbus, Ohio recently told me...she was afraid she would fall back into the Christian miasma if she started talking to biblicists. She was afraid of backsliding...

One must expect opposition, {insidious and surreptitious censorship}, and counterattacks. After appearing on the radio I'm often told a return engagement is a {distinct} possibility but they rarely occur because of opposition from clergymen, station management, sponsors, hosts, and

other influential figures. I've had people admit as much when I called. Free speech is not as prominent as we are led to believe and this becomes more obvious as your presentation becomes stronger, {more accurate, more poignant, and more relevant}. Although I'm sometimes brought on as a novelty act, they soon learn they have {a problem of the first magnitude} on their hands. It's by no means hopeless, however, because there is a broad spectrum of believers in varying stages of evolution and open-mindedness.

If you wish to research these matters you can adopt my technique. Go to a bookstore and buy the Layman's Parallel Bible which has four versions--the KJ, the RS, the Modern Language, and the Living Bible {and then proceed as follows}. First, read the KJ; if you can't understand it, read the RS; it's newer and not quite as difficult; if you still don't understand the text, then read the Modern Language, and if you still don't understand, read the Living Bible. It's a pathetic paraphrase with many inaccuracies but very easy to read.... Go through the entire Bible this way. Next I'd buy Strong's Exhaustive Concordance because you must have some kind of index.... It will tell you every word in the Bible and its location. All you have to do is remember any word in any verse and the book will locate every verse in which it appears.... Another thing you will need is an historical atlas of the OT, such as Hammond's or Westminster's, to trace, for instance, the migration of the Israelites at the time of the Exodus. Buy a red pen and do a lot of marking in your Bible of contradictions and other problems. I bought a thin pen and my Book looks like I'm working in the red it's so marked up. {Internal problems are noted on the pages to the left and external problems are noted on pages to the right}. Avoid Christian commentaries. I wouldn't go out {initially} and ask Christians what they think about the Bible {or read their opinions on it. You are intelligent enough to read the Book as you see it}. Don't let them influence you as to what it should say or what they think it says. Just read it cold, yourself. Go to Christian meetings and ask questions. I was recently in a Seventh-Day Adventist Seminar on the Books of Daniel and Revelation and everyone else present was of a fundamentalist mentality. I asked questions every week.... And after...about the 4th or 5th week, you could have heard a feather drop when I was asking a question because they were pretty sure something was going to come out of my mouth they hadn't considered or didn't want to hear. The minister teaching the course tried to get me to join his church and told me several times privately that the church would send me to an educational setting for training where they would pay all expenses if I would accept Jesus. They couldn't refute me so they were trying to co-opt me. They will do that sort of thing; {you can be sure}. I will go to anything Christians sponsor AS LONG AS I CAN ASK QUESTIONS THROUGHOUT. {I almost never listen to one-sided sermons}.... The only strategy I can think of that would be more effective than mine is force... But I can't do that nor would I recommend it.... {Of course, if I could determine the education of people from the moment of birth, that would also be decisive.}

In conclusion, if you really delve into the Bible you will see it's a maze, a mass, a veritable labyrinth of contradictions, inconsistencies, inaccuracies, poor math, bad science, erroneous geography, false prophecies, immoral comments, and a multitude of other problems too numerous to mention. It may be somebody's word but it certainly isn't the product of a perfect, divine being. The Bible has more holes in it than a backdoor screen. In a society dominated by the Book's influence I think all of us in the freethought movement should do what Adam and Eve did when they were expelled from the Garden of Eden. They went out and raised Cain. Thank you for being so attentive.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

#1 If you picked one contradiction as the best and simplest to use, what would it be?

ANS: Good question. I would probably use one of those that has already been mentioned. Why are we being punished for Adam's sin; how could Noah and Job be perfect if all have sinned, and {how could deceased fetuses and infants be saved if you must accept Jesus? However, what I do in BE is present nearly all of them and let people pick what they feel are the best. The ones I mentioned usually cause the greatest effect as far as I'm concerned. They are the ones that seem to generate the greatest interest.... Incidentally, I might say that the approach I'm taking is hard. I don't deny that at all. There is a lot of work involved and frankly I don't know many people willing to do what I'm doing. For instance, I listen to tapes on the NIV version of the Bible as I drive my car.... I don't do it very often as it does get old, but it is quite educational. As I listen I'll notice points I didn't see before, take notes, and look them up later at home. You also must read apologetic literature and that entails getting in among them. Usually we want to stay away from biblicists whenever possible, as if they had a contagious disease. Many think, "I don't want to get among those people, {I might succumb to their siren's song.}" But it must be done.

(To Be Concluded Next Month)

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Paul--The Deceptive Disciple (Part Four of a Six-Part Series)--With this month's commentary we resume the discussion of Paul's inadequacies that was last addressed in the September issue. As was stated in the July issue Paul's failings lie within 5 major categories: contradictions, misquotations, non-quotes, misinterpretations, and ill-conceived comments. As of now we have completed our enumeration of the contradictions and can proceed to the second category--misquotations. Almost no bounds exist with respect to Paul's propensity to extract from the OT the meanings he desires. (69) In 1 Cor. 3:20 (...For it is written....The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain") Paul misquoted Psalm 94:11 ("The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity"). Surely not all men are wise. Wisdom and men aren't equal. (70) In Rom. 15:12 ("And again, Isaiah saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust") Paul misquoted Isa. 11:10 ("And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek..."). (a) Isaiah does not say he shall reign or rule over the Gentiles. It merely states that the root of Jesse will act as a standard or banner for the people. (b) Isaiah refers to "it" not "him." (71) In 1 Cor. 2:9 ("But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him") he misquoted Isa. 64:4 RSV ("From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides thee, who works for those who wait for him"). (a) Nowhere in Isa. 64:4 does it say, "neither have entered into the heart of man." (b) Paul states, "the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." Yet, Isaiah 64:4 does not state or even imply that there will be a future reward for those that love God. It merely states that God will work for those who wait for him. (c) Isa. 64:4 says, "no eye has seen a God besides thee," which Paul omits. (72) In Eph. 4:8 ("Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men") Paul misquoted Psalm 68:18 ("Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men...") (a) Psalm 68:18 says "received gifts" not "gave gifts." (b) It also says "thou" not "he." (c) Jesus never led captivity captive, led others to a high mount, or gave gifts unto men. (d) There is a big difference between "giving gifts to men" and "receiving gifts for men." (73) In Rom. 3:4 ("...as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged") Paul misquoted Psalm 51:4 ("...that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest"). (a) Psalm 51:4 says "judgest" not "art judged." (b) Psalm 51:4 also says "and be clear" or "blameless," not "and mightest overcome" or "prevail." (74) In Rom. 15:21 ("But as it is written, To whom he was not

spoken of, they shall see: and they that have not heard shall understand") Paul misquoted and misapplied Isa. 52:15 ("...the kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they have not heard shall they consider"). (a) Isaiah 52:15 says nothing about "he was not spoken of"; it says "that which had not been told them." It says "that," not "he." (b) "They that have not heard shall understand" is not the same as "that which they have not heard shall they consider." Because something is considered does not mean it is understood. (75) In Heb. 10:7 ("Then said I, Lo I come [in the volume of the book it is written of me] to do thy will, O God") Paul distorted Psalm 40:7-8 ("Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me. I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart"). He left out the last phrase ("thy law is within my heart") which shows God's will is the law. If Paul had quoted Psalms correctly he would have been stressing the importance of upholding the Old Law. Since Paul never stressed the Old Law, he understandably left out the last verse. (76) In 1 Cor. 15:54-55 ("...then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory?). Paul misquoted Isa. 25:8 RSV ("He will swallow up death forever") and Hosea 13:14 ("...O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction"). (a) Isaiah says death will be swallowed up "forever" not "in victory." (b) Hosea says "thy plagues" not "thy sting." (c) "Hosea was not written in interrogatory form. (d) Hosea says "thy destruction" not "thy victory." It is difficult to see how Paul's words could be accurately derived from Isaiah and Hosea. (77) In Heb. 10:36-37 ("...ye might receive thy promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry") Paul perverted Hab. 2:3 ("For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry"). (a) Habbakuk says nothing about "he." The "it" in the verse is a vision, not Jesus. Hab. is referring to the maturation of a vision he has. The "it" referred to has nothing to do with the arrival of any individual. (b) Where in the OT, esp. Hab., did God promise "he will come and not tarry?" (78) In Rom. 11:9-10 ("Let their table be made a snare, and a trap and a stumblingblock, and a recompense unto them: let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back alway") Paul misstated Psalm 69:22-23 ("Let their table become a snare before them: and that which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap. Let their eyes be darkened, that they see not; and make their loins continually to shake"). The Psalmist said nothing about a "stumblingblock," a "recompense," or "bowing down their back alway." (79) In Rom. 11:26-27 ("And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob, For this is the covenant unto them when I shall take away their sins") Paul misquoted and misused Isaiah 59:20-21 ("And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord. As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord..."). (a) Isaiah 59:20 says "to Zion," not "out of" Zion. (b) Isaiah says the Redeemer shall come "unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob." It does not say the Deliverer "shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob." In other words, he will come to those who turned from transgression on their own volition. It does not say he will turn away ungodliness. (c) Moreover, "when I shall take away their sins" is not in Isaiah 59. Paul created that out of nothing. (d) Nowhere does Isaiah use the word "saved" or "salvation" as Paul uses it. (80) In Rom. 9:25-26 ("as he saith also in Hosea, I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God") Paul misquoted and misused Hosea 2:23 ("...and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God") and Hosea 1:10 ("...and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God"). (a) Hosea 1:10 is speaking only of Jews as Hosea 1:11 ("Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together") shows. It is not referring to Gentiles and does not justify spreading the word to Gentiles. (b) "and her beloved, which was not beloved" is not in Hosea. Paul created the words. (c) Hosea 2:23 says, "and they shall say, Thou art my

God," which Paul conveniently left out of his quote since millions of Gentiles have clearly not made such a statement. (81) In Rom. 10:6-8 ("But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? [that is, to bring Christ down from above] or, who shall descend into the deep? [that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead]. But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach...."), Paul mutilated Deut. 30:12-14 ("It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it? But the word is very nigh unto thee in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it"). (a) The latter is only saying that his (Moses--Ed.) commandments are easy to obtain. They are not far off but as close as one's heart or mouth. Deut. says nothing about "faith." (b) It refers to seeking "it" and doing "it," not seeking "him" or doing "him." (c) It does not even imply Christ or Jesus, let alone mention him. (d) Deut. is referring to Penitence and is not about believing on or bringing down Jesus from heaven or up from the dead. (e) Deut. is saying that God wills us to repent of sin and that you may know when you have sinned. You have only to look at his law which is very close by. (82) In Heb. 10:16-17 ("This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more") Paul misquoted and misapplied Jer. 31:33-34 ("...but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts,...for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more"). (a) The New Covenant referred to in Jer. 31:31 is not that of Jesus' New Testament but a reaffirmation with Israel of the importance of following the Old Law. Jer. 31:33 clearly states that God's law (my law) will be put in them. (b) Jer. says the law will be written in their hearts, not their minds and God's law will be put in their inward parts, not their hearts. "And in their minds will I write them" does not appear in Jer. (83) In Rom. 9:33 ("As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed") Paul misquoted Isa. 28:16 ("Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste"). (a) Isaiah says nothing about "on him" or "being ashamed." (b) Isaiah says God will lay a precious corner stone, a sure foundation, not a stumbling stone or rock of offence. (c) True, Isa. 8:14 ("And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel...") speaks of a stumbling stone and a rock of offense, but it is speaking of God himself. Paul deceptively combined two unrelated verses and altered the text in the process. (84) And finally, Heb. 12:20 is a misconstruction of Ex. 19:12-13 and Heb. 4:3 is a perversion of Psalm 95:11.

Besides contradictions and misquotations, Paul also engaged in quoting non-existent OT statements--nonquotes. (85) "For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed" (Rom. 10:11). No such statement exists in scripture. Isa. 28:16, Jer. 17:7, and Joel 2:32 simply don't apply. (86) "For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them" (Rom. 10:5). Although Paul is quoting Lev. 18:5, he couldn't be quoting Moses since Moses didn't write the Pentateuch. (See: Moses and the Pentateuch in Issues 19 and 20). (87) Second Tim. 3:8 ("Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses...") refers to two people who were never mentioned in the OT and there is no evidence they are the Pharaoh's sorcerers in Ex. 7:11. (88) Contrary to 1 Tim. 1:18 ("This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee..."), there are no OT prophecies pertaining to, or referring to, Timothy. (89) Eph. 5:14 ("Therefore it is said, Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light") is nowhere to be found in the OT. Isa. 60:1 and 26:19 are not applicable. (90) Contrary to 1 Cor. 15:7 ("After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles") no gospel says James saw Jesus. (91) And finally, contrary to Heb. 9:3-4 ("And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the

Holiest of all; which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant,...wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant...."), 2 Chron. 5:10, Deut. 10:2, 5, and Ex. 25:16 show there is nothing in the OT about a golden pot or Aaron's rod being put in the ark. {This listing of nonquotes will conclude next month.}

CONCLUSION OF THE AM. RAT. CONV. SPEECH

#2 Why is so much of the focus on Christianity? Is it because it's statistically the majority religion on the planet?

ANS: The reason I'm concerned is because it represents the majority in this country. If the Koran were the main religious book in the U.S., I'd focus on it.... You must know the Bible because when you talk to these people they are going to retreat into it. If you ask them how they know God exists, they are going to say, "Because the Bible says so." If you say, "Prove God exists;" many will say, "I don't have to; the Bible says he does." Now you have to prove the Bible is not to be believed, which means you must get into the Book and go over each point. {Don't forget their motto: The Bible says it; I believe it, and that settles it.} As long as they put credence in the Book, any arguments you make to the contrary are not going to carry sufficient weight....

#3 What is the origin of the Bible?

ANS: Answering that is a speech within itself. Let me attempt a quick summation. When you go into a bookstore and ask for a copy of the Bible, they don't give you a copy of the Bible; they give you a version. But you say, "I don't want a version; I don't want the King James, the Revised Standard, the New American Standard or the Living Bible. I want a copy of the Bible. But they can't give you that as there is no such animal. What they will produce is a book written by a group of people who claim to have manuscripts that are accurate copies of the originals--the autographs. But how do we know which are correct, assuming the originals ever existed? There are thousands of copies. Scholars picked and pulled from these different manuscripts and compiled or composed books which are portrayed as accurate versions of the originals. That's what you are reading.

In addition, there are the problems associated with how the Bible was put together initially. The catholic version has more books within the Bible than the protestant King James. During many councils and conferences in the 200 to 600 A.D. period scholars basically voted on the books to be accepted and rejected. I have a list in my notes of many of the books that {never made the canon's list}.... Christians don't want you to know this because it shows the Bible was composed by people and not by God. It was an expedient document put together by individuals pushing and pulling like typical politicians.... {Evidence shows the Book is not inspired.}

#4 If they admit a copyist error, how can they continue the discussion?

ANS: They admit there is a copyist error but contend the original writings are perfect. Most don't defend an inerrant King James.... Evangelists and other fundamentalists will concede errors in the King James. That isn't what you are debating.... They say it's the original writings which are accurate, the ones written approximately 2,000 years ago.... They are the ones without error. If you have a book today with mistakes in it, that's because somebody didn't copy correctly.... But we don't have the original autographs; all we have are a lot of writings purporting to be accurate representations of the original writings which don't exist.... Does that sound like a book composed by God?.... How do you know what is a copyist mistake and what isn't? That's their problem.... When they say it's a copyist mistake, they are obligated to provide evidence.... {And how do you know what's true if you start admitting certain parts are false? Where do you draw

the line? That's a major issue that looms over the entire Book. That's why many hold the line so fervently}.

#5 Doesn't this come down to empirical, logical, rational thinking versus irrational faith and an emotional need to hold on to something absolute? Aren't they going to believe no matter what you say?....

ANS: {As I said earlier}, you must realize the spectrum of believers is very wide. You can't use a broad brush to cover all Christians. Putting them all in the same bag is preposterous.... True, you have people on the fringe with whom conversation is futile. I wouldn't waste my time on them. I've talked to some biblicists and realized I might as well have been talking to a stone. There's no reaching them. Trying to present a rational argument to an irrational mind is an exercise in futility. Didn't the psychiatrist, Jung, say, {"I have treated many hundreds of patients. Among those over 35 there has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life."} Religion is a mental problem and it's reflected in their logic and rationalizing. Making a logical case to an illogical mind is a waste of time. But that isn't true of a lot of Christians, especially those who are more intelligent. If you present a case, many will listen. I'm not saying they will quickly change. As I said earlier, you must present some evidence and come back later and present some more repeatedly. You can't convert them in 20 minutes, but you can reach a lot of people by multiple contacts. I think you are saying they all fit your mould while many I talk to do not. I see many whom you can reach.... It relates to what I said about talking to Falwell. I know I'm not going to convert him to anything, but I can sure shake-up his followers.... (At this point my time was exhausted and the program was concluded.)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #230 from JW of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Dear Dennis. In Issue #3, where you respond to letter #3, you give 7 verses where God created evil. A verse which you did not list, but is directly on point is Isa. 45:7 KJV ("I form the light and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things"). Keep up the good work and keep thinking about putting it all in a book.

Editor's Response to Letter #230

Dear JW. Although I could have referred to this verse, it was omitted because apologists claim that just as light is the opposite of darkness, war or confusion, not evil, is the opposite of peace. So they contend the word "evil" means disruption rather than immorality. Rather than debate the issue I opted for verses less open to dispute.

Letter #231 from CWL of Reynoldsburg, Ohio

Dear Dennis. The other day a Jehovah's Witness knocked on our door (alone, surprisingly) and I invited him inside. I didn't try to overpower him in one visit and so I just politely asked him to resolve the Mary Magdalene problem in the four gospels. He left and didn't come back for about two weeks. His answer or solution was very poor. However, he returned and continued his evangelizing by supplying me with You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth to show me the "light."

Your periodical is a valuable aid in dissuading such individuals from their beliefs. However, I would like to ask if you have a considerable number of biblical verses that contradict the basic tenets or interpretations of Jehovah's Witnesses in particular. I would definitely appreciate

receiving such information by return mail. What I am pointing out is that your periodical has organized the Bible's contradictions in a certain manner. However, the contradictions are not organized so as to contradict the basic tenets of any particular fundamentalist religion, e.g. Jehovah's Witnesses and Baptists. Perhaps, as your periodical continues its publication, you will see fit to present biblical contradictions in a format that is aimed at one particular group or another.

Editor's Response to Letter #231

Dear CWL. I'm glad to see you confronted the JW on his own turf and didn't avoid a dialogue. When they gave me the book you mentioned I read and critiqued it from cover to cover. Some of the information was useable. As far as outlining problems in such a manner as to oppose particular groups is concerned, I intend to do so someday but other activities are of greater concern. Except for matters pertaining to eschatology, the Trinity, and a few other key areas, most of the basic beliefs of the Witnesses are in agreement with those of orthodox Christianity. So I'd direct the same points to them that have been made to other biblicists.

Letter #232 from BF of Louisa, Kentucky

Dear Dennis. A friend referred me to Jer. 8:8 RSV ("How can you say, We are wise, and the law of the Lord is with us? But, behold, the false pen of the scribes has made it into a lie"). Isn't this a golden test acknowledging biblical errancy straight from the horse's mouth? Maybe you've cited it often before but I haven't seen it in BE's pages?....

Editor's Response to Letter #232

Dear BF. I've never used this verse in BE because how one turns a law into a lie is somewhat unclear.

Letter #233 from Mark Potts, Wilson Hall, Rm. 203, NSU, Tahlequah, Oklahoma

Dear Dennis. I think I can answer your question, "What happens to people who never hear about Jesus?" According to 2 Thess. 1:7-9, those "that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" will be condemned. Because this passage is unambiguous and allows no exceptions, modern Japanese who have not heard the gospel are just as worthy of damnation as people in Christian countries who have heard the gospel but have rejected it.

Letter #234 from ARG of Front Royal, Virginia

Dear Dennis. My sincere admiration for your efforts in producing BE. Christianity is undoubtedly the biggest scam ever perpetrated on mankind. You are effectively knocking the foundation out from under it. Too bad there isn't some way to get your work before all reasonable people who still think the Bible has some inherent validity.

Letter #235 from JC of Prince Rupert, British Columbia, Canada

Oh, Bless you sir! You've taken a most loathsome chore off my hands. I can't stand that book; it gives me a headache. I open it looking for two things--a clear and straightforward explanation of Christian theology and eloquent examples of Christian mercy. There is hardly enough of either to fill a thimble.... Thank you for making some sense out of it. Perhaps you could set up a home study course. I agree with you that the freethought movement needs its biblical experts to point out to the religious middle-of-the-roaders that the Christian mythology preached in mainstream

churches has little to do with the bible and to point out to the fundamentalists that the bible does in fact have errors and contradictions. Personally I don't care what people do in the privacy of their own pew. The Moral Majority, however, is going for political power and taking their Inquisition-type-mindset with them.... If the current economic woes deepen, we will see a desperate casting about for Something-to-Believe-In, something sure, rock solid, fundamental.... I don't think Jim Bakker's troubles will hurt the cause of fundamentalism, but rather cause people to turn to someone even more rigid and uncompromising....

Letter #236 from KDB of Largo, Florida

Dear Dennis. WOW! Totally awesome! Fifteen adjectives indicating extreme surprise, fascination, enjoyment, and approval! In other words I like it. I just received #56 and #57 which began my subscription. Wadda Trip! There is just so much good stuff on the reprint list, that it may constitute mental cruelty. Which do I order first?... Please create a TRACT to give out. It must avoid obscene (hard to resist) insulting language, and set forth the truth in plain verifiable speech....

Letter #237 from PH of Calverton, New York

Mr. Dennis McKinsey....Keep up the good work. I live on Long Island and heard you on the Buffalo station. Some great person said an unexamined life is not worth living. I say an unexamined religion is not worth living by. I admire how you insist on the callers' logic but wonder how you take the abuse....

Letter #238 from VEC of Hood River, Oregon

I love them Dennis. Take good care of yourself and don't get burned out.

January 1988

Paul--The Deceptive Disciple (Part Five of a Six-Part Series)--Before moving to a listing of Paul's ill-conceived comments, we'll complete the enumeration of his nonquotes begun last month. (92) Paul's comment in 1 Cor. 15:4-6 ("...and he arose again the third day according to the Scriptures: and he was seen of Cephas--Peter, then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once...") is unsubstantiated. (a) No gospel says that Peter saw Jesus before the twelve. (b) No gospel states that Peter was the first person to see Jesus alive after the Resurrection although Paul implies as much. (c) And no gospel states that 500 people saw Jesus at one time after the Resurrection. Five hundred people never stated as much. Paul says they did, but we only have his word for it. (93) Paul's comment in Heb. 1:6 ("And again, when he bringeth in the first begotten (Jesus--Ed.) into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him") does not repete any statement in the OT. Psalm 97:7 and Deut. 32:43 have no relevance. (94) Paul's comments in 2 Cor. 6:18 ("...and (I--Ed.) will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty") appear nowhere in the OT. Second Sam. 7:14, 1 Chron. 17:13, and Jer. 31:1 aren't applicable. (95) In Heb. 10:5-6 ("Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me; In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure") Paul misquoted and misapplied Psalm 40:6 ("Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required"). (a) "but a body hast thou prepared me" is not in Psalm 40:6. Paul created it. (b) "mine ears hast thou opened" is in Psalm 40:6 but Paul omitted it. (c) Psalm 40:12 ("...mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head...") was written by the same person who wrote Psalm 40:6 who couldn't have been Jesus since the former committed many iniquities. Paul took the verse out of context. (d) Moreover, nowhere in the Gospels did Jesus say what Paul attributed to him in Heb. 10:5-7. (96) And finally, nowhere in the OT does it say that "the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you" as Paul says in Rom. 2:24 ("For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written"). Isa. 52:5 and 2 Sam. 12:14 aren't applicable.

The next major category encompassing Paul's failings involves ill-conceived comments. (97) "But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother" (Gal. 1:19). Where does any gospel say one of the apostles was Jesus' brother, James? (98) "For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them" (Heb. 4:2). The gospel was never preached to Paul. He simply converted and began preaching. (99) First Cor. 15:4-5 ("And he was buried, and he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve") flies in the face of Matt. 27:5 ("And he--Judas--cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and went and hanged himself"). Paul's statement that Jesus was seen by the twelve is false, unless Judas came back to life. His replacement, Matthias, was not elected until after the Ascension. (100) "You foolish man! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies" (1 Cor. 15:36 RSV). The organic processes constituting physical life do not cease in the grain which grows up into wheat. If they did cease, that body that shall be, which he compares to the bodies of the resurrected would never appear at all. In other words, that which thou sowest does not come to life if it dies. (101) "He (Moses--Ed.) considered abuse suffered for the Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt..." (Heb. 11:26 RSV). How and when was Moses punished or subjected to suffering because of a belief in Jesus or the Christ? Where is that in Scripture? (102) "Some (of the prophets--Ed.) were tortured, refusing to accept release, that they might rise again to a better life" (Heb. 11:35 RSV). Nowhere does the OT say that people suffered torture in order to expect resurrection. Paul created this. (103) "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree..." (Gal. 3:13). According to Paul's reasoning, anyone who was ever crucified could be the Savior. (104) "Therefore leaving the principle of the doctrine of Christ let us go on unto perfection..." (Heb.

6:1). According to Paul, then, Christ's doctrine is not perfection but only a step toward the same. (105) "For until the law sin was in the world; but sin is not imputed when there is no law" (Rom. 4:13) and "...where no law is, there is no transgression" (Rom. 4:15). This makes no sense! If sin was not imputable to people before the law, then how could sin have been in the world? How could people have been sinners? If sin was in the world, then it must have been imputable; otherwise, how could it have been sin? How could you have sin imputable to no one? (106) "But God has so composed the body (of Christ--Ed.), giving the greater honor to the inferior part, that there may be no discord in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (1 Cor. 12:24-27 RSV). Religious conflicts between Christians and the existence of over 1,500 Christian denominations demonstrate the inaccuracy of this statement. (107) "God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles...." (Heb. 2:4). The presence of miracles does not prove God is present as Matt. 24:23-24, Mark 13:21-22, Rev. 13:11, 13-14, 16:14 and 19:20 show. Many beings, both good and bad, performed miracles as Ex. 7:11-12, 8:7, 2 Thess. 2:8-9, and Deut. 13:1-3 prove. (108) "Who (Jesus--Ed.) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature...." (Col. 1:15). (a) If Jesus and God are equal and eternal, how could either be born? (b) In no sense could Jesus be considered the firstborn either as a man or a God. As a God he was never born; as a man he lived after millions were born. (109) "(God--Ed.) hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds...." (Heb. 1:2). An heir is appointed for a time when the appointer dies or is incapacitated. Paul is saying God is finite, will die, or become incapacitated and Jesus will take over which contradicts what God said in Isa. 48:12 ("...I am the first, I also am the last"). (110) "...by whom (Jesus--Ed.) also he made the worlds.... Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee?" (Heb. 1:2, 5). Paul quoted Psalm 2:7 wherein David said, "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee." If God created the world through Jesus, it would imply that Jesus lived before the worlds were created. But, then, Paul stated that God said to Jesus, "This day have I begotten thee" and he said it by the mouth of David who lived long after the worlds were created. (111) "...therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law)...." (Heb. 7:11). False! The law was given first in the form of the Ten Commandments and other rules to the firstborn Israelites. The priesthood and Temple service were switched from their responsibility to the Tribe of Levi after the former worshipped the golden calf and the Levites refused to do so. (112) "For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid (Hagar--Ed.), the other by a freewoman (Sarah--Ed.)...for these are the two covenants; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Hagar" (Gal. 4:22-24). False history! The law was given from Sinai to the descendants of the freewoman, Sarah, through Isaac and not to the descendants of the bondwoman, Hagar, through Ishmael. (113) Paul said Melchizedek was "...without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life, but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually" (Heb. 7:2-3). If Melchizedek is like Jesus then he is a God too. Yet, Gen. 14:18 implies he was only a priest. What Paul says of one must be true of the other. Otherwise, Melchizedek is not "like unto the Son of God." (114) "These all died in faith, not having received what was promised (by God--Ed.), but having seen it and greeted it from afar...." (Heb. 11:13). Paul, the alleged messenger of God, is accusing God of breaking his promise to Abraham. In effect, he's accusing God of lying. (115) "Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth" (1 Cor. 10:24). This verse speaks for itself. (116) "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not" (1 Cor. 10:23). And Nixon was accused of considering himself above the law and operating on expediency! (117) "But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was able to be blamed....(because--Ed.) he did eat with the Gentiles; but when (the Jews--Ed.) were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision" (Gal. 2:11-12). Paul accused Peter of acting on expediency; yet, he, Paul, was "all things to all men" (1 Cor.

9:22). (118) "That Christ should suffer and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead...." (Acts 26:23). Jesus certainly wasn't the first to rise from the dead as the RESURRECTION discussion in Issue #2 showed. (119) In several verses Paul openly admitted he spoke foolishly which is more than his followers are willing to concede: "What I am saying I say not with the Lord's authority, but as a fool, in this boastful confidence...." (2 Cor. 11:17), "...I speak foolishly,...." (2 Cor. 11:21), "...I speak as a fool...." (2 Cor. 11:23), "I wish you would bear with me in a little foolishness. Do bear with me" (2 Cor. 11:1 RSV), "I am become a fool in glorying...." (2 Cor. 12:11). (120) "I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service" (2 Cor. 11:8-9). This hardly needs comment! (121) "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9). False! The act of accepting by faith is a work itself. You have to do something; it's not a mere gift. (122) "And he (Paul--Ed.) said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest...." (Acts 9:5). Why would Paul ask who is speaking when he called the speaker "Lord?" He must have known who was speaking. (123) And lastly, "For I testify again to every man that is circumcised that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace" (Gal. 5:3-4). Yet, Jesus, himself, was circumcised ("And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called Jesus...."--Luke 2:21), as were Paul ("I was circumcised the eighth day...."--Phil. 3:5), and Peter ("And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, Saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them"). And Acts 16:3 RSV ("Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him; and he took him and circumcised him....") shows Paul circumcised Timothy. Although Jesus, Paul, and Peter were circumcised and obligated to do the whole law, each ignored significant parts of it and was fallen from grace. (TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT MONTH)

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #239 from AF of El Paso, Texas (Part a)

Dear Dennis. Thank you for the sample issue of your publication. I am an open-minded person who considers himself a Christian. I have a lot of problems with groups that are fanatics about "Bible worshipping" like the Council of Biblical Inerrancy out in California. At the same time I get tired of atheist nerds that don't know what they're talking about. I hope that we will be able to enter into dialogue/argument/fighting. Mr. McKinsey one of your arguments against the Genesis Flood account is Gen. 8:4 ("And the ark rested in the 7th month, on the 17th day of the month, upon the mountains of Ararat"). Many of your questions, arguments and criticisms of Genesis are interesting, valid and thought-provoking but 8:4 is very poor. Your standard of Bible attack seems to be based on the English translation which no respectable evangelical would accept as the 100% Inspired Word of God. The only material acceptable are the autographs written in the original languages and close to the original extant copies. Out here we have a chain of various peaks (mountains) called the Franklins. The mountains of Franklin they are called. In Gen. 8:4 both the singular and plural use of mountains seems to be correct.

Do you have a degree in Hebrew and Greek? Where did you receive it? Under whom did you study? Do you have professors/experts you can access rapidly? Where did you study hermeneutics, apologetics, textual criticism, eschatology, soteriology, and church doctrine?

Editor's Response to Letter #239 (Part a)

Dear AJ. First, "atheistic nerds" is hardly the kind of scholarly phrase one would expect from someone who just said he was "open-minded," but, even more important, do you have any

substantive evidence that they "don't know what they are talking about?" Pejoratives are not proof. I don't doubt that their opinions of your intellectual prowess would be anything but complimentary and they could submit equally colorful adjectives. Exchanges of this nature generate more heat than light and rarely alter opinions. Second, on page 2 of the sample issue I quoted Gen. 8:4 and asked how the ark could "have rested on several mountains at once." You said this was a "very poor" criticism of Genesis but presented very poor evidence to prove your point. The verse clearly says "mountains" not "a mountain." I have 14 English versions of the Bible, including the KJ, RS, LB, NEB, NASB, NWT, TEV, NIV, JV, NAB, BEB, AS, MLB, and the Masoretic text, and all but 3 say "mountains," which is plural. Only the NEB ("on a mountain in Ararat"), the TEV ("on a mountain in the Ararat range"), and the MLB ("on the Ararat mountain range") seek to resolve the problem by translating the Hebrew into a singular. The overwhelming majority of translations in my library (11 to 3) feel "mountains" is the most accurate term to use.

I'd like to ask you the question you asked me. "Do you have a degree in Hebrew and/or Greek? And even more importantly do you know Greek and Hebrew better than the scholars who translated Genesis into English. Nearly all of them say "mountains" is the best word to use. In fact, you admitted you're uncertain, you're guessing, when you said, "the singular and plural use of mountains seems to be correct." Would you please refrain from saying I'm wrong and provide some solid evidence to that effect. All you are contending is that I might be wrong because the originals might be saying something other than what the overwhelming majority of the English translators thought. Third, your comment that my "standard of Bible attack seems to be based on the English translation" is misleading because it's based not on 1 but 11 out of 14 translations. An overwhelming consensus of scholarly opinion is certainly not "very poor" scholarship. You, on the other hand, like so many of your compatriots, keep implying the non-existent autographs, which you have never seen, are your source. Actually, all you are relying on, assuming you can read Greek and Hebrew, are Greek/Hebrew manuscripts which are supposedly accurate copies of the "originals." This is precisely what scholars relied upon when they created the modern English versions. The only question now is whose translation is best. Apparently you feel qualified to correct their rendering. Fourth, I've already addressed the "Do you know Greek and Hebrew" question several times. {See: Issue #6, for example}. If critics would spend more time answering the questions and problems posed by this publication and less time worrying about my background, a great deal more could be accomplished. The amount of literature that I've read on my own is more than enough to prove my case. If you worried less about credentials and degrees, which are primarily bestowed by apologetic institutions in this field, and more about the logic, accuracy, and poignancy of that being presented, you'd be far better off. Training in apologetic institutions, such as seminaries, has a major disadvantage which studying on one's own can avoid. Institutions are either openly or covertly one-sided in their presentation and permeated with books, lectures, and A-V materials that are geared to accentuating the positive and ignoring the negatives. Because of the mind-set that is inculcated, there is little chance a graduate will critically examine the Bible, as does BE, before accepting it. Why look for something you've been taught is virtually nonexistent. If you don't think I've read enough on apologetics, hermeneutics, eschatology, and textual criticism, consult my wife.

Letter #239 Concludes (Part b)

For you to truly criticize the text you must present this in the original Hebrew with comparative translations and versions with a word study to correlate conclusions. I highly recommend a book titled, Noah's Flood, Joshua's Long Day and Lucifer's Fall Examined. It agrees with some of the questions you raise. I hope we can help each other answer questions and raise new ones. You seem very sincere and I applaud that. There are a lot of insincere (Expletive deleted--Ed.) out there who are on a political kick. Right now I will not go into many of your questions but I trust

that you will keep an open mind.... I hope to purchase some of your back issues. I find the format very refreshing.... Do you plan to do articles/expose's on Pat Robertson and....?

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #239 (Part b)

How could I or anyone else critique the text in "the original Hebrew" when there are no such documents, my friend? Comments like that lead me to believe you, not I, should read more in the area of textual criticism. And, other than your comments on Gen. 8:4, I can't see that you have gone into any of my questions. Again, are you sure I'm the one who needs to keep an open mind? All you said in regard to Gen. 8:4, and this is typical of so many apologetic explanations I confront on the radio, is that there has to be an explanation for the problem even though you don't know what it is. Of course, that's nothing more than a hope and a wish, a wing and a prayer, a proof of nothing. It's the same kind of irrationality exhibited by Paul in Heb. 11:1 ("Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen"). If it's merely hoped for and not seen, how could it be evidence? As far as critiquing prominent figures is concerned, that's not a very profitable exercise. Even if Robertson were ruined, he would be easily replaced and the process would resume ad infinitum. As long as the theology remains, spokesmen will emerge. Although we generally disagree, several of your comments are gracious and much appreciated.

Letter #240 from VS of St. Louis, Missouri

Dear Dennis McKinsey. Your BE arrived today and I read the whole issue--very interesting and very good. I'm a retired Lutheran minister. It seems to me you've done a lot of good. Glad you like dialogue and debate--but the "funnymentalists" are pushovers! (I mean from our point of view).... You've had a lot of fun; isn't it time for you to graduate to a more meaningful stage of your ministry. (I'm referring only to your periodical--I've never heard you on radio or TV; I'd like to). Whom are you reaching with your periodical?! the already "converted"? helping them gloat about mistakes in the Bible? I like fun too, but it's time for us to grow up and be for something. Being an iconoclast is not enough! When you try to take away someone's "security blanket" you should at the same time offer him something better. You have made your point over and over and over. Why ride it to death? I can send you many articles. Use any, any way you like....

Editor's Response to Letter #240

Dear VS. Several of your comments are wide-of-the-mark and deserve comment. First, I would not use the word "funnymentalists" because it's not only an unproductive pejorative but tends to minimize and make light of a serious and formidable opponent that dominates the White House. As far as being a "pushover" is concerned, even I wouldn't say that. How often have you engaged spokesmen for the inerrant position? I learned years ago, while playing tennis and chess, to never underestimate my worthy opponent. Second, there are tens of millions of people who have never been reached by the kind of message conveyed in BE. You talk as if the battle is over when it has barely begun. One minister alone, Jimmy Swaggart, has a larger budget, more adherents, and far greater access to the media than all the atheist, agnostic, humanist, and freethought organizations in the United States combined. If they are such "pushovers," I'd say we have either been pushing in the wrong direction or hardly at all. Third, BE exists to provide a tremendous amount of crucial information to millions of people being kept in the dark. The need is real and the stakes are high. Enjoyment, satisfaction, enhanced self-worth, and a sense of accomplishment undoubtedly exist, but they are secondary to the primary motive. "Fun" is hardly a precise term when so much time, effort, and study are involved. Fourth, I don't feel a need "to graduate to a more meaningful stage" when I'm already there. When people want me to move from what they

erroneously view as a concerted attack on fundamentalism alone, I'm not sure what they have in mind. If it's to a broader focus on liberalism in particular and Christianity in general, I can't think of a better way to dissipate one's efforts. Critiquing religious liberalism is like boxing jello in a kaleidoscopic room. Positions are continually changing on a spectrum that's constantly widening. As people leave the Bible in general and inerrancy in particular, they expand outward like spokes on a wheel. From New Agers and the occult to unitarianism and universalism, the number of views are multitudinous. Unless I'm dealing with a body of people with a common set of ideas, I'd have to search each person's individual beliefs in order to adequately expose their shortcomings. Some liberal organizations have a common group of postulates but none of them is as large or powerful as fundamentalism in general. What would you have me move on to? What is that to which we should "grow up" to? Could you describe the "more meaningful stage" to which I should advance? Fifth, "ministry" is not an appropriate term to describe our efforts or this publication. "An assertive educational program" is more appropriate. Sixth, whom am I trying to reach? Anybody who will listen because nearly everyone accepts some biblically instilled inaccuracies. Whom am I reaching? Our subscribers cover the entire spectrum with large numbers at each end. The "already converted" are by no means the only readers. Seventh, helping people "cope" rather than "gloat" is our purpose. Assisting people in accurately assessing the most influential book extant is BE's reason for being. Eighth, with respect to being "for something," we are. Anytime you expose contradictions, inaccuracies, and errors in a widely held tome, you are for logic, reason, and accuracy. That's the "something better" we are offering. But as I said in my Am. Rat. Conv. Speech, you must show people what is wrong with what they have before they are going to listen to what you propose. Ninth, as a religious term of opprobrium "iconoclast" is inappropriate because it stresses only the negative aspect of BE. Your reliance upon religious terminology implies you have not left religion to the degree you think. Adopting the other side's verbiage is conceding half the battle. When men tear down a city building to erect a newer structure or bulldoze a plot of ground for future construction, are they acting positively or negatively? Are they "iconoclasts" for not respecting the older structure or terrain? If so, how do you propose the new be built? And lastly, nothing has been ridden to death. BE has been systematically exposing all the known problems associated with nearly every major issue in the Bible. At what point would you have had us stop? Perhaps 5 issues ago? If so, then you would never have heard all the mistakes of Paul, who is unquestionably one of the most important figures in the entire Book. In fact, one could almost call the religion "Paulianity" instead of Christianity. How about 10 issues ago? Then you wouldn't have heard all the problems associated with the predestination question. Moreover, one man's major dilemma is another's minor problem and vice versa. How do you or I know the next problem won't be crucial to certain readers? We present as much as possible and let readers judge the degree of importance for themselves. Are you prepared to confront strong believers in the Bible on their own turf? If I had stopped 10 issues ago, could you have effectively related all the problems associated with predestination and Paul to a biblicist? And if we don't relate them, who will? What are you going to do when confronting these people? What are you going to tell them?--religion is irrational and only for the mentally ill and insecure; the Bible is a book of fairy tales and superstitious nonsense, key biblical teachings are unscientific and often absurd, and Jesus was nothing more than a nice guy with some beneficent teachings. Surely you don't expect that to carry the day! They have heard it before. That's been the overemphasis of freethought advocates for centuries. As with biblicists too much of their literature, both past and present, has been devoted to opinions, judgments, and conclusions rather than facts, proofs, and citations. Merely making statements, even though they are true, isn't going to persuade.

EDITOR'S NOTE: If you change your mailing address, please tell us immediately. We just can't afford to send multiple back issues to people who have failed to notify us and/or postal authorities of a change in address.

Feb. 1988

Issue No.62

COMMENTARY

Paul--The Deceptive Disciple (Part Six of a Six-Part Series)--With this issue we'll complete our revelation of Paul's failings begun last summer by listing the remaining examples of ill-conceived comments and concluding with those verses within the final category--misinterpretations. (124) In 1 Cor. 9:19-23 ("....And unto the Jews, I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews, to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; To them that are without law, as without law...that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some. And this I do for the gospel's sake") Paul showed his allegiance to expediency and opportunism by being a religious chameleon. (125) In Heb. 11:17 ("By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac... his only begotten son....") Paul contradicted not only what he said in Gal. 4:22 ("For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman") but two OT verses, Gen. 16:16 ("And Abram was 86 when Hagar bare Ishmael to Abram") and Gen. 21:5 ("Abraham was 100 years old, when his son Isaac was born unto him") which clearly show he had two sons and Isaac was the younger. (126) In 1 Cor. 11:14 ("Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him?") Paul refuted several OT verses that show long hair denotes a child of God: Judges 13:5 ("For lo, thou shalt conceive, and bear a son; and no razor shall come on his head: for the child shall be a Nazarite unto God from the womb...."), Num. 6:2,5 ("...when either man or woman shall separate themselves to vow a vow of a Nazarite...all the days of the vow of his separation shall no razor come upon his head...he shall be holy, and shall let the locks of the hair of his head grow"), and 1 Sam. 1:11 ("...she vowed a vow and said...I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head"). (127) In Heb. 10:5-10 ("Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, 'Sacrifices and offerings thou (God--Ed.) has not desired, but a body hast thou prepared for me;.... 'Thou hast neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings'...then he (Jesus--Ed.) added, 'Lo, I have come to do thy will.' He abolishes the first in order to establish the second, and by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all") Paul quoted Psalm 40:6 which clearly says that God does not want sacrifices to him. And yet Paul quoted Jesus as alleging that one final sacrifice is needed. There are no bounds to Paul's ability to extract from the OT the sense he desires; he goes so far as to find a demonstration of the necessity of the sacrifice of Christ in a Psalm passage (40:7) which clearly affirms that God does not desire sacrifice, but obedience to his will. (128) In Acts 23:6-8 ("But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees (at his trial--Ed.), he cried out in the council, men and brethren I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question. And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the multitude was divided. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit; but the Pharisees confess both") and Acts 24:21 ("...Concerning the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day") Paul intentionally lied about the charges against him in court in order to create arguments among his accusers. As Acts 21:28 ("...men of Israel, help! This is the man that teacheth all men every where against the people, the law, and this place; and further brought Greeks into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place") and Acts 24:5 ("For we have found this man a pestilent fellow and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes") show, the real charges were quite different. (129) According to Acts 9:22-25 ("But Paul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is the very Christ. And after many days were

fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him...") the Jews sought to kill Paul; while according to 2 Cor. 11:32-33 ("In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me....") it was the governor under Aretas the king who sought him. Unless the governor and his men were Jews, which is highly unlikely, there is a conflict. (130) Paul's comment in Heb. 1:2 ("...by whom (Jesus--ed.) also he (God--Ed.) made the worlds....") conflicts with his utterance in Heb. 1:5 ("Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?"). If God created the world through Jesus, it would mean that Jesus lived before the "worlds" were created. But in the same breath Paul stated that God said, "This day have I begotten thee" to Jesus and he said it by the mouth of David (Psalm 2:7) who lived long after the worlds were created. (131) In Phil. 3:8 ("...for whom (Jesus--Ed.) I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ") Paul seems to have ignored his own advice in Col. 3:8 RSV ("But now put them all away; anger, wrath, malice, slander, and foul talk from your mouth"). (132) Contrary to Gal. 1:18 ("Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him 15 days"), three different NT accounts found in Acts 9, 22, and 26 state that Paul went to Jerusalem shortly after he left Damascus, not 3 years later. (133) In Phil. 4:3 ("...help those women which labored with me in the gospel....") and Rom. 16:3 ("Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my helpers in Christ Jesus....") Paul seems to have ignored his admonition in 1 Tim. 2:12-13 ("I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve...."). (134) And lastly, in Acts 21:21-24, 26 Paul practiced deception by pretending to uphold the law by purifying himself with four men.

The final major category of Paul's failings involves misinterpretations of biblical verses and is a little harder to follow. (135) In Rom. 15:3 ("For even Christ pleased not himself: but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me") Paul misinterpreted Psalm 69:9. The "me" referred to in Psalm 69:9 is David; he is speaking, not Jesus. (136) In Heb. 1:5 ("...I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?") Paul misinterpreted and misapplied 2 Sam. 7:14 ("I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the stripes of the children of men"). (a) In 2 Sam. 7:14 God is saying he will call Solomon, not Jesus, his son. (b) How could Jesus commit iniquity which Paul omitted. It must be referring to a mere mortal like Solomon. (c) Certainly God would not beat Jesus with a rod, cause stripes to be put on him, or threaten to chasten him with stripes. (137) In Rom. 4:17 ("As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations") Paul correctly quoted Gen. 17:4 but incorrectly interpreted Gen. 17:4 in the prior related verse, Rom. 4:16 ("...the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all"). Gen. 17:4 says "many" not "all" nations. Abraham was not the father of us all. Many other tribes and peoples lived before and during his time, e.g. the Egyptians (Gen. 12:12) and the Amorites (Gen. 14:7). (138) Paul made a major error by incorrectly applying "seed" to Jesus in Gal. 3:16 ("Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. he saith not, and to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ"). (a) "Seed" in the OT was never used in the plural as Gen. 13:15-16, 15:5,13, 26:4 and 32:12 show. Seed always referred to all of one's descendants. (b) If "seed" is referring to Jesus alone, then Gen. 12:7 would mean God gave Jesus, the creator of heaven and earth, the land of Canaan as an inheritance which is absurd; Gen. 13:16 and 22:17 would mean Jesus was as numberless as the dust of the earth; Gen. 15:13 would mean Jesus and a nation of Christs would serve Egypt 400 years, and Gen. 17:9-10 would mean the covenant of circumcision was established with Jesus. (c) Why would God make a promise to Jesus to begin with since Jesus is co-existent and co-equal with God? (139) In Heb. 12:21 ("...and so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake....") Paul is referring to the fear Moses had when he stood at the base of an untouchable mountain and witnessed blazing fire, gloom, darkness, trumpets sounding, and words. Yet, Paul is using Deut. 9:19 ("For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure, wherewith the Lord was wroth against you to destroy you") which is actually referring to Moses' fear of the Lord's anger at the time he found them worshipping the Golden Calf. (140) In Heb. 6:20 ("...even Jesus made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec") Paul misapplied

Psalm 110:4 ("The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek") to Jesus. The "thou" in Psalm 110:4 is referring to David, not Jesus. (141) In Gal. 3:13 ("Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree") Paul used Deut. 21:22-23 ("And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree: his body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day,") for his own ends. (a) Deut. 21:22 is referring to a sinful man who couldn't be Jesus since the latter is supposedly sinless (1 Peter 2:22). (b) Jesus was not hanged. (c) He did not die on a tree and never remained "upon the tree" during the night. (d) Actually Paul is calling the alleged "Savior" cursed. (142) In Heb. 10:30 ("For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord") Paul quoted part of Deut. 32:35 ("Vengeance is mine, and recompense...") and falsely attributed the original comment to the Lord. The quote was actually made by someone who felt he was God's agent. (143) In Rom. 4:5-8 ("But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin") Paul misinterpreted Psalms 32:1-2 ("Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile"). (a) Just because God forgave iniquities does not mean one is saved by faith. (b) Psalms says nothing about belief or believing "on him." (c) In no sense does Psalms imply that a man's sins are forgiven because he believed or accepted something. (144) In Acts 13:30-33 ("But God raised him from the dead. And he was seen many days of them which come up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people. and we declare unto you glad tidings how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm <'...the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee'>"). Where does Psalm 2 say or where is it equivalent to saying in some distant day I will raise Jesus of Nazareth, Joseph's son, from the dead. The second Psalm does not promise that: (a) anyone will rise from the dead, (b) he who is the Son of God must rise from the dead, (c) Jesus of Nazareth is the son of God or (d) anyone risen from the dead shall be the son of God. Moreover, the Psalmist (David--Ed.) in Psalm 2:7 is speaking of himself, not Jesus. (145) In Heb. 2:6-9 Paul perverted Psalm 8:4-6. (a) The Psalmist stated that God made man, not Jesus, to have rule over all God made and God made man, not Jesus, a little lower than the angels. What the Psalmist stated has no relation to Jesus as Paul implies in Heb. 2:9. (b) Why would Jesus have been worshipped by the angels if he was made a little lower than them? (c) A crown of glory and honor was never put on the head of Jesus. (146) And lastly, in Heb. 1:8-9 Paul misinterpreted Psalm 45:7: (a) If Jesus is God or co-equal with God, would the Psalmist have addressed him with "thy God." How could Jesus, who is God, have a God? (b) Verses 45:1,8-9 show the Psalmist is speaking of a king. Jesus' garments never smelled of myrrh, aloes, and cassia. And king's daughters were never among Jesus' honorable women.

A final small category of Paul's failings concerns erroneous prophecies. (147) In 1 Thess. 4:15 ("...we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep") and 1 Thess. 4:17 ("Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord") Paul was certain that the end of the world was coming in the lifetime of his contemporaries. He expected to be snatched up bodily into heaven with other saints then living, who would, thus, never taste death. Yet, Jesus did not return in Paul's lifetime and Paul and his contemporaries were never taken up into the air. (148) Heb. 1:2 ("In these last days"), 1 Cor. 7:29 ("The time is short") and Heb. 10:37 ("For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come and will not

tarry") clearly show Paul taught his converts that Christ's coming and the end of the world were close at hand. After 2,000 years it's safe to say he erred.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #241 from CHF of Minneapolis, Minnesota

(CHF wrote letter #219 in issue #59. What follows are his observations on my response to that letter). Dear Dennis. I think you misunderstood my position as regards biblical validity. On rereading my letter to you I can see how that might be. Let me say first that although once a Christian minister, I am no longer even a Christian, but rather a convinced atheist.

The point I was trying to make in my previous letter to you was that there are in the ministry persons to whom the Bible's validity consists merely of a record of the progression of Judeo-Christian thought, that it is not God's word, nor does it dictate what one thinks, does, or believes.... The ministers of which I speak hold to the belief that life, energy, matter and order suggests a conscious intelligence, so they stay with a belief in God, and further believe that what is not yet clearly perceived awaits more light. As I said in my earlier letter, these ministers are not troubled by attacks on biblical literature; they are with you on that.

Editor's Response to Letter #241

Dear CHF. Thank you for the elucidation of your position although I don't think your earlier stance was misunderstood. As I said in response to your prior letter, liberals have abandoned many of the biblical problems associated with fundamentalism only to adopt another group of difficulties almost as fatal which I hope to cover eventually. Also, you might note my reply in last month's issue to VS, a former Lutheran minister, as well as comments in my Am. Rat. Conv. Speech.

Letter #242 from MA of Louisville, Kentucky (Part a)

Dear Dennis. I should like to offer some comments on BE Issue #2 on "The Resurrection." After quoting 1 Cor. 15:14 ("if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain") you state, "Yet, why should the Resurrection be of such significance." The supreme importance of His resurrection versus those before and after is the testimony to Who He is and God's acceptance of His sacrifice. Acts 2:22-36 speaks of Him as the Holy One who was not to see corruption. Also Romans 1:3-4 states His resurrection declared Him to be the Son of God.... I know from glancing through the issues of BE that you do not accept these doctrines. Yet, I feel it is an answer to your question as to why it is so important.

Editor's Response to Letter #242 (Part a)

Dear MA. You haven't resolved the difficulty. In the second issue I asked why the Resurrection should be of any significance since others rose before Jesus and what had Jesus ever accomplished that had not already been done. You replied that the Resurrection acted as "testimony to Who He is and God's acceptance of His sacrifice." But how does it testify to who he is? As I said earlier, others rose from the dead previously. And how on earth does it testify to God's acceptance of his sacrifice? That makes little sense and I'm confident you don't really understand what you are saying. You are merely relaying some stock answers learned in Sunday School or seminary, MA, without thinking about the import. "Speaks" in Acts 2:22-36 and "declared" in Rom. 1:3-4 are not proofs. They are merely conclusions or assertions by the Bible;

they aren't evidence. "Claims" aren't proofs. Nothing is cheaper than words. I want to know what Jesus did, what he accomplished, that was unique. The resurrection per se, proves nothing.

Letter #242 Concludes (Part b)

Rom. 6:3-10 shows why he died and that He was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father. The entire 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians states very dramatically the reason why His resurrection is so important.... Christ died for our sins, according to the scriptures, and he was buried, and He rose again the third day according to the scriptures....The apostle Paul shows that all was vain or void without the resurrection of Christ. Eph. 1:19-25 also states the reason why His resurrection is so important. Perhaps in the future I will take up the second major difficulty as cited by the 7 disagreements you allege.

Editor's Response to Letter #242 (Part b)

First, Romans 6 and 1 Cor. 15 give reasons for his death and resurrection but provide no proof. You assert that he died for our sins according to the scriptures and he rose again on the 3rd day according to the scriptures. But just because the scriptures say it, does not make it true. Moreover, others rose also. Does that mean they died for our sins? Constantly repeating what supposedly occurred isn't going to make it any truer, MA. Repetition of a favorite Christian belief lying at the core of the Apostle's Creed isn't going to make it valid. Second, you switched the topic from his resurrection to his death. Paul said it's the Resurrection that matters. The validity of Christianity rests on the fact that he supposedly rose from the dead not the fact that he supposedly died for our sins. What makes his Resurrection unique? Third, why did you mention Eph. 1:19-23 which does not add to or strengthen your case? Fourth, if you decide to "take up the second major difficulty as cited..." you'd better construct a position that's considerably more reasonable than the first. And lastly, just as a point of clarification, why do you call Paul, "the Apostle Paul," when he was no more one of the 12 apostles than Mark, Luke, Nicodemus, or John the Baptist who appear to have been closer to Jesus than Paul?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #243 from DH of Duluth, Minnesota

Dear Dennis. Thanks for taking on the monumental task of researching your topics for us. BE is the most useful tool available for those of us who enjoy a good debate.

Letter #244 from HLM of Bellbrook, Ohio

Dear Mr. McKinsey. Of all the atheist associations that I've been invited to join in recent days, yours is the most compatible with my way of thinking. Your sample copy of BE was, if you'll forgive me, a touch of heaven. My interests, like your own, lie mainly in pointing out the fallacies and absurdities of a book that modern man has been raised to accept as history.

Since I am the only atheist in my family (I am single), a newsletter like yours could help bridge the theist/atheist gap better than any other publication I can think of. This is because you not only get at the root or foundation of religion, but you also provide a public forum for your critics. I would not feel the least bit nervous about placing BE in the holy hands of a theist....

Letter #245 from Mark Potts, Wilson Hall #203, NS Univ, Tahlequah, Oklahoma 74464

Dear Dennis. According to Luke 7:36-50, after a sinful woman had anointed Jesus' feet, he announced to her that "Thy faith hath saved thee" (verse 50). If people could be saved before the Crucifixion, why was Jesus' death necessary?

In Matt. 5:8 Jesus blesses "the pure in heart." But there are no such people, for "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9).

In Rom. 1:20 Paul says that God's nature is evident in physical reality. Yet, in Rom. 8:20-22 he says that physical reality is corrupt. (Creationists interpret this passage to mean that). Does this mean that God's nature is corrupt or that the godly parts of physical reality are mixed up with the corrupt parts? Because the natural man is oblivious to spiritual things (1 Cor. 2:14), and even the Christian sees through the glass darkly (1 Cor. 13:12), how could we distinguish between the godly parts and the corrupt parts?....

Editor's Response to Letter #245

Dear Mark. You have again demonstrated an exceptional ability to strike at the foundation of biblical theology. If that organization of skilled and knowledgeable anti-biblical experts which I seek ever comes to fruition, you should apply for membership. You are clearly in tune with the philosophy, strategy, and intent of this publication. As today's youth would say, "I like where you are coming from; you have got the hang of it." Your problem concerning the sinful woman is especially perceptive and escaped my attention. Be careful, though. Don't strain verses to obtain the interpretation you prefer. Your third example hinges on Rom. 8:20-22 and I'm not sure biblicists would agree with your depiction of their interpretation. Exegesis can easily lapse into eisegesis.

Letter #246 from BN of Mary Esther, Florida

Thanks Dennis. Not only are you providing a much needed service to us who have long ago put "the book" in its proper place--pure poppycock--but for those people who are riding the fence and just don't quite know how to put it all in perspective. I know for a fact that several of my acquaintances have been swayed over to our side somewhat after reading your periodicals. Keep the fire burning.

Letter #247 from RK of Ruston, Louisiana

Dear Dennis. Regarding the BE strategy described in recent issues, the reasonable atmosphere required for true effectiveness would seem really attainable only by a consummate pro like yourself. For us less well-versed types, initiating the dialogue on the biblicists' favorite high ground (morality) might prove a more effective approach.

For instance, if a free thinker begins a discussion by piously and self-righteously suggesting that he can not morally accept a book which embraces the concept of a human sacrifice to a god, or which advocates, as an intimidation, the forced cannibalism of one's own children, or which condones slavery, the murdering of first-borns, etc., it is usually the biblicist who suddenly calls for reasonableness and rationality. At that point the subject of errancy just seems to naturally work itself in in a more receptive atmosphere.

Editor's Response to Letter #247

Dear RK. I appreciate your kind accolade but just can't agree with your strategy. There is no substitute for knowledge and no short cut to success. In order to be effective we have to know

the book as well as its proponents and undue concentration on one issue while ignoring or de-emphasizing hundreds of others is doomed to failure. Since time immemorial freethought advocates have relied too much upon the immorality and inhumanity contained within the OT to carry the day. The fundamental flaw in this approach lies not only in the fact that it's restrictive and biblicists have several replies, but also that the argument, in essence, is based more on emotion than logic. BE has always relied more on the head than the heart. We have always had an innate aversion to emotional appeals to feelings and arguments founded on the "that's just not kind or decent" approach.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Although increasing numbers of people are adopting BE's assertive approach, several have expressed a need for an index to BE's topics. Biblicists at the door or elsewhere can not be adequately shown the error of their ways if one can't access crucial information on a moment's notice. BE has become so voluminous that I, too, can't remember where some topics are located. For this reason we hope to create comprehensive and detailed indexes noting every location of each topic and verse. Unfound information is lost opportunity. As I've learned on the radio, if it can't be quickly retrieved, it might as well not exist.

Many readers have also expressed a need for a pamphlet with 10 or 20 of "BE's BEST" that can be handed out to biblicists as occasions arise. We hope to create a document of this nature soon. Let us know your favorites.

Issue No. 63

Mar. 1988

COMMENTARY

Over four years ago BE instituted a policy of periodically devoting an entire issue to correspondence from readers. Because the number of letters has grown to substantial proportions, this issue, as well as that to follow, will mark a renewal of that program.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #248 {An audio tape} from JW of Alpha and Omega Ministries in Phoenix, Arizona (Part a)

(On pages 2 and 3 of our 43rd Issue we commented on Robert Morey's description of BE on page 27 of his book, *The New Atheism*. Morey later appeared on a call-in radio program hosted by one of BE's fundamentalist subscribers, JW, of Alpha and Omega Ministries. The following dialogue with respect to BE actually went out over the air to an unsuspecting public.

JW: "...Dennis McKinsey also mentioned your book as I recall in his publication."

Morey: "Yes, he did. And, again, this is another logical fallacy. Every book ever printed as far as I know has at least one or two typographical errors. When you have someone doing the type-setting maybe they do "hte" instead of "the." Well, typographical errors logically have nothing to do with the arguments presented in the book. So McKinsey simply focused on the fact that there were several typographical errors. The problem with his arguments is that in the very edition of his magazine in which he swept away my book as not being worth reading because of typographical errors he himself had some typographical errors, I believe, concerning Geisler's book."

JW: "Yes, I think I was the one who pointed that out to you. He had the wrong title for False Gods of Our Time."

Morey: "Well, you see this is the problem. Someone says your arguments are invalid because you are mean or because you are proud. What logically does that have to do with that? Absolutely nothing! When atheists descend to slinging the mud and attacking your character it's because they cannot refute your arguments. And the fact of the ad hominem ferocious arguments that were given in the article simply made me deliriously happy for I know I must have zinged him good (Laughter from JW--Ed.) and he couldn't take the heat so he lashed back irrationally using ad hominem arguments."

Editor's Response to Letter #248 (Part a)

If anyone ever sought proof of perfidious prevarication by fabricating fundamentalists, this is it. Virtually nothing in Morey's malediction has anything to do with reality. For JW to have allowed this nonsense to be broadcast over the air says almost as much about his character and integrity as that of Morey. Fortunately, the whole situation can be easily checked for reliability. One need only read page 27 in Morey's book and pages 2 & 3 in BE's 43rd Issue to see the duplicity. Morey appears to have been relying on the assumption that few of JW's radio listeners had read both and thus would not be on guard. The most obvious deceptions are: First, Morey said, "McKinsey simply focused on the fact that there were several typographical errors" in his book. One need only read BE to see this wasn't even a significant consideration. In fact, the only reference to an error of this nature was in a final incidental comment at the end of over 1 1/2 pages of monologue. The very last sentence said, "Incidentally, in case someone should ask, the name of the publication is BIBLICAL ERRANCY not THE BIBLE ERRANCY." Second, I mentioned only one error of this kind not several. Third, BIBLE rather than BIBLICAL is not a typographical error. Somebody actually missed the name of the publication as I did with Geisler's work. Typing errors rarely create other words, especially when several letters are involved. Fourth, Morey accused BE of having "some typographical errors" "in the very edition" of BE which accused his book of having some typographical errors. Although I did refer to Geisler's book as False Gods in Our Time rather than False Gods of Our Time I would not consider our mistakes of equal significance. Fifth, where did I say or even imply that Morey's book was "not worth reading because of typographical errors?" Sixth, Morey referred to "arguments presented in the (his--Ed.) book." What arguments? Page 27 in his The New Atheism is little more than a tirade against some freethought advocates with opinions, judgments, and conclusions masquerading as arguments and evidence. The only point made that might be considered justifiable (MM O'Hair does not want people to read the Bible) has nothing to do with BE or the validity of its evidence. Seventh, he said BE had "some typographical errors." Could he provide others? As it stands, he has made an accusation without providing proof. Furnishing evidence should be very easy if it exists. If typographical errors are in that edition I'd like to know where. If they aren't, then an apology is in order. Eighth, where did BE say or imply "you are mean" or "you are proud"? To the contrary, on page 3 of Issue #43 I specifically said, "I haven't impugned your motives, denigrated your integrity, or implied you'd do anything to spread the Bible." After hearing Morey on the radio, however, I've changed my mind. On page 27 he accused me of doing "whatever was necessary to undermine the trustworthiness of the Bible." After listening to him in action, I've concluded the reverse is true. He'll do whatever is necessary to prop-up the Book. Ninth, Morey accused atheists of descending "to slinging the mud and attacking your character" because "they cannot refute your arguments" when that's precisely what he practiced with reckless abandon. In his book he accused me of resorting to "ad hominem ferocious arguments" when, in truth, on one page alone he accused freethought advocates in general and me in particular of being fueled by such ignoble motives as bitterness, irrational rage, hatred, and an angry spirit as well as being obsessed, promoting a crusade,

operating on expediency, exhibiting irrational hatred, doing superficial research, and twisting scripture. He has a remarkably strong propensity to accuse others of precisely that which he is most guilty. Tenth, he accused me of being unable to refute his arguments when, in fact, if he had presented any I would have been glad to have addressed them. And lastly, for him to say I "couldn't take the heat" when he's figuratively feeding Dante's Inferno seems rather incongruous.

Letter #248 Concludes (Part b)

(On another radio broadcast on a different topic JW said the following to his listeners--Ed.).

"There is a book put out by Zondervan by Gleason Archer called Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties. Now interestingly enough Mr. McKinsey enjoys taking pot-shots at Gleason Archer and his publication. Normally the pot-shots are way off the mark but that's the nature of the animal that you are dealing with when you are dealing with this subject. But this Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties will address the major supposed contradictions found in the scriptures. Not all of them. I've found a couple that people have dug up that were not addressed by Dr. Archer in his book. But it is a hardback book and very worth your while to add to your library. Another good book...."

Editor's Response to Letter #248 (Part b)

Several of JW's comments need to be addressed: First, "pot-shots" is a pejorative term and should be withdrawn unless he is willing to admit he takes "pot-shots" at BE. Second, could he provide examples of our mistaken criticisms of Archer's Work since he told his audience we are normally "way off the mark." I'd prefer evidence rather than unsubstantiated allegations. Third, "animal" is another derisive term that should be withdrawn unless he is willing to include himself. Scientifically speaking, I think every living thing is an animal unless he is putting himself into the vegetable category. Fourth, Archer's book certainly does not confront all "the major supposed contradictions found in the scriptures." It doesn't even come close. In so far as I am aware, there is no book in the English-speaking world that exhausts the subject. Although not a book, BE, is the most comprehensive source available, but it, too, currently falls short of exposing all the major biblical problems that exist. Contrary to biblicist propaganda, which seeks to minimize the number of problems and give the impression they aren't fatal, there is no single source, either pro or con, addressing all the major biblical problems. And finally, JW should know that I have no objection to him discussing BE on the radio or anywhere else for that matter nor am I primarily concerned with what is said. However, common decency and a sense of fair play would obligate him to send me a tape or written copy of any program or writing of his in which BE is criticised. I recently had the feeling that I would not have received some written and audio material if I had not learned of its existence and requested copies.

[TO BE CONTINUED]

Letter #249 from DM of Long Beach, California

Dear Dennis. On one or two occasions you have stated that modern translations have a tendency to eliminate discrepancies which are accurately rendered in the KJV. Can you give me some hard data on this point with respect to such recognized translations as the NEB, the TEV, the NOAB and the JB. I'm under the impression that the modern scholarly works are a distinct improvement over the KJV in terms of accuracy.

Editor's Response to Letter #249

Dear DM. I've never said, "modern translations have a tendency to eliminate discrepancies which are accurately rendered in the KJV." What I have said is that the Bible is a political document and some modern translations have resolved difficulties found in the KJV by changing words and phrases which other modern translations have left untouched. Repeated alterations of this nature to reduce surprise, project a point of view, or resolve conflicts have led me to the unavoidable conclusion that many changes are based more on political expediency than objective scholarship. Unfortunately, without the autographs--the original writings which are assumed to have existed--there is no way to conclusively prove my thesis any more than proponents of a particular version can prove they have created a precise reproduction of the original. An excellent example to corroborate my theory is found in 1 Sam. 6:19 where the number of people God killed because of a minor infraction varies widely from version to version: 50,070 (KJV, ASV, NWT, NASB, Masoretic Text), 70 (JB, BB, NEB, NAB, LB, TEV, RSV, NIV), and 50 to the 1,000 (Mod. Lang.). A very revealing footnote in the NIV says, "70 according to a few Hebrew manuscripts; most Hebrew manuscripts and the Septuagint say 50,070." Another revealing footnote in the RSV says the Hebrew has "of the people 70 men, 50,000 men." Notice that the KJV, in conjunction with most Hebrew manuscripts (assuming the NIV's composers are correct) has an incredible figure. Regardless of the scholars or manuscripts (assuming one can read Greek and Hebrew) one accepts as most accurate, other scholars will disagree.

A good, quick test from BE's perspective to judge the philosophy of any version is to see how Isaiah 7:14 has been translated. The less political and more objective versions translate the Hebrew word "almah" as a "young woman," "maid," "maiden," etc. rather than a "virgin." Another good test is to look at Ex. 20:13 and Deut. 5:17 to see if the 6th Commandment has been rendered, "Thou shalt not kill" or "Thou shalt not murder." Versions based more on politics nearly always opt for the latter. However, these are rough rules-of-thumb rather than iron-clad maxims. Of all the versions with which I am acquainted the RSV of 1946/52 appears to be the most reliable, although it, too, has drawbacks. This is always the problem when you prepare to discuss or debate the Bible. First, you have to agree on what most accurately represents the originals--assuming they ever existed. What is the Bible and where is it? It's hard to debate a book that does not exist and no one living has ever seen. That's quite a trick! You start debating translations and versions which have been derived from manuscripts which purport to be accurate copies of the originals. This, in turn, leads to disagreements over which manuscripts are the most accurate and since scholars can't agree, we are left with differing versions and translations which have been derived from manuscripts in dispute. One of the major failings of those who think nearly all problems can be resolved by going back to the Greek and Hebrew is that they're convinced their analyses of manuscripts or that of scholars with whom they agree are the most correct, even though other reputable experts disagree. The kill/murder example discussed some time ago with JW of Alpha and Omega Ministries is a classic example. After having explained to him the fallacy of his approach, he still refuses to either recognize or acknowledge his problem. Apparently he is erroneously assuming I'm merely creating a rationalization for not learning Greek and Hebrew in depth. Having passed a college proficiency test in German and having obtained the ability to read Spanish, French, and Russian at the sophomore level in high school, I seriously doubt Greek and Hebrew would present substantial obstacles. No, my real reason for not concentrating on these languages is that difficulties simply aren't resolved. As I've said before, I could become the world's greatest Greek/Hebrew scholar and still find knowledgeable opponents on many points.

Letter #250 from BWF of Louisa, Kentucky (Part a)

Dear Dennis. As an ardent BE fan, I was recently reviewing Issue #29 on "False Teachings." Having done some study of the book of Job, I noticed a couple of citations on page 2 from Job: (e) was Job 36:11-12 ("If they {Kings--Ed.} hear and serve Him, They shall end their days in

prosperity, and their years in pleasures....") and (j) was Job 36:13-14 ("But the hypocrites in heart heap up wrath.... They die in youth and their life is among the unclean"). Certainly these quotes are vulnerable to sarcastic dismissal by BE in terms of reality. But these two are allegedly from the lips of Elihu, one of the stricken Job's "comforters." Are these fair to cite, since in Job 42:7 ("You have not spoken of me what is right") Yahweh himself castigated Eliphaz and his two friends (one of which was apparently Elihu--Ed.). True, Elihu is not specifically named (since his speeches are now usually considered as later interpolations), but readers do consider Elihu as speaking against Yahweh's intentions. Thus, is it "cricket" to quote them among "False Teachings"?

Editor's Response to Letter #250 (Part a)

Dear BWF. You have been a strong supporter of BE for many years and your comments are always welcome. However, I don't see a problem. Your observation that verses 11-14 in the 36th chapter of Job were uttered by Elihu is correct but I see no reason to doubt their truthfulness from a biblical perspective. If they are invalid then prior verses 36:3-6 which were also uttered by Elihu are false too. They assert that God is righteous, perfect in knowledge, mighty in strength and wisdom, and does not preserve the wicked. Verse 26 says the number of God's days are incalculable. If one is false, why aren't the others? Why make a distinction? In verse 2 Elihu said he was speaking on God's behalf and if 5 of his subsequent verses are false, why aren't the rest? Secondly, when God accused Eliphaz and his two friends of not speaking of God what is right, I assumed Elihu was one of the friends and what he said in Job 36 was not included. If it was meant to be included, then I'd say you have exposed a rather significant contradiction. Elihu gave a very pro-God speech in Job 36 only to be told by God in Job 42:7 that he had not spoken of God "the thing that is right."

Letter #250 Concludes (Part b)

Not as clearcut as the Elihu verses but perhaps worth a mention here, are your citations of Job 27:14 and 27:16-17 on page 1 under (b). In traditional versions these do appear to come from the lips of Job himself. But according to Peake's commentary and the studies by W.B. Ewing and Samuel Terrian, etc. much of chapter 27 should be regarded as actually portions of the missing "third speech" of Zophar, another one of the ironic "comforters" condemned by Yahweh....

Editor's Response to Letter #250 (Part b)

You have just provided some evidence as to why I have never given much credence to apologetic commentaries, BF. If, contrary to traditional versions, Peake, Ewing, and Terrian consider someone other than Job to be the author of part of the 27th chapter, then they should read the first verse ("Moreover, Job continued his parable and said") of the chapter. Why do they arbitrarily assume Job ceased to speak at some point in the chapter? There is nothing in the narrative that would lead one to believe another speaker took over. Chapter 28 appears to be a continuation of Job's monologue in chapter 27 and this belief is buttressed by the fact that the first verse of chapter 29 says, "Moreover Job continued his parable and said."

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #251 from VEC of Hood River, Oregon

Dear Dennis. I just finished reading Issue #62 and found the good news about the pending indexing of BE's topics. I'm not a student of the Bible and don't want to spend the time and effort to become one. A cross index would really be appreciated.

Editor's Response to Letter #251

Dear VEC. You should know that the creation of a comprehensive index to BE at this time is entirely dependent upon a friend of mine who has volunteered his services. I simply don't have the time. However, I did manage to write 20 of BE's Best for small tracts to be handed out to biblicists. But that won't come to fruition unless I can find a printer willing to operate at considerably less cost than I've been offered.

Letter #252 from DB of Lima, Ohio (Part a)

I am glad to hear of your plans for a pamphlet which would include the 10 or 20 strongest points BE's made against the Bible. Such a pamphlet sure would have come in handy last December when I was preparing to debate two Jehovah's Witnesses. On the other hand, lacking such a thing I was forced to make my own and learned much in the process. This learning was tested in what turned into a three hour debate. I was amazed at my opponent's utter unfamiliarity with the most glaring of Biblical contradictions (such as the two different orders given for the creation of man and the beasts in Gen. 1 and 2), they were obviously embarrassed that an unbeliever seemed to know the Bible better than they did. Clearly, they were of the opinion that anyone who read the Bible had to be convinced of its truth. The fact that I had read it and knew it better than they did--yet still didn't believe--was, I think the greatest jolt I gave their mindsets.

Editor's Response to Letter #252 (Part a)

Dear DB. I know the feeling having experienced it on numerous occasions. Many of the Bible's strongest proponents are not only quite unfamiliar with its problems and contradictions but live under the delusion that to know the Book is to accept its contents. Incidentally, the word "unbeliever" is a negative trap which biblicists have subtly taught others to apply to themselves. They are the unbelievers, not us. In far too many instances, they have ceased to believe in reason, common sense, and proofs and chosen faith, miracles, and superstition instead.

Letter #252 Continues (Part b)

As for the specific contradictions which had the greatest impact, the following 4 rated highest: (a) Rom. 1:3 and Rev. 22:16 say Jesus is the offspring of David, but Matt. 1:20 says Mary conceived Jesus of the Holy Ghost and not of Joseph, David's alleged descendant. (b) Matt. 10:35-36 quotes Jesus as saying he means to turn people against their parents and Luke 14:26 has Jesus demanding that his disciples hate their parents. Yet, Col. 3:20 says we should obey our parents in all things, and, of course, Ex. 20:12 tells us to honor our parents. (c) Gen. 9:6 quotes God as saying that whoever sheds man's blood shall have his blood shed by man. Ex. 2:11-12 tells us that Moses killed an Egyptian. Yet, Moses' blood wasn't shed in turn. (d) 2 Chron. 22:2 says Ahaziah was 42 years old when he began to reign, while 2 Kings 8:26 says he was 22.

The first three contradictions were answered poorly, but the answers were seemingly still good enough for my opponents, if for no one else. The last left them speechless. It is to-date the strongest single contradiction I know of in the Bible. Either Ahaziah was 22 or 42--no legalistic quibbling or special pleading can get around that. And while there is another Ahaziah in the Bible, 2 Chron. 22:2 and 2 Kings 8:26 are part of passages full of too many parallel details for anyone to claim they refer to two different people. If Ahaziah was 42, this would make him older than his father Jehoram (2 Chron. 21:16-20)--an interesting enough contradiction, which I learned from BE, but no contradiction at all to diehard literalists, who can hypothesize odd adoption scenarios and unstated time gaps between Jehoram's death and Ahaziah's coming to power--the two events which define their relative ages. If I could vote for but a single contradiction to be a

part of your planned pamphlet, it would be 2 Chron. 22:2 versus 2 Kings 8:26. Anyone confronted with it (in either the King James or RSV editions) must either admit the Bible is not 100% true or argue 22=42 and thus suffer being dismissed as mad.

If you have ever mentioned this contradiction, I'm sorry I missed it and apologize for belaboring a point you're familiar with. The closest I'm aware that you came to stating it, however, was on page 2 of Issue 23. In fact, this statement of Ahaziah being older than his father led me to the contradiction with 2 Kings as I was researching possible counter-arguments. Since what I found seems to be a less easily explained contradiction than what you published then, forgive me for tentatively concluding you were not aware of it then and perhaps still aren't.

Continuing on the assumption that I have stumbled upon an area of contradiction that has perhaps escaped your notice--and, given the length and complexity of the Bible, I am only too well aware of how easily it is to miss things in it... If, however, I have erred somewhere and am really the one who is confused, please let me know before I do our common cause damage by misstating things in some future debate.

Editor's Response to Letter #252 (Part b)

If you send many more letters like this one, DB, assuming your observations are of your own creation, you, too, should consider applying for membership in that group of anti-biblical experts which I hope to see created someday. Either you are very knowledgeable with respect to the Bible's shortcomings or a very good guesser. In mid-January I concluded that the Ahaziah (22 vs. 42) contradiction was of such import that I decided to put it among the first 3 questions to ask a Christian minister during a 4-hour debate on 50,000 watt WLW radio in Cincinnati, Ohio, on Jan. 28th. Although a fundamentalist pastor in the Church of Christ for more than 45 years, I can say without fear of exaggeration that he was excruciatingly perplexed if not flabbergasted. Oddly enough, I've known of the problem's existence for years but only realized its full potential after reading Problem Texts by Ruckman, a King James only extreme fundamentalist. You're correct; it's among the cream of the crop and probably should have been mentioned in BE a long time ago.

Letters such as yours in which freethought advocates are relating encounters and debates with biblicists have always been of immense importance to BE. Contacts by those who engage the opposition and research "possible counter-arguments" lie near the apex of our priority list. We want to know what both sides said and the outcome. Keep up the good work; people engaging biblicists are sorely needed.

Letter #253 from RH of Shreveport, Louisiana

Dear Dennis. Your speech in the last three issues of BE is an excellent summary of your work. I've sent copies to friends. The stream of errancy you are broadcasting continues to be very high quality rational thought. You are putting out a magnificent product.

Letter #254 from J and SS of Bridgewater, New Jersey

Dennis.... We find more concrete info in one edition of your publication than in a year's worth of all others we receive....

EDITOR'S NOTE: All freethought advocates are urged to submit any and all biblical questions and arguments which they have found through actual experience to be exceptionally effective vis-a-vis biblicists. Send your best and they will probably be published for all to see and use.

Issue No. 64

Apr. 1988

COMMENTARY

With this issue we'll complete a two-month analysis devoted solely to correspondence from our readers.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #248 (an audio tape) by JW of Alpha and Omega Ministries Concludes from Last Month (Part c)

JW: But others attack the Scriptures from another direction and that is that they say we don't have the original manuscripts and therefore you don't know what it says. In fact, and this still just completely and totally levels me, Mr. McKinsey implies numerous times in his publication that the originals never existed. Now how you get 5,000 copies of a non-existent original I don't know and I've never figured it out. And I still can't figure it out and probably never will. This truly amazes me. But anyhow there are some who would say, "Hey, do you have the originals?" And then you would have to say, "No, we don't." I do not have what Paul sat down and wrote; I do not have the particular letter he wrote. I have 5,000 or more copies of it in Greek, 10,000 copies in Latin and all sorts of other different languages. But I don't have the originals. And they say, "Ah, then you don't know what the originals said." I say that's a very large jump in logic from saying we don't have the originals to saying we don't know what it said. We have manuscripts, for example, of the gospel of John that go back within a generation of the originals. And that is an unbelievably close period of time in comparison with any other ancient documents at all.... The whole subject of NT textual criticism is, of course, fascinating and there are a number of good books on it. But it is amazing how people will take pot shots at the accuracy of the Bible, people who know almost nothing about the Bible and its transmission. Without going deeply into the subject I can assure you that what you are reading is unbelievably accurate in comparison to any other ancient document. And there is nothing in the Christian faith that depends on any disputed passage whatever, nothing at all.

Now you compare modern translations and you say, "Well, I see differences between translations." You have got to be careful when you are talking about that. We are English-speaking people; we are reading an English translation and obviously if I sit down and someone else sits down and we both know Greek and we translate a passage it's not going to come out exactly the same because I'm going to choose different words than he. I'm going to put things in a different order than he does. That does not mean either one of our translations is wrong or inaccurate. They are just simply translations.... We are here to talk about the fact that what you have in your hand, if you have the NIV, the NAS, or any of these modern translations is an excellent, excellent resource. It reflects the originals so closely as to not have any effect on the meaning of the passages at all. In fact, there is hardly any other book at all that can boast the massive number of scholars involved in the translation and the care of the manuscripts and of the writing itself.

Editor's Response to Letter #248 (Part c)

Again, JW, you have relayed information to your radio audience that is erroneous and/or misleading for many reasons. First, you accuse me of saying, "we don't have the original manuscripts and therefore we don't know what it says." You should have inserted "for sure" at

the end of my alleged comment. We may have accurate copies of the "alleged" original but there is no way of knowing for sure. I'm glad you said, I "implied" the original never existed because I've never directly said its mythical. The burden of proof lies on he who alleges. Those who believe it existed are obligated to prove it did. I don't have to prove it didn't. As in the case of Jesus Christ, I don't have to prove he didn't exist; they have to prove he did. After all, they are the ones who brought up the name. Second, you ask, "How do you get 5,000 copies of a non-existent original" as if that proved the original existed. As far as I'm aware none of these 5,000 copies claims to be an exact copy of any other writing. So why couldn't they be independent creations by different authors discussing the same events? This could easily account for the 200,000 variances between manuscripts. Do you realize how many different encyclopedias there are? Collier's, the World Book, the Encyclopedia Britannica, the Encyclopedia Americana, Random House and the New Columbia are only some of those available. Are you saying that because they generally say the same thing and deal with the same topics, they must have a common source? The same question could also be asked of similar dictionaries, atlases, cookbooks, and school textbooks. I've been on several school textbook selection committees and couldn't see a dimes worth of difference among the many choices available. Third, your 5,000 copies are alleged to be copies of the original, JW. That does not mean they are. You keep leaving out the key words, "alleged" and "purported." You accept as fact that which can't be definitively proven. If you didn't have the incredibly large number of variances among manuscripts, if they all had the same wording, there would be much less in the field of textual criticism, a dramatic reduction in exegetical conflict, and a far more valid reason for assuming there was an original autograph. But, a multitude of differences do exist so we can never know the original wording for sure. Fourth, you said, "That's a very large jump in logic from saying we don't have the originals to saying we don't know what it said." In fact, a couple of large jumps were made by you when you assumed the original must have existed and we definitely know what it said. Fifth, regardless of how far back the gospel of John, or any other gospel for that matter, goes, we still don't have the autographs. That's a fact you just can't avoid no matter how hard you try and no matter how much you reassure your listeners that they are getting it "straight from the Almighty's mouth." Assuring your audience that what they "are reading is unbelievably accurate in comparison to any other ancient document" is deceptive not only because you subtly avoided saying it was inerrant or perfectly true but also because you compared it to writings which are not claiming to be God's word or inerrant. To say it's "unbelievably accurate" is not to say it's perfect. In effect, you are conceding mistakes may exist. And how do know what's true once you begin to admit certain parts are false? Where do you draw the line? God's word is not to be compared to other ancient writings to determine its credentials; it's to be compared to perfection. And by that criteria every writing available clearly fails. Sixth, you consider yourself knowledgeable in textual criticism but made the stunning statement that, "there is nothing in the Christian faith that depends on any disputed passage whatever. Nothing at all." Many examples easily disprove that comment. For example: (a) In some versions 2 Tim. 3:16 says "all scripture is inspired by God and profitable...." while others say "all scripture that is inspired by God is profitable...." The latter clearly does not say all scripture is inspired but implies some scripture is not inspired. (b) In some versions 1 Cor. 5:7 says, "For Christ, our paschal lamb, has been sacrificed" while the KJV says, "For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us." That Christ allegedly died for us is a crucial Christian doctrine. By omitting "for us" a large group of Christians are left without a gospel of substance. (c) In some versions Isa. 7:14 says, "Behold a virgin shall conceive..." while others say, "Behold a young woman or maiden shall conceive...." Thus some versions clearly remove an extremely important verse, indeed the only prophetic OT verse, in favor of the Virgin Birth. (d) In some versions Rom. 9:5 says, "...and from them is traced the human ancestry of Christ, who is God over all, forever praised" while others say, "...according to the flesh, is the Christ. God who is over all be blessed for ever." The clash here is all too obvious. One says Christ is God; the other does not. A period makes all the difference. (e) In some versions 1 Tim. 6:10 says, "For the love of money is the

root of all evil" while in others it says, "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil." There is a big difference between being "a" root and "the" root. There is also a big difference between "all evil" and "all kinds of evil." The latter could easily be omitting some kinds of evil. Many other major examples are available which will be listed in a future commentary. The number of minor variances among versions are far too numerous to cover. And lastly, your attempt to minimize or rationalize the differences between translations is rather transparent, JW. Obviously people will choose different words and place them in different sequences. That isn't the problem. The crucial aspect lies in the fact that the meanings are different. The messages diverge; the essence of that which is conveyed conflicts markedly. That's what matters; that's the real problem. Your belief that differences among modern translations do "not have any effect on the meaning of the passages at all" is erroneous to say the least. Your comment that "any of those modern translations is an excellent, excellent resource" flies in the face of the fact that they not only differ on many important points but include the NWT (New World Translation) of the Jehovah's Witnesses which you, yourself, have denounced as quite unreliable. Or, are you now agreeing with its translation of John 1:1 ("In the beginning the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a God") which says Jesus was not god but "a" god.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #255 from LWC of Lufkin, Texas

Dear Dennis. As a new subscriber to BE I am most favorably impressed particularly with "Strategy" as outlined in Issue #59. The technique of nonconfrontational, but persistent, attacks on bible credibility using the bible itself as the source would in my opinion be devastating to the bible believer. Before embarking on this course of action, however, one must do one's homework thoroughly as you point out. In that regard, does BE sponsor workshops or seminars to provide training in the proper use of this technique? If so, please send me some literature as I would be very interested in attending....

Editor's Response to Letter #255

Dear LWC. As of now we do not sponsor any training programs although they certainly will be implemented whenever possible. That's only one of more than 10 major programs I'd like to activate. All subscribers, including yourself, will be apprised when anything is undertaken. Your letter is very complimentary although the word "nonconfrontational" would not be applicable to this publication. We believe in direct, head-on confrontations in their ballpark, their book.

Letter #256 from KG of Champaign, Illinois

Dennis. I can't help but feel all your noble effort is in vain because you are asking irrational, unobjective people such as religionists, to be rational and objective, in short, to think! Something they don't know how to do because religion discourages free-thought. Is it evident to you that any of your religious readers have rejected their beliefs?... Sure one can get into complicated philosophical positions, and one can attempt to rationalize it all, but it's all redundant because religion is founded on irrational human emotion and ignorance, very difficult concepts to overcome. It's a lot easier to let mom, dad, or god tell you what to think...than it is to take care of yourself.... What your "ministry" is doing is very important.... I don't knock it at all. I just think it's too logical and systematic for most people to grasp. Please pardon my cynical ramblings.

Letter #257 from JRC of East Brunswick, New Jersey

Dear Dennis. Your publication continues to excel and your research is commendable. There are far less errors in BE than that rag you disillusionize. You have my deepest respect. Attacking the fundamentalists in their own backyard is probably one of the more effective ways of debunking their beliefs to a rational mind. However, we are not dealing with rational minds. Any arguments used against these people are likely to fall on deaf ears. That has certainly been my experience and from all I have seen and heard I am sure others have felt the same frustration. Publications like BE are, without doubt, of the utmost importance to those on the borderline of joining a sect or cult, or those with minds that still ask questions concerning their religion....

Letter #258 from JW of Chillicothe, Ohio

Dear Dennis. Can't tell you how refreshing it was to hear you on WLW Cincinnati radio last week. I didn't know if you were still bashing away at the idiocy in the world or not; you must be a real trooper.... You did an admirable job with Gaston, the minister.... Debating someone of his ilk is much like trying to carry on an intelligent conversation with a brick wall.... Again, keep up the good work. I know how frustrating it is to try to reason with a bunch of flaming churchy types and the "Satan" worshippers types aren't any better. They're all nuts.

Editor's Response to Letter #258

Dear JW. Your letter, as well as #256 and #257 which preceded yours, reflect one of the most, if not the most, common detraction made of this publication by sympathetic readers; namely, you just can't reason with biblicists. They are irrational, brainwashed, narrow-minded, and mentally ill. Pursuing a sensible, logical conversation with them is a waste of time. Your phrase, "a brick wall," seems to sum it up for many. I'm constantly confronted with this observation by people in the freethought movement. While at a freethought meeting recently I was asked if I really thought I was changing anyone through BE. Did I really think I could persuade religious believers in general and Bible-believers in particular. My response was an immediate, "Of course! I not only can; I have. Moreover, I venture to say that not one person at this rather large gathering did not come out of a religious background or ideology. In fact, the chairman of our meeting was a former trainee for the Lutheran ministry." The whole idea that "you just can't reason with these people" is flawed in several respects. First, biblicists cover an extremely wide spectrum of beliefs and many have already rejected much of the Bible. With sufficient evidence there is no reason to assume they wouldn't reject more. Second, how would you expect people to respond when they have been given a totally one-sided presentation of the Bible all their life. Naturally they are going to be stubborn in the early stages. You are telling them that fundamental beliefs they have held for decades are flawed throughout. Surely you don't expect to be accepted with open arms? Third, how many times you talk to them, how long the conversations occur, and how poignant are the arguments presented are of crucial importance. Anyone who thinks he is going to convert people in 30 minutes from beliefs they have held for a lifetime is only deluding himself. You must give them information, allow them time to mull it over, and repeatedly come back later with more. That's how they were taught and that's how they have to be deprogrammed. It's a long process and not for those of faint hearts or short attention spans. Fourth, classifying everyone who believes in the Bible as sick is inaccurate. I've dealt with many devout biblicists who possessed good minds and logical thought processes. The problem lies in the fact that their fundamental beliefs and assumptions are wholly inaccurate. Even though one can reason correctly it's of little use if the initial premises are erroneous. Their problem reminds me of syllogisms in logic. A good relevant example is: (a) Everything the Bible says is true. (b) The Bible says we must accept Jesus as our savior in order to be saved. (c) Therefore, it logically follows that the statement that we must accept Jesus as our savior in order to be saved must be true. Given the truth of (a) and (b), then (c) must logically follow. Biblicists are intelligent enough to draw the required conclusion. The mistake in all this, of course, lies in their original

assumption (a). {b} is not the problem; {a} is. It's amazing how many Christians who call me during radio appearances have failed to catch the flaw in their line of reasoning. Their logic is usually acceptable but their assumptions, which have been subtly instilled since birth, rest on quicksand. I don't hold that against them, however. To take an extremely obvious case, Iranians, especially children, are in the same predicament. How could they know they have been entrapped. If I had complete control over the lifetime environment of anyone in the freethought movement or anywhere else, I could successfully teach them to believe people can rise from the dead, donkeys can talk, sticks can turn into snakes, and a woman can turn into a pillar of salt. There is no belief so absurd that people will not adhere to it, especially when all contrary information is excluded. And lastly, I can't help but feel there is some rationalizing going on by some freethought advocates themselves. They are trying to evade their homework. Nobody said the race would be easy; after all, biblicists have had a head start of many centuries and tremendous funding. Each person must ask himself. How much does success mean to me; how badly do I want to reach my goal? Don't be deceived into believing that revelations about corrupt ministers such as Bakker and Swaggart will do the job for us.

Letter #259 from Mark Potts, Wilson Hall #207 NSU, Tahlequah, Oklahoma 74464

(Mark, a long time adherent to BE, has some relevant comments to make in this regard--Ed.). Dear Dennis. I got the Nov. 1985 issue.... I have a comment about letter #121 from Jack Trimpey (a psycho-therapist--Ed.) who says religious faith is a "mental disorder" (4th line from the bottom).... One can find at least three models of biblicist behavior in freethought literature: (1) the psycho-medical model, where biblicists are retarded, sick, etc., (2) the moral model where they are evil, and (3) the educational models where they are ignorant and misinformed. The first two models just don't work. Regarding (1) it's beyond dispute that biblicists can function in society--unlike retardates and the behaviorally disturbed. Regarding (2) even the Bible's most severe critics have admitted that its adherents can display good behavior. As Thomas Paine himself said in the first part of *The Age of Reason*, "That many good men have believed this strange fable, and lived very good lives under that belief (for credulity is not a crime), is what I have no doubt of." However, (3) proves to be the best and most careful description of the biblicist problem. Ignorance and misinformation can be objectively measured and corrected. Therefore I view biblicists as teachable, well-intentioned people whose heads have been stuffed with nonsense. By assuming this I know what to do to lead these people to reality.

Unfortunately, the leadership of organizations like (the names of several nationally known freethought organizations have been omitted--Ed.) prefer the first two models. By emphasizing that biblicists are inherently "different" from rational people, that there's something "wrong" with them, these groups turn their religious opponents into aliens and enemies. This tendency is unfortunate, since it cuts off the opportunity for constructive dialogue about the Bible. I plan to write to Trimpey about this and to see if we can plug him into our network. He seems to understand the basic issues....

Letter #260 from Jack Trimpey of Lotus, California

(A month ago we received the following letter from Jack Trimpey--Ed.). Dear Dennis...I, too, admire Mark Pott's incisive attacks on Biblical mumbo-jumbo. I've read his remarks over the years, and his growth as a leader in the errancy movement is evident.

On the whole, I think I agree with you that turning the Bible on itself is the most constructive thing that we can do to cut humanity's losses to revealed religion.... Even so, we would better recognize that the errancy approach requires a degree of discipline and facility with abstract

reason with which not everyone is endowed. Others are more comfortable, and therefore more effective, with challenging theology on other turf, and they should be encouraged to do so.

For example, as a psycho-therapist, I can see that human disturbance is often caused and perpetuated by conscious or unconscious adherence to harmful religious doctrines, such as the concept of human decadence, divine retribution, and the Jesus complex, and I can often show clients how they can benefit enormously from rejecting Biblically-based ways of thinking. The essence of therapeutic change, then, is often overcoming religious faith, rather than discovering Biblical errors. I show the painful consequences of certain doctrines or beliefs in everyday life and then provide a rational alternative which is in the client's, rather than the church's, interest.... The spirit of humanism or atheism is conveyed without a disciplined critique of absurd scriptures. Each BE reader has strengths which can be put to good use in the service of sanity and I believe that each of us is a little saner because of your excellent publication.

Editor's Response to Letter #260

Dear Jack. Mark Potts sent you a letter in December 1985 that is quite relevant in this regard. He also sent me a copy. It said, "Although I'm glad you're taking action to counter the Bible's influence, I must further dispute your clinical model of religious behavior. Though I have no doubt biblicism can become a serious behavioral problem for some people (comparable to, say, anorexia-bulimia), I must question the validity of applying this model to ALL biblicists, for the following reasons: (a) 'Mental disorder' is a rather unfair way to characterize ideas you happen to dislike.... (b) In my cultural tradition--poor, white, Southern--people become biblicists in the same way they acquire their accent. They simply don't KNOW any better. Their self-esteem has nothing to do with it. (c) Many biblicists are intelligent people who are 'successful' and 'responsible' by commonly accepted standards. For example, at the Univ. of Tulsa, a doctorate professor of computer science once told me the Second Coming is imminent. These don't fit the stereotype of 'mentally disordered' fanatics. So, although I concede biblicism can mess up some people's lives, I seriously doubt the phenomenon can, in general, be described as a 'mental disorder.' I prefer to describe it as an example of The Big Lie. Repeat a lie often enough, in the absence of contrary information, and people will come to believe it. I suggest you've been dealing with a biased sample in your professional counseling work. It's simply not valid to extrapolate from the human wrecks you've treated to ALL biblicists.

From reading your description of Unrevival 86' I get the distinct impression you plan to deprogram the masses by MOCKING religious behavior. If that's correct, then I'm afraid you'll be wasting your time. Dennis McKinsey, who has been studying the actions of the freethought movement for some time, will tell you that ridicule simply doesn't affect most biblicists. My own experience supports this conclusion. People just don't like to be laughed at. Even assuming your model of biblicism to be correct, you must admit you wouldn't treat anorexia-bulimia by LAUGHING AT and MOCKING its victims. Perhaps I misunderstood what Unrevival 86' is all about, but at first glance it doesn't sound like something I'd want to associate either myself or BE with. These are my objections to your program. If I've missed your points, please straighten me out...."

Letter #261 from GVS of Rye, Colorado

Dear Mr. McKinsey....Since I'm a late comer to your publication I wonder if you have a list of definitions to all of your abbreviations of the different bibles that you hang on to all the quotes from these bibles...?

Editor's Response to Letter #261

Dear GVS. I apologize for assuming people would automatically know what versions my biblical abbreviations were referring to. Let me list them now. KJV (King James Version), NAS (New American Standard), NWT (New World Translation), TEV (Today's English Version), NAB (New American Bible), NEB (New English Bible), BBE (Bible in Basic English), ASV (American Standard Version), LB (Living Bible), NIV (New International Version), JB (Jerusalem Bible), RSV (Revised Standard Version), ML (Modern Language or Berkeley Version), and the MT (Masoretic Text). I own all of them and use the Layman's Parallel Bible by Zondervan Publishers, which has four versions (KJ, ML, LB, RSV) running parallel, as my basic text. It's tremendously marked up with a red ink pen.

EDITOR'S NOTE: A husband and wife team known as Brother Jed and Sister Cindy travel from campus to campus throughout the Nation preaching an emotional message of hell-fire and damnation to college students. I'm tentatively scheduled to debate Brother Jed Smock on the Ohio State University campus in Columbus, Ohio at 7:30 P.M. on April 14, 1988.

COMMENTARY

The Crucifixion--In the 2nd Issue of BE we listed most of the problems associated with the gospel narratives of the Resurrection. Of comparable import are the conflicting details concerning the prior Crucifixion. As with the Resurrection, accounts clash in many respects. (1) What color was the robe that was put on Jesus? Scarlet--Matt. 27:28 ("And they stripped him, and put on a scarlet robe") versus purple--Mark 15:17 ("And they clothed him with purple....") and John 19:2 ("...and they put on him a purple robe"). (2) When was the robe put on Jesus? During his trial--John 19:1-2, 15 ("Then Pilate took Jesus, and scourged him. And the soldiers...put on him a purple robe.... Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King?") versus after Pilate delivered him to be crucified--Matt. 27:26-28 ("Then released he Barrabas unto them; and when he had scourged Jesus he delivered him to be crucified. Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into a common hall,...stripped him and put on him a scarlet robe") and Mark 15:15-17 ("And so Pilate, willing to content the people...delivered Jesus, when he had scourged him, to be crucified. And the soldiers led him away into the hall...and they clothed him with purple"). (3) At what hour was Jesus crucified? The third hour--Mark 15:25 ("And it was the third hour, and they crucified him") versus before the sixth hour--Luke 23:43-44 ("And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise. And it was about the sixth hour....") versus after the sixth hour--John 19:14-16 ("...and about the sixth hour: and he saith unto the Jews, Behold your king! But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him.... Then delivered he him unto them to be crucified. And they took Jesus, and led him away") to be crucified later. (4) What was the inscription on the Cross? "This is Jesus the King of the Jews" (Matt. 27:37) versus "The King of the Jews" (Mark 15:26) versus "This is the King of the Jews" (Luke 23:38) versus "Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews" (John 19:19). (5) For what did the soldiers at the Cross cast lots? His garments--Matt. 27:35 ("they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots") and Mark 15:24 ("And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments, casting lots upon them, what every man should take") and Luke 23:34 ("... And they parted his raiment, and cast lots") versus his coat alone--John 19:23-24 ("Then the soldiers when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also his coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be...."). (6) What was Jesus given to drink? Vinegar--Matt. 27:48 ("And straightaway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and...gave him to drink") and Luke 23:36 ("And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him and offering him vinegar") and John 19:29-30 ("Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth. When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished....") versus vinegar mingled with gall--Matt. 27:34 ("They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall") versus wine mingled with myrrh--Mark 15:23 ("And they gave him to drink wine mingled with myrrh; but he received it not"). (7) When Jesus got the sponge filled with vinegar, who said they would see if Elijah would come to his rescue? The person who actually gave him the sponge--Mark 15:36 ("And one ran and filled a sponge full of vinegar and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink, saying, Let alone; let us see whether Elias will come to take him down") versus those with the person who gave him the sponge--Matt. 27:48-49 ("And straightaway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink. The rest said, Let be, let us see whether Elias will come to save him"). (8) How many of the thieves on the Cross reviled Jesus? One--Luke 23:39-40 RSV ("One of the criminals who were hanged railed at him,

saying, 'Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!' But the other rebuked him, saying, Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?") versus both--Matt. 27:44 RSV ("And the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way") and Mark 15:32 ("And they that were crucified with him reviled him"). (9) Who were the named women watching the Crucifixion? Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's children--Matt. 27:55-56 versus Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the less and Joses and Salome--Mark 15:40 versus Jesus' mother, his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene--John 19:25. (10) From where did the women observe the Crucifixion? From afar--Matt. 27:55-56 ("And many were beholding afar off...among which was Mary Magdalene...") and Luke 23:49 ("...and the women that followed him from Galilee, stood afar off, beholding these things") and Mark 15:40 ("There were also women looking on afar off; among whom was Mary Magdalene,....") versus near the cross--John 19:25 ("now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene").

Children--Punishment of children is one thing; child abuse is another. And, unfortunately, many biblical verses can be easily used to justify the former by means of the latter: Prov. 23:13-14 ("Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell"), Prov. 22:15 RSV ("Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him"), Prov. 20:30 RSV ("Blows that wound cleanse away evil; strokes make clean the innermost parts"), Prov. 13:24 RSV ("He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him"), Prov. 19:19 ("Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying"), Prov. 29:15 ("Thy rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother"), Prov. 26:3 ("A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's back <children are often foolish--Ed.>"), and Deut. 21:18-21 ("If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son, who will not obey the voice of his father or the voice of his mother, and, though they chastise him, will not give heed to them, then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his city...and they shall say to the elders of his city, 'This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice; he is a glutton and a drunkard. Then all the men of the city shall stone him to death with stones; so you shall purge the evil from the midst").

And, then, there are those verses which demean and degrade children by looking upon them as little more than beings to be punished for the misdeeds of others: Ex. 20:5 ("I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me"), Lev. 26:22 ("I will also send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children...."), Hosea 13:16 ("Samaria shall become desolate: for she hath rebelled against her God: they shall fall by the sword; their infants shall be dashed in pieces, and their women with child shall be ripped up"), and Isa. 13:16-18 ("Their infants will be dashed in pieces before their eyes; their houses will be plundered and their wives ravished.... Their bows will slaughter the young men; they will have no mercy on the first of the womb; their eyes will not pity children").

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #261 from JW of Alpha and Omega Ministries of Phoenix, Arizona (Part a)

Dear Mr. McKinsey. I am in receipt of the March, 1988 edition of Biblical Errancy. As seems normal for BE (having read a majority of all past issues to this point), the impression given by your handling of the material from our series on atheism on The Dividing Line Radio Program

are unfair to say the least. It wasn't so much what you said as what you did not say that matters. A few examples should suffice.

You first castigated me in your response on page #1 of Issue #63 by stating, "For JW to have allowed this nonsense to be broadcast over the air says almost as much about his character and integrity as that of Morey." Really? Am I suppose to engage in censorship on my program, Mr. McKinsey? Why is it that you did not mention anywhere in this edition of BE that you, too, appeared on our program for just as long as did Dr. Morey? Should I have edited the great amount of "nonsense" that you propounded on the air? And why did you neglect to mention that of the five guests I had on that series, three were atheists? The only Christian apologists that were part of the program (excluding myself) were Dr. Morey and Dr. Boliek. You were given every opportunity to enter into dialogue on these subjects live and direct--I do not practice attempting to "edit" live programs or debates.

Editor's Response to Letter #261 (Part a)

Dear JW. Several of your comments are wide of the mark. First, you were not being asked to engage in censorship or "editing." I would not support such activities nor was that the thrust of my remark. I wanted to know why you allowed comments to go out over the air which were unamended and uncorrected, comments you knew were inaccurate. Surely you aren't alleging lack of knowledge on your part in this regard. Don't you feel responsible to your audience and an obligation to correct inaccuracies, even when uttered by your closest compatriots. One need only read BE's back issues to see that we correct inaccuracies, or that which is viewed as incorrect, by proponents and opponents alike. We let it go out to the audience, too, but not without a response. Correcting is not "editing". You criticized where you thought I was wrong but you said nothing where you knew he was. Second, please don't try to bring in extraneous material in order to give an appearance of objectivity. We are discussing what Morey said on your radio program about BE's treatment of his book. How long Morey and I appeared on your program and the composition of your guest lists are not germane to the central issue discussed in Issue #63. I wasn't concerned with the length of time I appeared on your show or an imbalance in your guest list. Third, for you to complain about me leaving material out seems rather incongruous in view of the fact that you not only made no attempt to defend Morey's character or integrity, only your own, but you also did not attempt to defend even one of his major comments.

Letter #261 Continues (Part b)

Regarding the specific charges you made against my endorsement of Dr. Archer's book *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Zondervan). (a) "pot-shots" indicates your propensity for attacking scholarly information drawn from a variety of sources while you yourself demonstrate abject lack of scholarly training in the fields in which you make such confident assertions. Have you ever engaged Dr. Archer in direct debate? Have you corresponded with him on the topics? Have you taken the time to become equipped to deal with the Bible as it was written? If you have not, then the term "pot-shots" is an accurate description of your writings. Indeed it is a far more accurate term than your lyrical "perfidious prevarication by fabricating fundamentalists" wouldn't you say? (b) You asked for specific citations of error regarding Archer--such is too simple--the very first time you address the topic (Issue #1, page 3-5) you show your ignorance of the Hebrew term *nacham* and, as usual, did not allow for any interpretation or harmonization of the passages under consideration (i.e., you again assumed a priori that the passage was incorrect), just as I pointed out in *Letters to an Anti-Theist*, pages 31-32. Your mocking parody of Dr. Archer's discussion of paradise, etc. was equally "way off the mark" (Issue #2, page 4). To assert a contradiction in this instance you must claim omniscience for yourself, for you are only asking questions that are not directly addressed by the text itself. We don't know what color

Jesus' eyes were either, but that hardly has bearing on the issue of inerrancy. The same can be said of page 5 of this issue where you have the audacity, ignorant as you are of textual criticism and the Biblical languages, to attack Dr. Archer's brief mention of the difficulty of accuracy in transmission of numbers and proper names. Such criticism is not only "way off the mark" but it is completely outside the realm of scholarly discussion. Indeed, in reference to Archer in Issue #5, page 3, you again repeat the ludicrous idea that there were no "original" writings of the Bible! No serious scholar can give such nonsense the time of day, DM! Just where do you think those thousands of copies came from anyway? I suppose because no one alive has even seen the original of Josephus' Antiquities that the original never existed--copies just materialized over time from nothing, right? I think that should provide sufficient samples of material that is "way off of the mark." (c) Most of your readers probably can understand the phrase "but that's the nature of the animal that you are dealing with when you are dealing with this subject." "Animal" is made correlative with "subject." It clearly indicates that erroneous comments are part and parcel of dealing with anti-theists. (d) Your next criticism is ridiculous; you point out that Archer does not address all the major supposed contradictions found in Scripture. Anyone reading just what you printed would see that I had already said that. There's even this little sentence--"Not all of them." Did you miss that or something? TO BE CONCLUDED

Editor's Response to Letter #261 (Part b)

Your letters have sunk to a new low, JW. I can't think of any prior correspondence in which you have exhibited more denunciations and vilifications with less proof than this one. Pejoratives and ad hominem denunciations are replacing dispassionate scholarship and open-mindedness. Liquefied hate is dripping onto your writing. I'm reminded of the 19th century writer who said, "I hear the voice of approbation not in the dulcet sounds of praise but in the savage cries of indignation." Your errors, deceptions, and irrelevancies are many. First, you accuse me of demonstrating abject lack of scholarly training, exhibiting ignorance of textual criticism, speaking outside the realm of scholarly discussion, and making ludicrous, nonsensical, and ridiculous comments. Yet, proofs within your letter are few and far between. Much of your malediction is little more than opinions and conjectures based on an offended ego. Please leave the world of glittering generalities and present specifics. Don't criticise unless you provide chapter and verse with respect to what everyone said. Put your "proof" within the letter. Otherwise, readers are left guessing as to what's being debated and they, as well as I, are forced to do research you should have furnished. Second, you asked if I had ever corresponded with Archer or engaged him in debate. No! Nor have I so engaged scores of other apologists I have quoted at one time or another. I don't know of anyone who has; do you? Are you saying you have corresponded with and debated the people you have critiqued? You mean I must correspond with someone in order to critique his writings? Third, you ask if I have become equipped to deal with the Bible as it was written. We have debated this issue in one form or another on several occasions, JW, and we recently had two phone conversations in which it played a prominent role. Frankly, I'm beginning to conclude that no amount of evidence is going to penetrate your biblical barrier to the brain. Nevertheless, I'll try once more. Give me the text as it was written. Were, for instance, verses 9 through 20 in Mark 16 in the original? A simple yes or no will do. They either were or they weren't. We both know you have already committed yourself to a negative reply because of the pamphlet you sent me entitled, Mark 16:9-20 Scripture or Not The Evidence. But, can you name one English version of the Bible that omits them? If so, then you and it are in a lonely boat. Many manuscripts and the translators of every version with which I am acquainted have those verses in the Bible while you claim they don't belong there. Many of the translators with whom you disagree have taught in this field longer than you have been alive. You might read Dean Burgon, for example, who proves conclusively, according to many, that they do belong in the Bible. Mark 16:9-20 is only one of many examples which I will use in a later commentary to make this point. Fourth, you again accused me of

promoting "the ludicrous idea that there were no 'original' writings of the Bible." I don't often say this about someone, JW, but you have a distinct inclination toward pure hardheadedness. In your zeal to defend the faith at all costs, you are strangling receptivity while oxygenating the Bible. Despite repeated readings of page 3 in our 5th Issue, I am yet to find any statement by me that there "were no original writings." You repeatedly resurrect a point that was laid to rest years ago. To make matters worse, you completely ignored my clear statement on this topic in last month's issue. I said, "I'm glad you said, I 'implied' the original never existed because I've never directly said its mythical. The burden of proof lies on he who alleges. Those who believe it existed are obligated to prove it did. I don't have to prove it didn't." I have never said the original didn't exist. Let me repeat this since it doesn't appear to have registered. I have never said the original didn't exist. What I have said is that you "are obligated to prove it did" and so far the evidence is inconclusive. "As in the case of Jesus Christ, I don't have to prove he didn't exist; his followers must prove he did. After all, they are the ones who brought up the name." Fifth, you claim I exhibit ignorance of the Hebrew term "nacham" and didn't allow for "interpretation or harmonization." What you really mean is I didn't allow for any rationalization. Num. 23:19 ("God is not a man that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent") clearly contradicts 1 Sam. 15:11 ("It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king...."). In both verses as well as 1 Sam. 15:29 and Ex. 32:14 "repent" comes from the Hebrew word, "nacham" and one need only consult Archer's defenses and my responses, which you failed to provide or discuss, to see his explanations are weak and unwarranted. Sixth, you accuse me of engaging in "mocking parody of Dr. Archer's discussion of paradise" when his entire rationalization of the problem found in Luke 23:43 ("Today thou shalt be with me in paradise"), which you also failed to provide, is based on two "apparentlys" and one "presumably." I said, "apparently, apparently" and "presumably" which are nothing more than accurate repetitions of his comments. You don't have to be asserting omniscience to ask how Jesus could be with the thief in paradise on that day when he spent 3 days in the grave. Seventh, you accuse me of having the audacity "to attack Dr. Archer's brief mention of the difficulty of accuracy in transmission of numbers and proper names" and assert my criticism "is completely outside the realm of scholarly discussion." In fact, one need only read his explanation and my response, which you also failed to provide, to see that both are well within the tradition of apologetic defense and critical response. Eighth, the whole issue of accurate translations, the degree to which we know the original, and the role played by thousands of manuscripts will be addressed in a future commentary, since it's too voluminous to be covered here. Ninth, most readers are quite capable of understanding what you meant by animal and do not need your "obfuscating guidance" to interpret the subtleties behind the scene. They know what was implied. Tenth, why did you refer to me as DM, when everyone reading this publication knows my name. Words on the letterhead are hard to miss. I'm forced to conclude that you are engaging in unjustified mockery, JW. While you are trying to be cute I'm trying to be cautious. Years ago we printed the full names of several individuals and were reprimanded several times. Employment, status, and friendships were only some of the factors under consideration. Since then we have used initials only, unless requests are made to the contrary. If you want your full name used, just say so. That's no problem. In fact, we'll put in your address if you want. And lastly, regarding whether or not Archer addressed all the supposed major contradictions, let's read verbatim what you said in your letter. "But this Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties will address the major supposed contradictions found in the scriptures. Not all of them. I've found a couple that people have dug up that were not addressed by Dr. Archer in his book." There are hundreds if not thousands of major contradictions in the Bible and when you say there are "a couple that were dug up" that he omitted, that's tantamount to saying he covered them all. Their number is certainly far more than a couple. If you insist your sentence--"Not all of them"--is justified by a couple of exceptions, so be it. We'll let the readers judge.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #262 from John Sikos, P.O. Box 443, Romeo, Michigan 48065-0443

Dear Dennis.... When I first read Issue #43 regarding Robert Morey's book *The New Atheism*, I immediately went to the local Bible bookstore and found a copy. Your comments regarding the logical errors made by Morey in that book were 100% correct.... Obviously Morey plays to an audience he knows will never check up on the truth of his statements, an audience who will never bother to read *Biblical Errancy*. The point of my letter is this: Judging from the transcript of JW's radio broadcast and Morey's statement implying that you are "slinging the mud and attacking" people's characters, I do not think that we are dealing here with stupid, misguided people. I think they know full well that you are right and that they cannot logically defend themselves, so they must resort to deliberate, conscious, and malicious slander like this. Do you and does *Biblical Errancy* have any plans to sue JW and Morey for libel and/or slander, and also to demand equal time on JW's broadcast? I doubt that you are considering legal action, but I hope you nevertheless print parts of the above letter so that when JW and Morey see it, they will know that they'd better watch what they say in the future.... When Christians must resort to these kinds of antics on their radio broadcasts it means we are doing something right....

Editor's Response to Letter #262

Dear John. Taking legal action is not my style. We have accepted an offer by JW to reappear on his program in early May.

Letter #263 from SO of Tallahassee, Florida

Dear Dennis. In reference to your EDITOR'S NOTE in Issue #63, here are five of my favorite biblical contradictions: (1) Where did King Josiah die? He was killed at Megiddo (2 Kings 23:29-30) versus he died in Jerusalem (2 Chron. 35:22-24). (2) Did Jesus curse the fig tree before or after cleansing the Temple of the moneychangers? "After" (Matt. 21:1-19) versus "before" (Mark 11:1-15). (3) How many sons did Abraham beget? Isaac was Abraham's only begotten son (Heb. 11:17) versus Abraham had two sons (Gal. 4:22). (4) Was the veil of the Temple torn in two before or after Jesus expired on the cross? "After" (Matt. 27:50-51) versus "before" (Luke 23:44-46). (5) Did Jesus communicate face to face with the Centurion whose slave was healed or only with the centurion's representatives? Jesus spoke directly to the centurion (Matt. 8:5) versus he spoke only to his representatives (Luke 7:1).

These are five among my favorites not only because they are such obvious contradictions but because they elicit such ludicrous rebuttals from Christian apologists. It is in the quality of the rebuttals that biblicists continually reveal the absurd lengths to which they are willing to stretch credulity in order to preserve pre-conceived notions about inerrancy. It's amazing.

Letter #264 from FG of East Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Dear Dennis. As usual, BE #63 was great. I can't thank you enough for elevating my knowledge of the Bible. I can't say I've grown to despise it, but my appreciation of it has gotten to where I can't see it having authority over my life anymore.... My religious training is in the past. I'm a scientist now, and every day I try to be a better one. The training helps me in coping with people who have similar backgrounds and are into problems with science.

Letter #265 from KB of Los Angeles, California

Dear Dennis.... BE #61 arrived today. Regarding letter #239. Referring to "the original autographs" by inerrantists is usually a way to avoid commitment to any particular reading....

The variants give a breadth of interpretation that they don't want to lose if all except one were determined to be copyist errors.

Editor's Response to Letter #265

Dear KB. You're correct when you say they like the versatility that's provided by variant interpretations. As a minister I debated recently demonstrated, they can expediently leap from version to version as conditions warrant. However, like so much in life this, too, is a two-edged sword. The flexibility this generates also produces contradictions, contrasts, and conflicting interpretations which leave proponents and opponents alike decidedly perplexed.

Issue No. 66

June 1988

COMMENTARY

The Originals--Two major questions need to be addressed in regard to the alleged original writing of Scripture. First, was there an original copy of the Bible from which subsequent manuscripts were copied and, secondly, if there was such an original, and existing manuscripts are copies of that original, can we reconstruct or do we have an accurate copy of that original. In addressing the first question in prior issues we noted that although there are thousands of manuscripts with similar and nearly identical texts, there were also thousands of variations. Because of the great number of differences, one would not be wise to assume there must have been a common source. As was stated a couple of months ago, encyclopedias and cookbooks also bear a remarkable resemblance and one might assume they, too, had a common source. Although it is correct to say that the degree of similarity between biblical manuscripts is significantly higher than that between most encyclopedias and cookbooks, the difference is one of degree, not kind. It remains for believers in an original to prove it existed.

The second is even more important. Even if we assume an original existed, could one know what it said based on existing manuscripts? With thousands of variances between thousands of manuscripts, there is no way to definitely know an original's contents, despite apologetic assurances to the contrary. Hundreds of differences between translations bear witness to the fact that scholars can't agree on what various verses say, what they mean, and whether they should even be included in reconstruction of the Bible. The experts are clearly at loggerheads on many points and uncertain as to others. Unanimity is not the dominant theme by any means. Despite the uncertainty that permeates the process of translating and understanding, people are repeatedly told there is no reason to worry about the validity of translations or reconstruction of the "original."

Versions Differ (Part One of a Five-Part Series)--Within the last 4 months the editor of BE has been told by 3 professional defenders of the Bible that there is nothing in the Christian faith that depends on any disputed passage in Scripture, nothing whatsoever. Unfortunately for biblicalists there is abundant evidence to the contrary. A wide variety of differences among translations, often caused by the manuscripts from which they are derived, are readily available and, generally speaking, can be grouped into 3 broad categories: (1) Differences with respect to how a verse or part of a verse should be translated (Conflicting Translations--CT), (2) Differences on whether or not verses contradict one another (Contradictory Verses--CV), and (3) Differences on whether or not verses or part of a verse should be omitted entirely (Omitted Text--OT). The first category (CT) is undoubtedly the largest and can be divided into 2 smaller subdivisions whose lines of demarcation are admittedly gray: (a) Different renderings that go to the heart of biblical

teachings and (b) Differences among translations that range from significant to serious, but not critical. [The initials that will be used for translations are: KJ = King James Version, RS = Revised Standard Version, ML = Modern Language, AS = American Standard Version, NEB = New English Bible, NAB = New American Bible, NI = New International Version, NAS = New American Standard, TEV = Today's English Version, BBE = Bible in Basic English, NWT = New World Translation, JB = Jerusalem Bible, LV = Lamsa's Version, MT = Masoretic Text, LB = Living Bible]. Disputed translations within the first subdivision of category CT are such verses as: EX. 20:3 ("You shall not have no other gods before me"--KJ, RS, ML, AS, NAS, MT, NI) versus ("You shall have no other gods except or besides me"--JB, NAB, TEV, BBE, LV). A clash over the first commandment arises from the fact that the former group merely says you must put the god of the Bible at the top of the list. Worship of other gods is not prohibited. 1 SAM. 6:19 ("But God smote of the men of Beth-shemesh...50,070..."--KJ, AS, NWT, NAS, MT) versus ("...he slew 70 men of them"--RS, LB, JB, BBE, NEB, NAB, TEV, NI) versus ("the Lord smote 5,070 men of the people"--LV). Whether God killed 70 people or over 50,000 for a relatively innocuous act bears directly on the biblical teaching in Deut. 32:4, Psalm 9:8, etc. that God is just and righteous. Apparently this troubles scholars and accounts for the dramatic reduction in numbers in many recent translations. JOB 19:26 ("...yet in my flesh shall I see God"--KJ, LB, NI, TEV, NWT) versus ("then from or without my flesh I shall see God"--RS, ML, JB, AS, BBE, NAB, MT, NAS). The latter denies the physical resurrection of mankind which the former affirms. PROV. 14:33 ("...but it <wisdom--Ed.> is not known in the heart of the fools"--RS, NAB, JB, BBE, TEV, LV) versus ("But in the inward part of fools it maketh itself known"). Biblical teaching is contradictory as to whether wisdom lies within fools, although one might argue the inward part does not mean the heart. PROV. 28:3 ("A ruler who oppresses the poor is like a driving rain..."--NI, BBE, NAB, TEV) versus "A poor man that oppresseth the poor"--KJ, RS, ML, LB, AS, NAS, MT, LV). It's hard to visualize how a poor man could oppress the poor which is probably why the NI, NAB and TEV translators reversed the script. The biblical view of an important social issue is quite muddled. ISA. 7:14 ("Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son..."--KJ, ML, LB, NI, AS, NAB, NAS, LV) versus ("Behold, a young woman shall conceive and bear a son..."--RS, BBE, NEB, TEV, MT) or (a young maiden--JB, NWT). This clash has been debated for centuries and goes to the heart of a critical biblical teaching because it's the only OT prophecy referring to the Messiah's virgin birth. DAN. 9:24 ("...and to anoint the most holy"--KJ, AS, NI) versus ("...and to anoint a most holy place"--RS, LB, BBE, NEB, TEV, NAS, MT). The 9th chapter of Daniel has one of the most important of all OT prophecies and it's rather difficult to see how it could be referring to Jesus, i.e. be messianic, when conflict exists as to whether the most holy is a man or a place. MICAH 5:2 ("...whose goings forth have been from old from everlasting"--KJ, ML, LB, AS, BBE, NWT, NAS, LV) versus ("...whose origin is from old from ancient days"--RS, JB, NI, NEB, TEV, MT, NAB). Micah 5:2 is supposedly one of the most precise OT prophecies because it supposedly predicts the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem. But how could it be referring to Jesus if his goings were "from ancient days" which, unlike "everlasting" denotes a beginning at some time in the distant past? Whether or not the Messiah had an origin is crucial. MATT. 12:40 ("For as Jonas was 3 days and 3 nights in the whale's belly"--KJ, RS, AS, NAB, LV) versus ("For as Jonas was 3 days and 3 nights in the belly of the sea-monster"--ML, JB, NEB, NAB) versus ("For as Jonas was in the great fish 3 days and 3 nights"--NI, NWT, TEV, LB, BBE). This conflict bears directly on the accuracy of comments by Jesus since whales are not fish and vice versa. MARK 1:1 ("The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ"--NI, LB, JB, TEV, NWT) versus ("The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ"--KJ, RS, ML, AS, BBE, NEB, NAB, NAS, LV). The former does not say Jesus wrote the Book of Mark while the latter all but says he did. MARK 15:39 ("...Truly this man was the son of God"--KJ, RS, NI, AS, NAB, TEV, NAS, LV) versus ("...In truth this man was a son of God"--JB, BBE, NEB). "A" son clearly means there could be other sons of God while "the" son does not. LUKE 1:27 ("To a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph..."--KJ, ML, LB, RS, JB, NI, AS, BBE, NAB, NWT, NAS, LV)

versus ("...with a message for a girl betrothed to a man named Joseph...."--NEB, TEV). The latter translation does not support the idea of a virgin birth. LUKE 2:33 ("Joseph and his mother marveled at those things which were spoken"--KJ, LB, LV) versus ("his father and his mother marveled at what was said...."--RS, ML, JB, NI, AS, BBE, NEB, NAB, TEV, NWT, NAS). Except for the Living Bible and the LV no modern version in our list supports the KJ. They all imply there was no virgin birth because Joseph is equated with his mother by being called his father. The second group clearly implies that Joseph was as much his father as Mary was his mother. LUKE 2:43 ("...and Joseph and his mother knew not of it"--KJ, LV) versus ("His parents did not know of it"--RS, LB, ML, JB, NI, AS, NEB, NAB, TEV, NWT, NAS). Again every one of our versions says Joseph was the father of Jesus except the KJ and LV. Only the latter imply Joseph was not his father and there was a virgin birth. LUKE 17:21 ("...the Kingdom of God is within you"--KJ, LB, AS, TEV, NWT, NI, LV) versus ("...the Kingdom of God is among you"--RS, ML, JB, BBE, NEB, NAB, NAS). Whether or not the Kingdom of God is within you or outside is of theological importance. JOHN 1:26, 31, 33 ("...I baptize with water"--KJ, ML, RS, LB, JB, BBE, NAB, TEV, NI, LV) versus ("...I baptize in water...."--AS, NEB, NWT, NAS). No wonder some support baptism by sprinkling ("with water") while others believe in baptism by immersion ("in water"). JOHN 10:29 ("My Father who has given them to me <Jesus--Ed.> is greater than all...."--KJ, ML, LB, RS, JB, AS, NEB, NAB, NAS, NI, LV) versus ("What my Father has given me is greater than anything...."--BBE, TEV, NWT). Which is greater than all? God or what God has given to Jesus? JOHN 10:33 ("...You a mere man claim to be a God"--NWT, NEB) versus ("...you a mere man claim to be God"--KJ, RS, ML, LB, JB, AS, BBE, NI, NAB, TEV, NAS, LV). "A" god leaves open the possibility of many gods. Claiming to be God differs dramatically from claiming to be "a" god. ACTS 20:28 ("...of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood"--KJ, NWT, NAS, NI, TEV, LB, LV) versus ("...of God, which he obtained with the blood of his own Son"--RS, ML, JB, AS, BBE, NAB, NEB). Whether God's blood or that of his son was spilled is quite important, especially for those who don't believe the two are identical. ROM. 9:5 ("...as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever"--KJ, ML, JB, AS, BBE, NAS, LV) versus ("...according to the flesh, is the Christ. God who is over all be blessed for ever"--RS, LB, NEB, NAB, TEV, NWT). The latter version clearly does not make Jesus God while the former does. 1 COR. 7:21 ("...Even supposing you could go free, you would be better off making the most of your slavery"--NAB, LV) versus ("If you can gain your freedom, do so"--KJ, RS, ML, LB, JB, BBE, NI, NWT, NEB, NAS, TEV). By advising people to make the most of their slavery, the NAB and LV clearly conflict with other versions on a major point. 1 COR. 7:36 ("But if a man thinketh that he behaveth himself unseemly toward his virgin daughter...and if need so requireth, let him do what he will; he sinneth not; let them marry"--AS) versus the BBE, NAB, KJ, NI, NEB, NWT AND ML which omit the word "daughter." The latter don't agree with the ASV's teaching that fathers should marry their daughters rather than behave "unseemly" toward them. GAL. 3:24 ("Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring <or lead> us to Christ"--KJ, AS, BBE, NWT, NAS, NI, LV) versus ("...the law served as our custodian until Christ came"--ML, LB, RS, JB, NEB, NAB, TEV). If the law served as our custodian until christ came as the latter asserts, then it no longer held that role after he arrived which the former projects. The first version does not rule out its guidance after his arrival. Moreover, serving as our custodian does not necessarily mean it's bringing us to Christ. 1 TIM. 3:2, 12 & Titus 1:6 ("A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife...."--KJ, ML, RS, LB, AS, BBE, NI, NWT, NEB, NAS, TEV, LV) versus ("A bishop must be irreproachable, married only once"--JB, NAB). The JB and NAB clearly limit a bishop to only one wife whereas the former do not keep him from having many wives as long as he has no more than one at a time. 1 TIM. 3:16 ("...great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh...."--KJ) versus ("Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion: He was manifested in the flesh...."--RS, ML, JB, NI, AS, BBE, NEB, NAB, TEV, NWT, NAS). With differences of this magnitude is it any wonder that the King James only supporters are up-in-arms. In this instance, the KJ is the only version clearly saying

God was manifest in the flesh. If "he" is referring to Jesus Christ, then it is only stating the obvious. If Jesus came, he came in the flesh or as a man. But it doesn't say he was God or God came in the flesh. 1 TIM. 4:4 ("For every creature of God is good..."--KJ, AS) versus ("For everything created by God is good..."--RS, ML, LB, JB, NI, BBE, NEB, NAB, TEV, NWT, NAS, LV). If everything created by God is good, that would include far more than just the "creatures" mentioned in the KJ and ASV. 1 TIM. 6:10 ("For the love of money is the root of all evil"--KJ, RS, ML, JB, NEB, NAS, LV) versus ("For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil"--NI, AS, TEV, NAS) versus ("For the love of money is a root of all evil"--BBE) versus ("For the love of money is a root of all sorts of injurious things"--NWT). Is the love of money "a" root or "the" root? If it's "a" root then there could be many others. Is it the root of "all evil" or "all kinds of evil"? "All kinds" does not mean "all evil." Some could be excluded. 2 TIM. 3:16 ("All scripture is given by inspiration of God"--KJ, RS, ML, LB, JB, NI, BBE, NAB, TEV, NWT, NAS) versus ("Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching..."--AS, NEB, LV). A cardinal belief of all fundamentalists is that all scripture is inspired, but that is clearly not the import of the AS, NEB and LV. They leave open the possibility that some of Scripture is not inspired. TITUS 2:13 ("...and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ"--KJ, AS, NAB, NWT, LV) versus ("...the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ"--RS, ML, LB, JB, BBE, NEB, TEV, NAS, NI). According to Granville Sharp's Rule of grammatical interpretation which fundamentalists propound, the first version is referring to two separate beings because the word "our" appears before the word Saviour. According to that same rule "our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ" in the second version is referring only to one being and calling Jesus God. This same rule, which supports BE's position, applies to "of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ" versus "our God and Saviour Jesus Christ" in 2 Peter 1:1. HEB. 9:11 ("But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come..."--KJ, JB, AS, BBE, NI, NAS) versus ("But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come"--RS, ML, LB, NAB, NWT, NEB, TEV, LV). Versions differ on whether Christ was high priest of good things to come or of good things that already have come. 2 PETER 2:9 ("...and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished"--KJ, JB, NWT, LV), versus ("...and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment"--RS, ML, LB, AS, BBE, NEB, NAB, TEV, NAS, NI). Versions can't agree on whether punishment exists until the day of judgment or begins on the Day of Judgment. 1 JOHN 3:4 ("...for sin is transgression of the law"--KJ, JB, BBE, TEV) versus ("...sin is lawbreaking or lawlessness"--RS, ML, AS, NI, NAB, NWT, NEB, NAS). The "law" refers to OT maxims whereas "lawbreaking" could refer to any laws, OT or otherwise. Apparently some biblicists don't want to be obligated to follow all the Old Law. REV. 13:8 ("...whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world"--KJ, ML, NWT, NI) versus ("...everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain"--NAS, LB, JB, AS, BBE, NEB, NAB, TEV). Conflict exists over what occurred at the foundation of the world. Was the lamb slain or were names written in the book of life?

In conclusion, one can see from all the above that to assert nothing of crucial importance in the Christian faith depends on any disputed passage in Scripture is irrational. Anyone contending there are not critical theological, philosophical, and sociological differences among versions of the Bible simply hasn't studied the evidence.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #261 from JW of Alpha and Omega Ministries (Part c)

As you know, when I contacted you about being on the program (you did not contact me) I promised to send a tape of the discussion to you at a later time. Before we went on the air I

mentioned that we would send the entire series we were doing once it was completed and edited. We tried to do that for each of the guests, but it took a while to edit them, transfer them to other tapes, etc. Again you make it look like we are involved in duplicity, when in fact we have provided you with airtime, free materials, etc. Why did you not mention that you heard of our little booklet Letters to an Anti-Theist from our very own newsletter which we sent you at no cost? When you wrote and asked about it you did so by circling the item on our own order sheet that you received in our newsletter....

Editor's Response to Letter #261 (Part c)

Again, JW, you brought in irrelevant material to put a gloss on your activities. Whether or not you sent me promised tapes or provided free materials is not the issue. The real point in dispute lies in the fact that some time ago you published nearly all of our correspondence in a pamphlet entitled Letters to an Anti-Theist. I was not told this occurred and did not receive a copy. Later when I received a compilation of all your available materials I happened to see this pamphlet on the list. I requested a copy suspecting that it might pertain to me, which was subsequently confirmed. I concluded, justifiably I might add, that if I had not specifically sought a copy, I probably would have never become aware of its existence. Now that I have a copy we intend to eventually provide an itemized refutation of its contents.

Letter #261 Concludes (Part d)

And finally, given the fact that attempting to debate an issue while limited to the pages of BE seems fruitless (case in point--your reply to my last letter ran 3.37 times longer than what I wrote--to my 43 lines you replied with 145). How about we answer these questions live on the air before a public audience? I certainly have no problems in paying for the air time and the phone call. Demonstrating how anti-theists twist and hide the truth is well worth the effort. Feel free to call us collect and we will set up a time....

Editor's Response to Letter #261 (Part d)

Correcting erroneous comments often takes far more time and effort than composing the statements, JW. As far as meeting on the radio is concerned, we both agreed to discuss the Bible again on your program on Sat. May 7th. Unfortunately, you sent me a letter on May 5th stating our dialogue would have to be cancelled because all but one of your radio sponsors had withdrawn. My acceptance is still open. Apparently you do have a problem in paying for air time. Incidentally, I did not call you collect because I had not yet read your letter when you called me.

Letter #266 from JL of Phoenix, Arizona

Dear Dennis. I just received BE #64.... I am very much interested in seeing the rest of your response to JW.

I must say I find your response to JW in Issue #64 to be entirely unconvincing. As I have commented to JW on this subject, the evidence for original documents from the existing variants is almost as good as the evidence for common ancestors of existing biological species. I agree with your "we don't know what it says for sure," but I think we do know with a fairly high degree of accuracy, at least for the NT epistles. In the case of the gospels, there is a strong possibility that individual stories and sayings of Jesus were independently circulated and then collected together in their present form by editors (and there is little question that the synoptic gospels are interdependent in some way.

It looks to me as though you are arguing that because we don't know for sure, we don't know at all. If I were to accept that argument, I would have to reject nearly all knowledge. It would certainly lead to solipsism.

Your argument about encyclopedias is pretty bogus--any two encyclopedias do not come anywhere near as close as any two variant manuscripts of NT books.

Finally, your response (the sixth) is based on a misunderstanding of JW's comment. Your examples are of translational variants, not textual variants. JW's reference to "disputed passages" meant disputed passages in the variation of extant manuscripts, not disputed interpretations of identical manuscript passages.... (In other words, JW was referring to differences in the Greek or Hebrew wording of manuscripts on the same material, not disagreements on the best translation of the Greek or Hebrew of manuscripts on the same material--Ed.).

Editor's Response to Letter #266

Dear JL. Initially, you addressed two questions discussed in this month's commentary on The Originals. Was there an original and, if so, is there any way to know what it said based on existing manuscripts. As far as the first question is concerned, I have never been persuaded that the evidence proves an original existed. Perhaps it did, but tens of thousands of variations among thousands of manuscript, cause me to doubt the veracity of your assumption. In so far as whether or not we can reproduce the "alleged" original from existing manuscripts is concerned, you, yourself, employ some qualifiers. "I think we do know," "a fairly high degree of accuracy," "a strong possibility," and "interdependent in some way" are not the words of someone who is positive we have, or can recreate, accurate copies of the "original." Obviously, you, too, have doubts and reservations.

My argument with respect to the encyclopedia analogy, which was presented in this month's commentary, need not be repeated.

Lastly, as far as your final point is concerned, JW made the same comment to me during a phone conversation over a month ago. His position is that differences arise from disagreements over how verses should be translated (translational variants) when there are no differences between manuscripts over what the verses say in Greek and Hebrew (textual variants). In other words, he contends the manuscripts are basically consistent in the Greek and Hebrew wording; it's in translating that conflicts arise. This is another way of saying the autographs are okay, but the translators aren't. As I tried to show JW on the phone, there are two major problems with this theory. First, the manuscripts are by no means in as much agreement as he alleges, even in the Greek and Hebrew. Scholars admit that tens of thousands of variations exist. The manuscripts are in far greater disagreement than JW is willing to concede. Secondly, and even more importantly, why would consistency be of any real consequence if you can't tell what is being said. It would be as if a man caused the following dialogue to occur by bringing thousands of manuscripts in Swahili to JW and myself. JW: (after looking them over) "My, look how consistent they are. They all say nearly the same thing." DM: Fine, what do they say?" JW: "I don't know for sure but they are quite consistent." Greatly simplified, JW's position is that as long as they are consistent who cares what they say while mine is, who cares if they are consistent if you don't know what they say. Moreover, the tremendous number of differences between the translations of Greek and Hebrew experts shows we not only don't know what is being said in far too many instances but we don't even know if many books, chapters, and verses should be included. A common misconception some people have of BE is that it deals only with contradictions in the Bible. In truth, we deal with any and all problems having to do with the Bible's validity. Contradictions are only one aspect. If manuscripts agree on the wording of a

particular verse but there is no way to determine the correct translation of that verse, if different translations of a verse prevail among the major translations, then we have a contradiction equal in importance to that of textual variations. We have a plethora of contradictory translations but are assured there is no problem when the manuscripts are in agreement. The Kill or Murder problem discussed with JW in prior issues (the 6th Commandment) is a classic example. He claims there are no textual variants but can only provide contradictory translations whenever the commandment is mentioned.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #267 from DAP of St. Petersburg, Florida

Dear Dennis.... May I offer you some thoughts on whether Christian/Religionists suffer from mental disorders? A major disorder, usually described as Schizophrenia, can be defined as the state of a mind that holds diametrically-opposed ideas, yet is consciously unaware of any conflict. As an example of the Christian or Religionist thought conflict, I offer you Ex. 20:13 and Num. 31:17. In the first instance, Moses is commanded by his god: Thou shalt not kill! In the next instance, Moses tells his followers to kill innocent children. This is don't kill versus kill the innocent. As history shows, Christians and Jews slaughter others in the name of the god who says "Thou shalt not kill."

The second example is that Christians describe Jesus as offering humankind unconditional love, then they tell you that you must, as stated in Mark 16:16 both believe and be baptized. So, Jesus' unconditional love is predicated on two conditions. This is schizophrenic....

EDITOR'S NOTE: Jed Smock and I are going to debate again at the same time and place on Tuesday, May 31st. I thoroughly enjoyed our last exchange and would like to participate in many more throughout the Nation. The last encounter was over the Bible in general and now we intend to concentrate on all activities related to Jesus in particular.

Issue No. 67

July 1988

COMMENTARY

Versions Differ (Part Two of a Five-Part Series)--Last month's commentary focused on Conflicting Translations (CT) of a critical nature while this month's analysis will concentrate on those that range from significant to serious: GEN. 11:2 ("And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east"--KJ, RS, BBE, LV) versus ("...in the east"--ML, NEB, NAB, TEV) versus ("...eastward or to the east"--NIV, LB, ASV, NWT, NAS, MT). Did they journey from the east, to the east, or in the east? GEN. 19:14 ("Lot went out, and spoke unto his sons-in-law which married his daughters"--KJ, ASV, BBE, NAB, NWT, MT, LV) versus ("Lot went out and said to his sons-in-law, who were to marry his daughters"--RS, LB, NIV, JB, NEB, TEV, NAS). Were the sons-in-law married to Lot's daughters and how could they be sons-in-law if they weren't (were to!)? GEN. 49:10 ("The sceptre shall not depart from Judah...until Shiloh come...."--KJ, ML, LB, ASV, NWT, NAS) versus ("The sceptre shall not depart from Judah...as long as men come to Shiloh...."--MT. Is Shiloh a man or a place and who or what is coming--men or Shiloh? EX. 14:27 ("The Egyptians were fleeing toward it"--NIV, RS, JB, NAS) versus ("the Egyptians fled against it"--KJ, ML, ASV, MT, LV) versus ("...the Egyptians were fleeing from encountering it"--NWT. NUM. 3:28 ("In the number of all the males from a month old and upward were 8,600"--KJ, RS, ML, LB, ASV, BBE, NEB, TEV, NWT, NAS, MT, NI, LV)

versus ("...males of one month and over, came to 8,300"--NAB, JB). NUM. 11:25 ("...when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied, and did not cease"--KJ) versus ("...and when the spirit rested upon them, they prophesied. But they did so no more"--all other versions). Only the KJV says the prophesying did not cease. JOSH. 15:18 and JUD. 1:14 ("...as she came unto him (her husband--Ed.), she moved him to ask of her father a field..."--KJ, RS, ML, AS, NEB, NWT, NAS, MT, NIV) versus ("...when she came to her husband, he urged her to ask her father for a field"--JB, BBE, NEB, TEV). Who urged whom to ask? JUDGES 1:18 ("Judah took Gaza, with the coast thereof..."--KJ, RS, ML, LB, ASV, BBE, NEB, NI, NWT, NAS, MT, LV) versus ("But Judah did not take Gaza"--JB, NAB, TEV). JUDGES 4:11 ("Hobab the father-in-law of Moses..."--KJ, RS, ML, LB, JB, NWT, NAS, MT, LV) versus ("Hobab the brother-in-law of Moses"--AS, BBE, NEB, NAB, TEV, NIV). JUDGES 14:15 ("And it came to pass on the 7th day, that they said unto Samson's wife..."--KJ, ML, AS, MT) versus ("On the 4th day they said to Samson's wife..."--RS, LB, JB, BBE, NEB, NAB, TEV, NWT, NAS, NIV, LV). 1 SAM. 8:16 ("And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and your goodliest young men..."--KJ, ML, LB, AS, NAS, MT, LV) versus ("He will take your menservants, and maidservants, and the best of your cattle..."--RS, JB, BBE, NEB, NAB, TEV, NWT, NI). Translators can't agree on whether men or cattle were taken. 1 SAM. 13:1 ("Saul was ... years old when he began to reign"--RS, NAB, NWT, MT) versus ("50 years old"--NEB) versus ("40 years old"--ASV, NAS) versus ("30 years old"--NIV). Again, 1 SAM. 13:1 ("...and for 2 years he reigned over Israel"--NWT, MT, NAB) versus ("and he reigned over Israel for 22 years"--NEB) versus ("he reigned 32 years"--NAS) versus ("he reigned over Israel 42 years"--NIV) versus ("one or two years"--LV). Talk about confusion! 1 Sam. 13:1 is a classic example. 1 SAM. 13:5 ("and the Philistines gathered themselves together to fight with Israel, 30,000 chariots..."--KJ, RS, ML, AS, NEB, TEV, NWT, NAS, MT) versus ("...mighty army of 3,000 chariots"--LB, JB, BBE, NAB, NI, LV). 1 SAM. 25:22 ("...do God unto the enemies of David"--KJ, ML, AS, NWT, NAS, MT) versus ("God do so to David"--RS, JB, BBE, NEB, NAB, TEV, NI, LV). Did God do it to David or the enemies of David? 2 SAM. 15:7 ("At the end of 4 years"--NIV, RS, ML, LB, JB, BBE, NEB, NAB, TEV, NIV, LV) versus ("after 40 years"--KJ, AS, NWT, NAS, MT). 2 SAM. 21:19 ("...Elhanan...slew the brother of Goliath the Gittite"--KJ, LB) versus ("Elhanan...slew Goliath the Gittite"--RS, AS, BBE, NWT, NAS, MT, NI). 2 SAM. 23:18 ("Abishai, the brother of Joab...was chief among 3..."--KJ, LB, AS, MT, NI) versus ("Abishai, the brother of Joab...was chief of the 30"--RS, ML, JB, BBE, NEB, NAB, TEV, NWT, NAS, LV). 2 SAM. 24:2 ("For the king said to Joab the captain of the host..."--KJ, ML, LB, AS, TEV, NWT, NAS, MT, LV) versus ("the king said to Joab and the commanders of the army"--RS, JB, BBE, NEB, NAB, NI). Did the king speak to many or Joab alone? 2 SAM. 24:13 ("So God came to David, and told him...Shall 7 years of famine"--KJ, ML, LB, AS, NWT, NAS, MT, LV) versus ("...Shall 3 years of famine"--RS, JB, BBE, NEB, NAB, TEV, NI). 2 CHRON. 3:4 ("...20 cubits and the height was an 120"--KJ, RS, JB, AS, BBE, NWT, NAS, MT) versus ("...and its height was 20"--NEB, NAB, NI, LV). 2 CHRON. 36:9 ("Jehoiachin was 8 years old when he began to reign"--KJ, RS, LB, JB, AS, NEB, NAS, MT) versus ("was 18 years old"--ML, BBE, NAB, TEV, NWT, NI, LV). 2 CHRON. 36:10 (...and made Zedekiah his brother king over Judah..."--KJ, RS, LB, JB, AS, NAB, MT, LV) versus ("He appointed his uncle Zedekiah as king..."--ML, BBE, NEB, TEV, NWT, NI). PSALMS 2:11-12 ("Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry..."--KJ, ML, NI, AS, NWT) versus ("Serve the Lord with fear, with trembling kiss his feet, lest he be angry"--RS, JB, BBE) versus ("...kiss the King, lest the Lord be angry"--NEB). So what is to be kissed--the Son, his feet, or the King? PROV. 10:6 ("...but violence covereth the mouth of the wicked"--KJ, AS, NIV) versus (...but the mouth of the wicked conceals violence"--RS, ML, NAB, TEV, NWT, NAS, MT). Does violence cover the mouth or does the mouth cover the violence? Which covers which? PROV. 11:30 ("The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life; and he that winneth souls is wise"--KJ, NI, AS, NWT, MT, NAS) versus ("The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, but lawlessness takes away lives"--RS, BBE, NAB, NEB, TEV). The underlined parts of these two verses are quite dissimilar. PROV. 21:12

("The righteous man wisely considereth the house of the wicked"--KJ, ML, AS, NAB, LV) versus ("The Righteous One considereth the house of the wicked"--MT, JB, BBE, NEB, TEV, NWT, NI). Is God or man to do the considering? ECCLE. 8:10 ("...they, the wicked, were forgotten in the city where they had so done"--KJ, ML, AS, NWT, NAS, MT, LV) versus ("they were praised in the city...."--RS, BBE, NAB, TEV, NIV). Were the wicked praised or forgotten? ISA. 65:20 ("and the one who does not reach the age of 100 shall be thought accursed"--NAS, JB, NEB, NAB, NI) versus ("...and the sinner a 100 years old shall be accursed"--RS, KJ, ML, AS, MT, LV). Are you accursed when you reach 100 or before? JER. 49:32 ("...I will scatter into all winds them that are in the utmost corners...."--KJ, NI) versus ("I will scatter to every wind those who cut the corners of their hair"--RS, ML, JB, AS, BBE, NAB, TEV, NWT, NAS, MT, LV). In this instance, the clash between translations is exceptionally obvious. EZEK. 5:7 ("...nor observed the ordinances of the nations which surround you..."--NAS, KJ, ML, JB, AS, NEB, MT, NIV) versus ("but have acted according to the ordinances of the nations that are round about you"--RS, BBE, NAB, TEV, NWT, LV). Did they follow the ordinances or not? EZEK. 40:44 ("...at the side of the east gate"--KJ, AS, NWT, NAS, MT, LV) versus (...at the side of the south gate"--RS, ML, LB, JB, BBE, NEW, NAB, TEV, NI). EZEK. 40:49 ("...and the breadth 11 cubits"--KJ, AS, NWT, NAS, MT, LV) versus ("and the breadth 12 cubits"--RS, JB, BBE, NEB, NAB, NI). MATT. 6:7 ("But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do...."--KJ, AS, BBE, NWT, NAS) versus ("And in praying do not heap up empty phrases or babble as the Gentiles do..."--RS, TEV, JB, NI, NAB, NEB). The Catholics, with their repetitive "Hail Marys," would not use, or agree with, the former translation and their versions (the JB & NAB) reflect as much. MATT. 18:22 ("...I say not unto thee, until 7 times; but until 70 times 7 <i.e., 490--Ed.>"--KJ, RS, ML, LB, AS, BBE, NEB, NAS, NAB, TEV, LV) versus ("...I tell you not 7 times, but 77 times"--NI, JB, NWT). There is a big difference between 490 and 77. MATT. 26:50 ("Jesus said to him, 'Friend why are you here'"--KJ, ML, NWT, RS, LV) versus ("Jesus said, 'Friend, do what you are here to do'"--LB, JB, AS, BBE, NI, NAB, TEV, NAS, NEB). Did Jesus ask a question or issue an order? MARK 1:2 ("...as it is written in the prophets, Behold, I send my messenger..."--KJ) versus "as it is written in Isaiah the prophet, Behold I send my...."--all other versions). The rest of verse 2 and all of verse 3 came from Isaiah and Malachi, not Isaiah alone. Thus, only the KJV can be interpreted without contradiction. LUKE 2:36-37 ("...she had lived with her husband 7 years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was 84 years old"--JB, ML, RS, KJ, AS, NI, NEB, NAB, TEV, NWT, NAS) versus ("...after 7 years of married life she had been a widow for 84 years"--LB, LV, BBE). Was she a widow until age 84 after 7 years of marriage or was she a widow for 84 years after 7 years of married life? LUKE 10:1, 17 ("After this the Lord appointed 70 others...."--KJ, RS, LB, ML, AS, BBE, NWT, NAS, LV) versus ("after this the Lord appointed 72 others"--JB, NI, NEB, NAB, TEV). LUKE 14:5 ("Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit...."--KJ, ML, AS, BBE, NEB) versus ("Which of you, having a son or an ox that has fallen into...."--RS, JB, NI, NAB, TEV, NWT, NAS, LV). LUKE 17:37 ("Where the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together"--RS, KJ, AS, BBE, NWT) versus ("Where there is a corpse, there the vultures will flock"--ML, LB, JB, NI, NEB, NAB, TEV, NAS, LV). ACTS 3:21 ("...which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began"--KJ, LV) versus ("...that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old"--RS, ML, AS, BBE, NI, NAB, TEV, NWT, NAS). Since prophets did not exist when the world began, it's understandable that later versions left the KJ translation. "From of old" is much less precise and more easily defended. ACTS 12:25 ("...returned from Jerusalem"--NIV, KJ, RS, ML, JB, AS, BBE, NAB, NAS, LV) versus "...returned to Jerusalem"--NEB, TEV). ACTS 27:12 ("...a harbor in Crete facing southwest and northwest and winter there"--KJ, ML, LB, JB, NI, NEB, NAB, TEV, NAS) versus ("...a harbor of Crete, looking northeast and southeast and winter there"--RS, AS, BBE, NWT). 1 COR. 7:25 ("Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord"--KJ, JB, NI, AS, BBE, NEB, NAB, NWT, NAS, LV) versus ("Now concerning the unmarried, I have no command of the Lord"--RS, ML, LB, TEV). Unmarried women are certainly not to be equated with virgins. 2 TIM. 1:12 ("...he is able to keep

that which I have committed unto him...."--KJ, ML, LB, JB, NI, AS, BBE, NEB, NWT, NAS) versus ("...until that Day what has been entrusted to me"--RS, NEB, TEV). To whom was it entrusted--him or me? JAMES 5:16 ("Confess your faults one to another...."--KJ) versus ("Confess your sins to one another...."--all other versions). Many believe you confess sins to God alone. Judging from this verse, every version but the KJ provides legitimacy to the Catholic confessional. Faults are not necessarily sins. Confessing faults is one thing; confessing sins is another. And lastly, REV. 8:13 ("and I beheld and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven"--KJ) versus ("Then I looked, and heard an eagle crying with a loud voice...."--all other versions). Was an angel flying or an eagle crying?

Except for a few lesser clashes to be mentioned later, that completes our analysis of the largest category which focuses on the contradictory translations (CT) of a particular verse. Next month we'll discuss the key verses within the second category that exposes contradictions between two different verses (CV). Their importance lies in the fact that they often expose attempts to resolve problems by simply rewriting the script.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #268 from James White of Alpha and Omega Ministries, P.O. Box 47041, Phoenix, Arizona 85068 (Part a)

Dear Mr. McKinsey....(Following a malevolent denunciation of my scholarship, a comparison of me to a King James only outcast, and a complaint about the length allotted to critical letters, James said--Ed.). To set the record straight, your comment in the March 1988 edition more than just implied that the originals did not exist and in our phone conversation you know that you directly said such.

Editor's Response to Letter #268 (Part a)

Dear Mr. White. In your own devious style you continue to make accusations without citations. Would you please cite chapter and verse to show where I "more than just implied that the originals did not exist." I've reread that issue and find no statement by me that the originals did not exist and I certainly did not make such an assertion over the phone. What I did ask was for you to conclusively prove they did exist.

Letter #268 Concludes (Part b)

(James continues trying to prove the last 12 verses in the Book of Mark are not genuine and should be expunged. What better way to escape the immunized drinking of any deadly thing and the picking up of serpents promised in verse 18--Ed.). Also the longer ending of Mark is deleted from the straight text of the NASB (it is enclosed in brackets which is a sign of non-originality) and by the NIV (where it is separated by a line). The RSV, as I recall, originally relegated the entire passage to footnotes (it does not any longer). The TEV titles the section "An Old Ending to the Gospel," and the Phillips Modern English entitles it "An ancient appendix." Of course, if you were familiar with the field of textual criticism, you would know why the vast majority of textual critics question the originality of the passage.

Editor's Response to Letter #268 (Part b)

Why don't you stop doubletalking your audience, James? You are the one who is lacking in the field of textual criticism. Enough of this "longer ending," "Old Ending," "ancient appendix," "brackets," and "footnotes" nonsense! Mark 16:9-20 either belongs in the Bible or it doesn't.

Now which is it? Is every reader supposed to flip a coin? Are you saying the creators of every version are allowing readers to decide for themselves whether or not these verses belong? What kind of scholarship is that? You referred to the NASB, the NIV, and the TEV to prove your case. Yet, they all have the 16:9-20 ending as does the revision of the original RSV. If pushed to the wall the translators would have to decide one way or the other, and since they all included these verses in the text, it's logical to conclude they made a positive decision some time ago. If not, then they have done a pathetic job of making their position clear. Like you, they are straddling a nonstradlable fence.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #269 from LWC of Lufkin, Texas

Dear Dennis. Just received BE issue #63 and read it ravenously as usual. The letter from DB and your reply (#252) were especially interesting. In this exchange there is much ammunition for use in debates with bible believers. In fact, the number of indisputable biblical contradictions and errors being uncovered and publicized by BE and other publications is increasing geometrically. What started as a trickle a few years ago is now reaching flood stage and keeps on coming. In light of this development it's hard to understand how unqualified belief in the sanctity of the bible can be maintained.

In their desperation, however, I believe biblicists may have hit upon what they perceive to be a way out of this dilemma. They simply publish a new version of "The Bible" in which key words and passages are conveniently changed so as to eliminate the troublesome contradictions. This tactic was discussed in your dialogue with DM (#249). Fortunately for us, biblicists cannot go back and eliminate these contradictions in the earlier versions, as I'm sure they would like to do. These contradictions remain to haunt them and we should not hesitate to drive the point home at every opportunity.

Concerning 2 Chron. 22:2, it is interesting to note that in the NIV, LB and NASB Ahaziah's age has been changed to 22 years, thus bringing it into agreement with 2 Kings 8:26. In the NIV and LB there are footnotes attributing this change to the correction of previous translation errors. The NAS offers no explanation at all. Thus, another glaring contradiction is conveniently eliminated. Theologians have never been noted for their objectivity where biblical matters are concerned. But the practice of making textual changes, obviously in the interest of political expediency is a new low. I know that it is their bread and butter that is in jeopardy. For that reason I can understand, and maybe to some extent forgive their actions, but intellectual dishonesty and outright fraud are, to say the least, unethical and unbecoming, especially for those to whom many people still look for integrity, honesty, moral leadership, and spiritual guidance.

Editor's Response to Letter #269

Dear LWC. You have focused on a crucial strategem from the biblicists' perspective. When you can't solve a problem just rewrite the script. Unfortunately, this approach is being employed with ever greater frequency. However, it's interesting to note that widespread disagreement prevails over the degree to which this ploy should supercede accurate translation. All too often political expediency accounts for the steady drift away from the King James. Although the latter possesses many problems, it was written in an era when criticisms of the Bible were considerably less widespread and potent than is true today. The forces of freethought were much weaker and the Higher Critics of the 19th Century were yet to appear. Consequently, the role played by expediency was significantly less than that of today. Today's standard defense is that the changes are warranted because of the latest biblical scholarship and manuscript discoveries.

If that were true, then why are so many versions still in agreement with the King James on nearly every point in dispute and why does nearly every change ameliorate a problem rather than heighten it? Moreover, how many new manuscripts have appeared since the King James arose?

Letter #270 from Ken Bonnell, P.O. Box 65706, Los Angeles, California 90065

Dear Dennis...Regarding the Debate Responses to JW of Alpha-Omega Ministries--Best to curb your response; don't "compose in the stick," but sharpen down your response to the fewest words. Your space is too precious to use up with what could be said in fewer words and without emotional invective. Avoid references to "offended ego" and "biblical brain barriers."

The greatest criticism of Archer's ENCYCLOPEDIA is that it misrepresents itself. Dealing with only the major (in the author's view, i.e., those he could handle to his own satisfaction), it is not encyclopaedic in the least. I thumbed it in a bookstore, but concluded it was not really worth the price....

Letter #271 from HLM of Bellbrook, Ohio

Dear Dennis. I was in attendance at your recent debate in Columbus with Jed Smock and thought you handled yourself expertly. However, your opponent seemed to frustrate you slightly in suggesting that, contrary to your claim that the Bible labels us all sinners, little babies are incapable of sinning....

Editor's Response to Letter #271

Dear HLM. Smock's denial of Original Sin was outside orthodox protestant teachings. During our second debate he repeated his position and I was ready with the appropriate information.

Letter #272 from DAP of St. Petersburg, Florida

Dear Mr. McKinsey. I am engaging an extremely sincere Christian in a debate on reality, and I need your help. I have not found any material that equals that which you produce for clarity, brevity, or ease-of-understanding. I am enclosing my check to pay for the 6 back issues that my opponent feels are most relevant. May I have a new back-issue listing? My new good Christian friend didn't bother to return it to me after I let him have it to look at.

Editor's Response to Letter #272

Dear DAP. The reason you have not found any good material in opposition to the Bible is that precious little is available. Paine and Ingersoll did not write very much and the Higher Critics stayed primarily on the periphery. I'm often asked to suggest books to supplement BE but I can't think of many. I've read scores of books and frankly only a few are worthy of recommendation. My favorites would probably be those by Joseph Wheless (Is It God's Word), John Remsburg (The Christ and The Bible), and Thomas Paine (The Age of Reason). Many are too extrabiblical; many are more opinion than proof; some dwell on relatively insignificant matters; some are too narrow in focus although their content is vital, and some reflect the approach of many current critics. They concentrate on what strikes the author's fancy rather than what unnerves biblicists. The latter comes about, in large part, because they avoid debating the other side which, in turn, causes them to lose touch with what works and what doesn't.

Letter #273 from Mark Potts, 8510 E. 66th Pl. S. Apt. A, Tulsa, Oklahoma 74133-2008

Dear Dennis....When I lived at NSU, I had several long talks with my roommate about Christianity and the Bible, and I think I've nudged him from the naive biblicism he acquired from his upbringing. All it takes is patience and repeated doses of reason and information. Unfortunately, I'm afraid the rate of conversion is thousands-to-one in favor of the Bible. Too bad we don't control the television networks. According to 1 Kings 3:12, no one living before or after Solomon would be as wise as he. Yet, in Col. 2:2-3 we are informed that Jesus possesses "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Which man is wiser?

According to Rev. 22:11, "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still." Does this verse forbid us from changing our behavior?

According to 2 Cor. 6:16, 1 Cor. 3:16, and 1 Cor. 6:19, the bodies of Christians constitute God's temple. How, then, could Paul's "man of sin" sit in such a temple (2 Thess. 2:3-4).

According to Lev. 20:10 when a man and a woman commit adultery, both of them are to be put to death. Yet this law was rarely enforced against men. For example, in John 8:1-11, when the woman caught "in the very act" of adultery was brought before Jesus and about to be stoned, one is tempted to ask, "But where was this woman's lover, and why wasn't he about to be stoned also?" Moreover, Jesus' rescue of this adulteress was an obstruction of God-ordained justice, and as James 2:10 says, "...whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.

An effective question I have found is, "Should I believe in the Gospel because I honestly think it's true, or should I believe in it because I'm threatened with punishment?" If the biblicist answers the former, you can present your errancy arguments to show why you doubt the Bible's validity. If he answers the latter, you can say you have no reason to believe the punishment threats because you doubt the Bible. In any case, you force the biblicist to argue the essential issue--the Bible's validity.

Another good question is "Did you discover the True Religion because you were wise or because you were lucky? Rarely will a biblicist admit he's wise (because of 1 Cor. 1:19-10 and other verses) and an admission that you discovered it through luck means that you have no control over the situation--it's like winning the lottery.

And lastly, according to 2 Cor. 4:3-4, the Gospel "is hid to them that are lost." Who is the Gospel for, then?

Letter #274 from RCC of Nagasaki, Japan

Dear Dennis. I just finished reading issue #65, much enjoyed as usual and very informative. Thanks for being and publishing. I noted in letter #263 from SO of Tallahassee, Florida his #3 contradiction. How many sons did Abraham have? Heb. 11:17 says, "an only begotten son," while Gal. 4:22 says he had two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. Please let him know he should expand the contradiction. He probably forgot Gen. 25:1, 4. By Keturah Abraham had 6 sons.

EDITOR'S NOTE: We have all seen the small pamphlets handed out by religious groups in bus stations, libraries, etc. Because of an apparent demand, we have created 2 of our own entitled, **THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD?** and **JESUS CHRIST IS THE ANSWER?** Each has more than 20 of our best zingers and costs a dime; the price will drop if demand becomes high. They should unnerve any reasonably open biblicist, and hopefully purchasers will hand them out at every opportunity. For now they will be written on both sides of 60 lb. white paper. As they are

distributed, please let us know the results so better points can be substituted, if needed, with a new printing. For the first time we are selling material other than BE. A minimum order of 10 is required because of postage costs.

[Click here to view the pamphlets online.](#)

Issue No. 68

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COMMENTARY

Versions Differ (Part Three of a Five-Part Series)--Last month we completed our exposure of situations in which translations of a particular verse were at odds (CT). This month's commentary will dwell on the second category which is composed of contradictions between translations of two different verses (CV). Here, more than anywhere else, is clear evidence of attempts by translators to resolve conflicts by simply rewriting the script. (1) GEN. 14:12 ("And they took Lot Abram's brother's son (i.e., Abram's nephew--Ed.)...."--KJ, RS, ML, LB, JB, ASV, BBE, NEB, NAB, TEV, NWT, NAS, MT, NIV, LV) versus Gen. 14:14 ("And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive"--KJ, ASV, NWT, MT) or ("When Abram heard that his kinsman was taken captive"--RS, ML, JB, NEB, NAS, NIV) or ("And Abram hearing that his brother's son had been...."--BBE, NAB, TEV). A contradiction exists in the KJ, ASV, NWT, and MT. All others wrote the text in such a way as to escape the obvious conflict. 2 SAM. 6:23 ("Michal the daughter of Saul had no child unto the day of her death...."--KJ, RS, ML, LB, JB, ASV, BBE, NEB, NAB, TEV, NWT, NAS, NIV, MT) versus 2 Sam. 21:8 ("...and the five sons of Michal the daughter of Saul...."--KJ, ASV, NWT, MT) or ("And the five sons of Merab the daughter of Saul...."--RS, ML, JB, BBE, NEB, NAB, TEV, NAS, NIV) or ("And the five sons of Nadab the daughter of Saul...."--LV). Again, only the KJ, ASV, NWT, and MT reveal the contradiction. All others eliminated the problem created by 2 Sam. 21:8 through changing the name of Saul's daughter to Merab or Nadab. 1 CHRON. 18:4 ("And David took from him 1,000 chariots and 7,000 horsemen, and 20,000 footmen...."--all versions) versus 2 Sam. 8:4 ("And David took...700 horsemen and 20,000 footmen"--KJ, RS, ML) or ("David captured 1,700 cavalry and 20,000 infantry"--LB, JB, ASV, BBE, NEB, NAB, TEV, NWT, NAS, MT, LV) or ("David captured...7,000 charioteers and 20,000 foot soldiers...."--NIV). Only the NIV resolved this contradiction to any meaningful degree. 2 SAM. 24:9 ("...there were in Israel 800,000 valiant men that drew the sword"--All versions) versus 1 Chron. 21:5 ("All they of Israel were a 1,100,000 that drew the sword"--all versions). In this instance, nobody rewrote the script to escape the dichotomy. Apparently they think one can defend the belief that women or unvaliant men compose the 300,000 difference, a proposition that's not really viable. A classic example is found in 2 CHRON. 9:25 ("Solomon had 4,000 stalls for horses and chariots, and 12,000 horsemen...."--KJ, RS, ML, LB, ASV, BBE, NAB, NAS, MT, LV) or ("Solomon had 4,000 stalls for his horses and chariots and 12,000 horses"--JB, NIV, NEB, TEV, NWT) versus 1 Kings 4:26 ("Solomon had 40,000 stalls of horses for his chariots, and 12,000 horsemen"--KJ, RS, ML, ASV, NWT, NAS, MT, LV) or ("Solomon had 4,000 stalls and 12,000 horses"--JB) or ("Solomon had 4,000 stalls for chariot horses and 12,000 horses"--NIV) or ("Solomon had 40,000 chariot horses in his stalls and 12,000 cavalry horses"--NEB) or ("Solomon had 4,000 stalls for his 12,000 chariot horses and 12,000 cavalry horses"--TEV) or ("Solomon had 4,000 stalls for his 12,000 chariot horses"--NAB) or ("Solomon had 4,000 boxed off spaces for horses for his carriages and 12,000 horsemen"--BBE). Close examination will show that contradictions exist within every version except the JB, NIV, BBE, and NAB. Another exceptionally good

example is 1 KINGS 7:26 ("...it contained 2,000 baths"--KJ, RS, JB, NIV, ASV, BBE, NEB, NWT, NAS, MT, LV) or (...its capacity was 18,000 gallons"--ML) or ("...it had a 12,000 gallon capacity"--LB) or ("...its capacity was 2,000 measures"--NAB) or ("...the tank held about 10,000 gallons"--TEV) versus 2 Chron. 4:5 ("...it received and held 3,000 baths"--KJ, RS, JB, NIV, ASV, BBE, NEB, NWT, NAS, MT) or ("...it held 3,000 barrels"--ML, LB) or ("...it had a capacity of 3,000 measures"--NAB) or ("The tank held about 15,000 gallons"--TEV). In this case, any version except the LB or ML will cause a biblicist trouble. 2 KINGS 8:26 ("...22 years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign"--KJ, ML, TEV, LB, RS, JB, ASV, BBE, NIV, NAB, NWT, NEB, NAS, MT, LV) versus 2 Chron. 22:2 ("...42 years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign"--KJ, RS, ML, ASV, NEB, MT) or ("...20 years old was Ahaziah..."--JB) or ("...22 years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign"--BBE, NIV, NAB, NWT, NAS, TEV, LB, LV). Creators of the BBE, NIV, NAB, NWT, NAS, TEV, LB, and LV versions opted for a script alteration to avoid rationalizing. 2 KINGS 24:8 ("Jehoiachin was 18 years old when he began to reign and he reigned in Jerusalem 3 months"--KJ, RS, ML, LB, JB, NIV, ASV, BBE, NEB, NAB, TEV, NWT, NAS, MT, LV) versus 2 Chron. 36:9 ("Jehoiachin was 8 years old when he began to reign, and he reigned 3 months and 10 days in Jerusalem"--KJ, RS, ML, LB, JB, ASV, BBE, NEB, NAB, NAS, MT) or ("Jehoiachin was 18 years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem 3 months and 10 days"--NIV, TEV, NWT, LV). Biblicists are trapped no matter what path they pursue. 2 KINGS 25:8 ("...and in the 5th month on the 7th day of the month..."--KJ, RS, ML, JB, NIV, ASV, NEB, NAB, TEV, NWT, NAS, MT, LV) versus Jer. 52:12 ("Now in the 5th month, in the 10th day of the month..."--KJ, RS, ML, LB, JB, NIV, ASV, BBE, NEB, NAB, TEV, NWT, NAS, MT, LV). This problem, too, is going to embarrass biblicists no matter what version is utilized. That's the primary reason it's in our Bible pamphlet. Adherents to the Bible can only hope nobody notices the clash. 1 CHRON. 19:18 ("...David slew of the Syrians 7,000 men which fought in chariots and 40,000 footmen..."--KJ, RS, ML, LB, JB, NIV, ASV, BBE, NEB, NAB, TEV, NWT, NAS, MT) versus 2 Sam. 10:18 ("David slew the men of 700 chariots...and 40,000 horsemen"--KJ, RS, ML, LB, ASV, NEB, TEV, NWT, NAS, MT) or ("David killed 700 of their chariot teams and 40,000 men"--JB) or ("David killed 700 of their charioteers and 40,000 of their foot soldiers"--NIV, BBE, NAB) or ("David destroyed 1,700 chariots...and slew 4,000 horsemen"--LV). Again, biblicists will have to rely on their opponents' ignorance because no exit exists.

That completes our discussion of key examples in the second category (CV). During the final two months we'll concentrate on verses that are omitted (OT) in one or more versions. The contradictory aspect lies in the fact that translators can't agree on whether or not many verses, some of considerable import, belong in the "authentic" Bible to begin with.

REVIEWS

Among the publications emanating from Alpha and Omega Ministries of Phoenix, Arizona is a 44-page booklet entitled, Letters to an Anti-theist by James White, the director. It consists of three major sections--the extensive correspondence between White and myself, White's response to 14 critical questions posed in an earlier issue of BE, and a final section devoted to criticisms of some points made in BE through the years. The correspondence between us has already been covered in earlier issues of BE and need not be revealed, but White's responses to 14 questions submitted by us months ago and his criticisms of some points we made in days gone by were not addressed. Now is the time to fill that gap. Before beginning, however, we might note that the booklet's title, Letters to an Anti-Theist is based upon the unwarranted assertion by White that BE is an atheist (anti-theist) publication. BE has never taken a position on the existence of a God and I would challenge White to provide evidence to the contrary. Many biblicists live under the mistaken impression that opposition to the Bible is synonymous with atheism. On page 25 White says, "Notice first of all that I have used the term "anti-theist." Many atheists like to say that they

have no beliefs, hence they have nothing to defend. But, if atheists have no beliefs, how can they write books about atheism? How can they publish monthly periodicals attacking the Bible? Are they not by doing so asserting something even if that something is negative? Of course they are. So when dealing with people such as Mr. McKinsey, using the term "anti-theist" is perfectly accurate. It is clearly Mr. McKinsey's goal to destroy any trust in the Bible and, by so doing, belief in God. Therefore, he is rightly called an "anti-theist." White's logic is often faulty because of fallacious assumptions and this case is no exception. Because his assumptions are wrong, his reasoning is erroneous and his conclusion is false. First, his initial statement that "many atheists like to say..." is based on the erroneous belief that I'm an atheist. This, in turn, is followed by the irrelevant comment that, "if atheists have no beliefs, how can they write books about atheism?" Our position is more one of agnosticism than atheism and BE is not a book about atheism. In fact, it is not even a book. Second, White's innate belief that opposition to the Bible makes one an atheist is shared by many biblicists and only reveals his myopic view of life. Many people with no view on the existence of a God (agnostics for example) as well as many who believe in a God (Moslems for example) discount the Bible or substantial portions thereof. Theists, such as Thomas Paine, believe in a God but strongly oppose the Bible. Third, White's comment, "are they not by doing so asserting something even if that something is negative?" is deceptive. Yes, periodicals such as BE are asserting something; they are saying the Bible is flawed throughout and not to be trusted, but that doesn't mean they are saying anything about the existence of God. Like many products of Sunday School, White can't seem to separate God from the Bible. He mistakenly equates the two such that a critique or denial of one is viewed as a critique or denial of the other. His comment that, "when dealing with people such as Mr. McKinsey using the term 'anti-theist' is perfectly accurate" is perfectly inaccurate. Fourth, "how can they publish monthly periodicals attacking the Bible" is a misleading observation since BE's primary purpose is to expose information about the Bible that is kept from the laity. This could only be viewed as an "attack" on the Bible by those who have a vested interest in seeing that only one side is presented. And lastly, White only adds to his malaise by saying Mr. McKinsey's goal is to destroy any trust in the Bible and, by so doing, belief in God." BE's subcaption clearly says that its purpose is to expose the Bible's errors, contradictions, and fallacies. That's our goal. The inseparable by-product is destruction of people's trust in the Bible. Common sense should have told him that if destroying people's belief in God were our goal, then dwelling on the Bible would be rather innocuous since Moslems, Hindus, and millions of other individuals believe in a God or gods without adhering to the Bible. If the Bible vanished tomorrow, that would not alter their theistic concepts.

Having registered our objection to the inappropriate title given to the publication, let us turn to White's responses to 14 of the questions posed by BE long ago. The first question we submitted was: Why are we being punished for Adam's sin? After all, he ate the forbidden fruit, we didn't; it's his problem, not ours. And why do women have to endure pain in childbirth because of Eve's behavior, especially in light of Deut. 24:16 and other references? In answer to this White says, "Few doctrines come under more consistent and heavy fire than that of man's sin. This is hardly to surprise us, as man does not like to be reminded of his sin, nor of his responsibilities before God.... First we are not being 'punished' for Adam's sin. Instead, we are living with the consequences of Adam's sin. There is a big difference between them. God does not punish someone else for Adam's sin, and if someone thinks he does, that person is mistaken....when Achan sinned (Joshua 7:20) he was punished by death and his whole family perished with him. They were not punished, but they experienced the results of Achan's sin. They were not said to be guilty but Achan, as the head of his house, was their representative and what he did was considered to be their responsibility as well. The same goes for Adam. As our representative, Adam fell and (according to Paul in Romans 5) we fell with him. We are not punished for his one act--rather we live in a world that is completely affected by that act...."

There is almost no end to the amount of rationalizing biblicists are willing to employ to justify many inane biblical doctrines and this imbroglio is no exception. Their approach is one of making black look white, making the irrational seem logical. White's "explanation" of the dilemmas associated with Original Sin is a clear example. To begin with, his first sentence is false. We are not dealing with "man's sin." Men didn't sin, a man sinned, according to the mythology. One man sinned, not billions. Second, we most assuredly are being punished for Adam's sin. If he had not eaten of the forbidden fruit we would all be living in paradise on earth from conception to death. Vices would be nonexistent and virtues would reign supreme. Third, to say that we are "not being punished" but merely "living with the consequences of Adam's sin" is a distinction without substance, a ruse to avoid the obvious. One might just as well execute an entire town because one of its citizens murdered a friend and then use the pretext that the town was not being punished but only bearing the consequences of one person's act. When Achan and his entire family were killed because of his act they were punished. To say they were not punished but merely experienced the results of Achan's sin is without merit. Using White's logic I could steal a car and say the owner was not robbed but only bearing the consequences of the car being taken. White says what Achan did was considered to be his family's responsibility as well. Why? Considered by whom? Certainly not by a just God! How could people be held responsible for an act they did not commit, that, in fact, was done by another? As I've said before that makes about as much sense as would the following scenario. While sitting at home watching TV one evening the police arrived to arrest me. I asked them why I was being arrested and they said my father in Australia just killed someone. I asked what that had to do with me and they said, "Well he's your father isn't he?" After starting out by telling us they were merely bearing the consequences; White shifted gears and claimed they were actually responsible.

White concludes, "Therefore it is inaccurate to say that we are punished in Adam's place or for Adam's sin. Of course, the anti-theist may reply, "but that's not fair! Why should I live in a messed-up world because of what someone else did? That is true- it's not fair. It is not fair that an innocent person dies when a drunk crosses the line and collides with the innocent person's car. But it happens...."

White alleges that people "live with the consequences" of the acts of others and concedes that's unjust. That's life he says. Drunks are out there. Yes, they are, but the collision was accidental. It was not intentionally planned or willed that innocents be injured because of a drunk's deeds. It was not willed by God that innocent people should suffer because of the drunk's behavior. Yes, innocent people are injured by drunks, but is White saying God caused them to bear the consequences because someone got drunk. No God could be just and condone such an arrangement. In typical apologetic style White is trying to create an analogy where none exists. No amount of Christian obfuscation is going to make an irrational situation look reasonable.

Interestingly enough, White's position is not biblical because it clashes with Paul. The latter clearly states that mankind is not under the cloud of sin because it is bearing the consequences of Adam's act but because everyone actually sinned when Adam sinned. "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned"--Rom. 5:12. "All sinned" (past tense). Paul says mankind actually sinned when Adam sinned and that's why they are paying the penalty and suffering the consequences. People did not just inherit the ability to sin because of Adam's act; they did not just inherit a propensity or desire to sin, they are not just bearing the consequences, as White alleges; they sinned, period. If White intends to revamp his drunk analogy to fit Paul's logic and become biblical he is going to have to say that the innocent victims were not innocent after all. They sinned when the drunk sinned and got their just desserts, a position which is even more absurd. Surely White wouldn't say the innocent victims somehow sinned and that's why they were hit by the drunk?

Incidentally, the irrationality of Paul's position is also shown in the fact that in order for everyone to have sinned when Adam sinned, everyone would have to have existed somewhere when Adam lived. That would mean billions of people were waiting somewhere for their turn to be born.

Another question asked in BE months ago was: How can the Resurrection be so important when others were raised before Jesus? One strategy White often employs to elude dilemmas is to shift the focus by dwelling on irrelevancies and raising them to unwarranted levels of significance. His response in this instance is a fine example. "It is true that others were raised from the dead before Jesus was. This statement assumes the Biblical statements concerning those resurrections are true, and therefore the question is really a theological one, and must be answered in that way." Oddly enough, one who believes the Bible is the infallible, inerrant word of God is using the word "assumes." We have always been told that resurrections prior to that of Jesus were real because the Bible says they occurred; now we are told by fundamentalist White that belief in same is really an assumption. Moreover, why that causes the question to shift from biblical to theological and the importance attached thereto are unclear.

White continues, "There is no indication in the Bible that any of the others who were raised from the dead lived eternally. Instead, it is clear that they lived on and then died a natural death. Jesus did not die again--he lives eternally. This makes His resurrection unique as it is a true resurrection to life eternal." To begin with, this is the standard irrelevant tactic I often encounter on radio talk shows that is no more valid now than the first time it surfaced. Paul clearly states in 1 Cor. 15:14, 17 that it's the Resurrection that counts, not the fact that Jesus never died again. Where does Paul attribute importance to the fact that Jesus never died again? It's not germane. We aren't talking about how long people lived after their resurrection but only about Christ's resurrection per se. Secondly, where is the evidence showing that it's "clear" others "lived on and died a natural death?" White is obligated to provide chapter and verse. Otherwise it's merely conjecture. Nowhere does the Bible clearly state these people died again. Thirdly, White's comment that this is what "makes His resurrection unique" flies in the face of Paul's assertion that uniqueness resides in the fact that it occurred at all. In typical apologetic form White again seeks to rewrite and reinterpret the script as expediency dictates. He's added deaths to the Bible that are not mentioned and words to Paul he never said. Fourthly, deception lurks in White's comment that Jesus "lives eternally." According to the Bible that's true of everyone. Whether in heaven, hell, or otherwise, we all live eternally, regardless of our desires. Or maybe White has accepted annihilationism?

White continues, "Secondly, Jesus was God in human flesh. None of the other people who were resurrected were Deity." Even if Jesus were God, which many biblical verses deny, it's irrelevant, since Paul said it's the Resurrection per se that matters.

Again White, "Third, Jesus' resurrection was prophesied long before. He himself foretold it. None of the others foretold their deaths and resurrection. He also said that he had authority to take back his life again (John 10:17-18). No other person claimed to have a part in raising himself or herself." "Prophesied long before?" Long before what? Long before Jesus lived? Where and by whom? Where in the OT is the resurrection of Jesus prophesied? Leaving aside the fact that Jesus did not accurately prophesy the time of his own resurrection, the fact remains that this, too, is irrelevant. Where does Paul stress these points? Are we going to go by what Paul said matters or by what later apologists feel should be stressed? Are we going by the Bible or what its proponents allege? Moreover, Jesus did not raise himself. The Bible repeatedly says he was raised by another, i.e., God (Acts 2:32, 3:15, 4:10, 5:30, 13:30, Rom. 8:11, 10:9).

White concludes, "Finally Jesus' resurrection makes possible the resurrection of all who trust in him. We as believers have the promise of our own resurrection because of the resurrection of our

Lord. My resurrection is not guaranteed because of the raising of the son of the widow of Nain or of Lazarus; but, as I am united with Christ, and he was raised, so shall I be...." Again "irrelevant" is the key word. Paul said it's the Resurrection that counts not the results that supposedly emanate from it. Second, as was mentioned earlier, everyone is resurrected eventually; so how could his resurrection "make possible" the resurrection of all who trust in him? Biblical teachings assert that we are all resurrected, except for those alive at the rapture, and we all live eternally. That's unavoidable. Where we reside eventually is another matter. In any event, these are irrelevant secondary issues indicative of one seeking to shift the focus. {To Be Continued}

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #275 from John Sikos, P.O. Box 443, Romeo, Michigan 48065-0443

Dear Dennis. I was extremely shocked to read in Issue #66 that you were not sent a copy of Letters to an Anti-theist by JW of Alpha and Omega Ministries. Professional courtesy would require that this be done automatically. I received a copy of the booklet UNSOLICITED (probably because you have permission to publish my name and address), yet JW claims you got a copy only because you circled the proper item on his order sheet. After reading his booklet, I am convinced it was intended for his audience, not you, because it is designed so that someone not familiar with BE would think you had been defeated....

Letter #276 from PD of Mesick, Michigan

Hi Dennis. Your two tracts are what I need to enlighten some of my born-yesterday, fundamentalist friends. The last two issues of BE start to touch on an argument that I have found to be most effective. A significant foundationstone for the fundamentalist belief in the validity of their Bible is the noting that their scripture has been passed through the centuries without so much as "one jot or tittle" being changed. As BE demonstrates, a number of changes (such as Mark 16:9-20) made by church scribes were intentional, and not innocent errors. Thus, instead of saints faithfully copying and translating the scripture, it was done by deceitful men lacking moral integrity, who put the worldly interests of the church hierarchy ahead of any form of eternal punishment for their deeds. That being the case, the fundamentalists must now prove that the particular verse they are quoting is identical to that written by the original "inspired" author, and therefore is the one true, undebatable word of God. Once I have them on the defensive, I can use facts about the different versions and conflicting translations to totally rattle their smug air of superiority. By their own admission, once part of scripture becomes suspect, all of it is in doubt. How delicious. This "authenticity" question often tones down even the most annoying "fire and brimstone" speaker!....

Letter #277 from DM of Dayton, Ohio

Dennis. Please send me your two new pamphlets.... I work with some born-again types, 32nd degree masons, and others who think "if it's in the bible it is correct," period. Want to whip it on them. Keep up the good work.

Letter #278 from PK of Berkeley, California

Dear Dennis. I've never in my life enjoyed reading the Bible as much as I do with your newsletter as my guide. Thanks for your consistently interesting and vitally important work....Best of luck in all your endeavors.

Letter #279 from JQK of New York, New York

Dear Dennis....Someday I hope all the priceless information in BE can be published in book form. You're doing a fantastic job.

Letter #280 from VSF of Garnavillo, Iowa

Dear Mr. McKinsey....Your publication is just wonderful and you are doing a great job. I just can't find words to thank you and look forward each month to receiving it.

EDITOR'S NOTE: (a) Letters have a much greater chance of being published in BE if they are succinct, to-the-point, well-written (proofread), and reasonably scholarly.

(b) The problems and contradictions highlighted in our two new pamphlets on the Bible and Jesus are synchronized with the King James Version. Always check to see which version of the Bible biblicists are using before assuming a contradiction exists. Modern translators, such as those who created the NIV, have often rewritten the text to remove a problem. Honest, objective scholarship is not one of their hallmarks.

(c) Continuation, alteration, or elimination of the pamphlets depends upon field- tested effectiveness. Please let us know how they fare and the strength of each point.

COMMENTARY

VERSIONS DIFFER (Part Four of a Five-Part Series)--The third and final category within differing versions is composed of variations between translations that are attributable to words or phrases in one text that are omitted in others (OT). Since the number of conflicts is sizable and many are of minimal significance, only those of substantial importance will be outlined. All others at our disposal will only be cited for those who wish to pursue the matter further. PSALM 145:13 ("The Lord is faithful in all his words and gracious in all his deeds"). Maybe the KJ, ML, LB, AS, BBE, NEB, NWT, NAS, and MT feel the Lord is not faithful and gracious since they omit this verse. MATT. 5:22 ("...whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment...." "Without a cause" is omitted in every version except the KJ, ML, and LV. May we infer that the latter allow one to be angry as long as there is a cause while all others prohibit anger for any reason? MATT. 5:44 ("Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you and pray for them which despitefully use you...."). Only the King James and the Living Bible tell people to bless their cursers and do good to their haters. All others delete the underlined sentence. MATT. 6:6 ("...and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly"). Since believers are often not rewarded openly, if at all, that could account for the fact that every version except the King James and the Living Bible wisely omit the word "openly"? MATT. 6:13 ("For thine is the Kingdom and the power and the glory, for ever"). This powerful verse is omitted in the RS, LB, JB, AS, BBE, NIV, NAB, TEV, NWT, and NEB. Maybe they feel it isn't forever? MATT. 17:21 ("Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting"). Since this verse is omitted in the RS, JB, NIV, BBE, NEB, TEV, and NWT, one might conclude they feel prayer and fasting are unnecessary. MATT. 18:11 ("For the son of man came to save that which was lost"). This important verse is omitted in the RS, JB, NIV, AS, BBE, NEB, NAB, TEV, and the NWT. Perhaps they feel that's not why he came? MATT. 19:9 ("...whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery"). Since this verse is omitted in the RS, ML, LB, JB, NIV, NEB, TEV, NWT, and NAS, are we to conclude they would allow a man to marry a woman who is put away? MATT. 23:14 ("Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widow's houses, and for a pretence make long prayer; therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation"). If damnation awaits those making long prayer, then one can understand why this verse is not in the catholic NAB and JB versions. I've witnessed some "Hail Marys" that seemed interminable. However, it must also be noted that it's not in the RS, LB, NIV, AS, BBE, NEB, TEV, and NWT either so there may be no ulterior motive. Only the KJ, ML, NAS, and LV feel it's authentic. MATT. 24:36 ("But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only"). The KJ and LV are the only two versions without "nor the Son" which could easily lead one to conclude that they are trying to make Jesus look more knowledgeable than he really is. In this case, the KJ and LV would seem to be the least honest translations. MATT. 27:24 ("...I, Pilate, am innocent of the blood of this just person"). It's interesting to note that several versions left out the word "just." One might conclude they don't feel Jesus is just. MARK 1:1 ("The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God"). Only one version, the Jehovah's Witnesses' NWT, omits "the Son of God." That's odd since Jesus is referred to several times as the "Son of God" in the Witnesses' catechism entitled, Reasoning from the Scriptures (pages 209-210). MARK 9:29 ("...This can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting"). Every version except the KJ omits "and fasting." Apparently Christians are becoming less fond of physical denial which fasting entails and prayer doesn't. MARK 10:24 ("Children, how hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God"). The underlined part is omitted in the RS, NIV, NAB, TEV, NWT, and the NAS. They believe that entering heaven is difficult, period. All others believe it's hard

only for those who trust in riches. MARK 11:26 ("But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses"). Many modern versions--RS, LB, JB, NIV, AS, BBE, NEB, NAB, TEV, and the NWT--omit this important verse. MARK 14:68 ("And he went out into the porch; and the cock crew"). The prophecy by Jesus in John 13:38 that the cock would crow after the third denial, not the first, is shown to be false by this verse. The RS, LB, JB, NIV, NEB, NWT, and NAS eliminated the problem by omitting "and the cock crew." MARK 16:9-20--Every version has these verses in one form or another although the NIV has a footnote stating they do not exist in the two most reliable early manuscripts. Whether or not they belong in the "authentic" Bible remains in dispute. LUKE 9:55-56 ("But he turned, and rebuked them and said,...the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them").

Discontent on the part of King James' supporters is understandable in view of the fact that only three modern versions--the ML, NAS, AND LV--have the underlined part. LUKE 11:2 ("...They will be done, as in heaven, so in earth") and LUKE 11:4 ("...but deliver us from evil"). It's interesting to note that every modern version except the LV omits these well-known King James comments. LUKE 24:51 ("...he was parted from them and carried up into heaven") and LUKE 24:52 ("And they worshipped him and returned to Jerusalem with great joy"). The NEB and NAS omit "...carried up into heaven" and "worshipped him" which implies they do not believe these occurred. JOHN 3:13 ("...even the Son of man which is in heaven"). The RS, LB, NIV, BBE, TEV, NWT, and NAS omit the underlined part and imply Jesus was not in heaven. JOHN 6:44 ("He that believeth on me hath everlasting life"). One can understand KJ only supporters being upset when every version except the LB, BBE, and LV omits "on me." Most versions say one need only believe. Belief in Jesus per se is not specified. JOHN 7:8 ("Go ye up unto this feast: I go not up yet unto this feast"). After making this statement, Jesus went to the feast. By omitting the key word, "yet," many versions--RS, JB, AS, NEB, NAB, TEV, NAS--are clearly showing Jesus engaged in prevarication. JOHN 7:53-8:11 (The Woman Caught in Adultery). Every version except the NEB and the NWT omits these verses. As with the last 12 verses of Mark 16, the NIV has a footnote stating the earlier and most reliable manuscripts don't have this story. 1 COR. 5:5 ("...that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus"). By omitting the word "Jesus," many versions--JB, NIV, NEB, NAB, TEV, and NWT--imply Jesus is not Lord. 1 COR. 5:7 ("For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us"). When they see the phrase "for us" omitted, it's not hard to understand why the supporters of every version except the KJ, LB, BBE, and LV are disgruntled. Was Jesus sacrificed for who knows what or was he sacrificed "for us"? 1 COR. 10:28 ("...for the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof"). Every version omits this verse except the King James. Perhaps they don't feel the earth is the Lord's afterall? COL. 1:14 ("In whom we have redemption through his blood...."). Every version except the KJ, ML, and LB omit "through his blood." Without that phrase it would appear that mere reliance upon or belief in Jesus, rather than his death on the Cross, is sufficient. 1 PETER 4:1 ("...Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh"). When they see every version except theirs omitting "for us," one can again understand the concerns expressed by KJ and LV supporters. Without it one is not sure why he suffered. And lastly, we have JOHN 14:14 ("Anything you ask me in my name I will do"). The KJ version and many others--RS, JB, AS, NEB, NWT--omit "me" in this verse and by so doing imply that one need not ask Jesus in particular to be satisfied. One need only ask in his name which diminishes his role and importance. Admittedly, in several instances, circumstantial more than solid evidence is being employed to account for the various omissions. But every attorney knows circumstantial evidence is admissible in a court and can be decisive for a conviction.

In closing, it should be noted that biblicists could argue the omissions are justified by the Hebrew and Greek texts. If so, then why do they surface in some versions and not others? More than likely the reason for these differences is attributable to the fact that every one appears in one or more ancient text and their inclusion or exclusion from one or more versions is primarily based on expediency and the philosophy translators seek to convey. (To Be Concluded Next Month)

HEAVEN--From a biblical and theological perspective what is the most important goal of nearly every Christian? To what end are their efforts directed; what's it all for? In a nutshell, it's to save souls from hell and for HEAVEN. Jesus is only a means to that end; he is not the end itself. The overriding purpose is to ferry people into that realm of eternal bliss known as HEAVEN. All the preaching, all the writing, all the time, effort, and money are geared toward that one overarching, all-encompassing aspiration. But, unfortunately, very few of heaven's adherents have seriously thought about all the problems and ramifications, both biblical and practical, associated with what has come to be known as HEAVEN. They haven't thought it through.

Biblically speaking, there are 7 verses and a parable attributing qualities to heaven that range from unacceptable to loathsome. Why would anyone want to cross its threshold in light of the following? REV. 12:7 ("And there was war in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels"). Heaven is supposed to be a perfect place. Yet, it experienced a war. How can there be a war in a perfect place and if it happened before why couldn't it occur again? Why would anyone want to go to a region in which war can occur when that's precisely what most people are trying to avoid. MATT. 11:12 ("And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth and the violent take it by force"). Violence and force in a perfect place? REV. 19:14 ("And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses..."). Again, the antithetical idea of war in heaven. MATT. 11:11 ("...he that is least in the Kingdom of heaven is greater than he"). How can heaven, the perfect location, have inequality and levels of status? MATT. 24:35 ("Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away"). The verse clearly states that heaven, like earth, will pass away. Why seek a place that will eventually vanish? Mark 13:31 and Luke 21:33 concur. To forestall the back-to-the-Greek defense and reliance upon the assertion that the word "Heaven" is only referring to the sky above, we should note that it comes from the Greek word "ouranos" which is the only word used for "heaven" in all the gospels. MATT. 13:33 and LUKE 13:20-21 ("...The Kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in 3 measures of meal, till the whole was leavened"). How can heaven be utopian when it's like leaven, a contaminant, as several verses show? 1 COR. 5:8 ("Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth"), LEV. 10:12 ("And Moses spake unto Aaron,...Take the meat offering that remaineth of the offerings of the Lord made by fire, and eat it without leaven...for it must be holy"), 1 COR. 5:6 RSV ("Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?"), LUKE 12:1 ("...he began to say unto his disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy"), and MARK 8:15. MATT. 16:19 ("And I will give unto thee the Keys of the Kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven..."). How could people be bound or restrained in a perfect place of freedom? Perhaps it isn't that free? Lastly, we have a parable in MATT. 20:1-16 which clearly demonstrates that heaven is the antithesis of a just environment. Briefly stated, the parable is as follows: Early one morning an estate owner went out and hired some workers for his field at \$20 per day. Three, 6, 9, and 11 hours later he hired additional workers. Yet, when everyone was paid that evening, they all received the same amount. In 20:1 Jesus equated this arrangement with heaven. Those who worked the entire day understandably grumbled and Jesus related the dialogue that occurred. "...on receiving it they grumbled at the householder, saying, 'These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat.' But he replied to one of them, 'Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for \$20. Take what belongs to you, and go; I choose to give to this last as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?....'" If that's Heaven, Christians are pursuing the kind of milieu that's all too prevalent on earth today. Like war, it's precisely the kind of condition nearly everyone is trying to avoid. For Jesus to quote the landowner (God) as saying, "Friend I am doing you no wrong" is enough to create rejection of Jesus and heaven. While biblical verses show that heaven is far from desirable, many practical problems

show it's far from viable. As with the Flood account (See: Issue 11's Commentary) believers must confront the series of practical questions that are engendered. Very few people have taken the time or effort needed to soberly critique what heaven would entail. (1) If the number of rewards and/or possessions in heaven is equal regardless of productivity, as Jesus stated in his parable, won't that create dissension and a feeling among many that heaven is not what they expected? (2) The Bible repeatedly says people will be rewarded according to their works-- MATT. 16:27 ("For the Son of man shall come...and then he shall reward every man according to his works"), ROM. 2:6 ("...the righteous judgment of God; who will render to every man according to his deeds"), REV. 22:12 ("...my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be"), PSALM 62:12 ("...for thou renderest to every man according to his work"), REV. 20:12 ("...and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works"), and REV. 20:13 ("...and they were judged every man according to their works"). But where does the rewarding occur since this world is certainly not the locale and there is no biblical basis for an intermediate stage such as Purgatory? Apparently it occurs in heaven. If so, will some people in heaven have 6 cadillacs while others will have only 1 or 2, figuretively speaking? How rewards will be dispensed and in what form is a very practical question that's rarely addressed. Since some people committed more good deeds on earth than others, some mechanism must exist by which some will receive more rewards than others. As a result, the inequality so evident on earth will continue in heaven. The heaven described by Jesus in his parable, on the other hand, is one in which rewards for labor are equal regardless of one's efforts. So which is the true heaven? One in which people receive equal rewards regardless of the amount of effort demonstrated or one in which rewards are greater for those who generated the larger number of good deeds? (3) Will there be rules, laws, and regulations in heaven or does freedom reign unhindered? The obvious question is how people could interact in any form whatsoever without personal constraints. (4) Is everything in heaven abundant and free as is commonly believed? The answer is either yes or no, assuming something is there besides people. In either case, would heaven be synonymous with paradise? Either we would have to work for that which we sought or we would be given that which we didn't earn. The former does not sound that appealing and the latter violates Paul's admonition that, "when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat" (2 Thess. 3:10). Moreover, to say our finite deeds on earth earn us infinitely free rewards in heaven is as unjust as to say our finite sins on earth earn us infinite punishment in hell. (5) Do you continue to learn in heaven or is your knowledge restricted to that which was learned on earth? If your reservoir of information grows, then how could that occur without interaction with something other than people? If growth does not occur, then aren't unequal levels of awareness eternally fixed? (6) How could heaven be a utopia when every inhabitant will be far from perfect? Even those we love the most have undesirable traits and would have to be changed. Everyone who ever lived is far from perfect, so who can think of any person or group with whom they would want to spend an eternity? If personalities are not altered or perfected in heaven, how will you be kept from encountering unpleasantness from those who earned admittance but are displeasing nevertheless. If people are segregated to avoid this dilemma, you'll be alone forever because everyone displays some disagreeable characteristics. (7) In order for heaven to be a state of bliss, won't the memories of its inhabitants have to be stripped of much that occurred on earth? If not, won't unpleasant periodic flashbacks interrupt an otherwise idyllic existence? Or is all recollection of earthly existence extinguished? One can only speculate as to what the latter would do to a person's level of intelligence. (8) Does everyone in heaven have the same degree of intelligence? If not, then aren't unheavenly feelings of inferiority and inadequacy unavoidable? (9) People change dramatically over the years such that the person you are at 10 often has almost nothing to do with the personality you have at age 90. So do you enter heaven as you were at age 2, 32, or 92? And do you continue to age or is it fixed. If the latter, at what age is it fixed, by whom, and on what basis? Could someone's age be fixed at the mental age of a normal 40 year old when he only lived on earth 2 months? (10) When fetuses and infants die and enter heaven, do they stay at

that age or do they grow and develop a personality which never existed on earth? (11) Do people reproduce in heaven or is the number anchored forever? If reproduction is not allowed wouldn't those who wanted children feel they were in something other than heaven? Or is the desire to have children abolished? If the number is allowed to increase, how does this occur? (12) If people are created in heaven, how could God be just, since they would be allowed to by-pass the earthly test that everyone must surmount in order to attain heaven. They never accepted Jesus and/or performed good deeds. (13) How will people be recognized in heaven? If everyone has the appearance they died with on earth won't many be saddled with an appearance they wished to improve or eliminate? Or is the appearance of everyone altered as they desire and you are simply told in some manner who is whom? Or is the appearance of everyone completely abolished? One can only guess how you would recognize someone who has no appearance whatever. (14) And finally, if people will be reunited with their relatives and friends in heaven, will they also be able to reunite with animals? Unless people have their memories of what occurred while on earth radically altered or abolished, won't they also yearn to be with the best companions many ever had? How could this occur since biblicists believe animals have neither souls nor immortality? Or is the desire to reunite with earthly things abolished for everything except people?

These are only a few of many questions that must be addressed by those who take heaven seriously and seek to provide a rationale. Queries of this nature aren't immaterial because millions of people are literally staking their lives on heaven's existence. Everything they do and say is done with an eye on that final arena, the expected reward. They should realize that problems as potent as many found throughout the Bible accompany the whole concept.

Biblicists who really think they have thought it through are urged to write us a letter describing heaven as they think it is or as they would like it to be. You can use any portrayal imaginable. We only ask that it be SPECIFIC AND PRECISE. No glittering generalities, please.

REVIEWS

Last month we addressed answers given by JW of A & O Ministries to two questions posed in BE months ago. Other questions submitted by BE were also addressed by him in Letters to an Anti-theist and two more merit a reply. The first is how Noah (Gen. 6:9) and Job (1:1) could have been perfect if all have sinned (Romans 3:23)? JW's reply was, "Little time need be spent on this, as it is clearly answered by asking the question, 'Why do you equate perfection and sinlessness?' The Hebrew terms used in these passages do not mean sinlessness. Rather, the Hebrew word is tam, which refers to completeness, not sinless perfection. When applied to man, it would refer to a complete man with moral integrity (see: Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew lexicon for details). Also we see that Noah offered sacrifices (Gen. 8:20) as did Job, for it was his regular custom (Job 1:5). Why would these men sacrifice if they did not know of their own sin?"

The little time that need be spent is on the rationalizations JW apparently adopted from some prominent apologists to escape this problem. They are the standard fare that's meted out to an uncritical laity and are fatally flawed in several respects. First, JW says, "the Hebrew word is "tam," which refers to completeness, not sinless perfection." Complete in what way? Complete "with moral integrity," says JW. But that's sinlessness. What's the difference? He is either complete morally or he isn't. If he is complete then he's sinless; if he isn't complete then he's a sinner like everyone else. To say someone is a complete man with moral integrity is to say he is sinless. If he isn't a complete man with moral integrity then he's a sinner. There is no inbetween. He is either perfect or he isn't. Like his apologetic mentors, JW carefully avoided giving a precise definition to "a complete man with moral integrity." Why? Because it can only mean "sinless perfection. Second, if Noah was not morally perfect, i.e., sinless, then why was he

chosen to be on the Ark? If he was morally imperfect, i.e., a sinner, then he had no more right to be chosen than any other sinner of his day. He should have perished with all the other sinners. Incidentally, there were 7 people on the Ark with Noah. Unless they were morally perfect, what right did they have to be saved either? They, too, were sinners like everyone else. Third, JW says, "Noah offered sacrifices" (Gen. 8:20) and these would not have been necessary if he did not know of his "own sin." What he craftily avoided telling his readers is that: (a) The sacrifices were offered after the Flood had ended which means Noah could have been sinless until the Flood subsided. He could have been sinless while the Ark was being built and after it was launched; (b) Gen. 8:20 does not say the sacrifices were offered because of any sins committed by Noah. In fact, verse 21 implies they were only intended to appease God because the latter said, "I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake.... Neither will I again smite any more every living thing...." (c) Biblical sacrifices were offered for a wide variety of reasons. Why assume those in Gen. 8:20 were offered for sins? (d) If they were offered to remove sins why couldn't they have been offered by Noah for the sins of everyone but himself. The text is nebulous on this point. And lastly, JW says Job must have sinned because he, too, offered sacrifices as "was his regular custom" (Job 1:5). At this point JW's "scholarship" sank to a level that can only be described as pathetic, if not desperate. Apparently he is relying on reader lethargy as his sole means of support because one need only read the text to see that Job's sacrifices were offered for his sons and daughters' behavior, not his own. "His sons used to take turns holding feasts in their homes, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would send and have them purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, 'Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.' This was Job's regular custom" (Job 1:4-5 NIV). And to think apologists accuse us of engaging in eisegesis (reading something into the text that isn't there) and taking verses out-of-context!

Another query addressed by A & O is found in the third section of the same pamphlet. JW writes, "In the February 1983 issue, page 3, McKinsey alleges that Jesus did not fulfill the prophecy of Matt. 12:40 RSV ("For as Jonah was 3 days and 3 nights in the belly of the whale so will the Son of man be 3 days and 3 nights in the heart of the earth"). He bases this on the idea that Jonah was in the whale's belly for 3 days and 3 nights, but Jesus was not in the tomb 72 hours (Friday evening to Sunday morning). He bluntly says, 'His prophecy failed.' Now, some have taken a Wednesday crucifixion position to avoid this, but that is not only unnecessary but Biblically insupportable. Rather, the answer lies in the obvious fact that the Jews counted any portion of a day as a full day. Therefore, Friday was day one, Saturday day two, Sunday day three....

Again, JW has relied on the common rationalizations that permeate the standard apologetic writings. And like them his explanation has the same inaccuracies. First, and most important, how are 3 nights going to be shoved into the time slot from Friday afternoon to Sunday morning? Apologists always seek to ignore the reference to 3 nights. Second, 3, 6, or 10 hours does not make a day. The prophecy says 3 days, not fractions thereof. Please provide chapter and verse to support the assertion that "Jews counted any portion of a day as a full day." Jews know a day's length as well as the rest of us and I've never been shown any portion of their literature to the contrary. Third, JW's allegation that "a Wednesday crucifixion position...is not only unnecessary but biblically insupportable" is only half true. It is necessary but biblically insupportable. And lastly, the prophecy failed because Jonah was not in the whale as Jesus was in the tomb. Jonah remained alive while Jesus was dead.

EDITOR'S NOTE: (a) We wish to thank some perceptive readers who noticed a couple of errors in our new tracts. In THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD? #6 should have Gen. 32:30, not Gen. 32:20 and in JESUS CHRIST IS THE ANSWER? #5 should have Mark 14:66-68 rather than John. (b)

Many readers have requested tapes of my radio appearances. Although they aren't available now, we hope to distribute some eventually.

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COMMENTARY

VERSIONS DIFFER (Part Five of a Five-Part Series)--Last month we completed our specific enumeration of significant words, phrases, and sentences that have been omitted in one version or another. This month we'll conclude the third and final category by citing some texts of lesser importance in which some or all of the words have been omitted in one or more versions. Interested parties can look up the specific details and the problems created thereby. In 2 SAM. 23:33 "son of" is omitted in the KJ, RS, LB, AS, TEV, NWT, NAS, and MT. MATT. 9:34 and 16:2b-3a are left out of the NEB. MATT. 12:47 does not exist in the RS, LB, or JB. MATT. 21:44 is not in the RS, JB, NEB, or TEV. In regard to MATT. 27:35 ("And they crucified him, and parted his garments casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots"), only the KJ and ML have the underlined phrase. MARK 7:16 is not in the RS, LB, NIV, AS, BBE, NEB, TEV, or NWT. MARK 9:44, 46 is not in the RS, LB, JB, NIV, AS, BBE, NAB, NEB, TEV, or the NWT. In MARK 10:7, "And cleave to his wife," is not in the JB, NAB, NWT, or the NAS. MARK 15:28 is omitted in the RS, JB, NIV, AS, BBE, NEB, NAB, TEV, and the NWT. LUKE 17:36 is not in the RS, JB, NIV, AS, BBE, NAB, NEB, TEV, or the NWT. LUKE 22:19b-20 is not in the NEB. LUKE 22:43-44 is not in the RSV. LUKE 23:17 does not exist in the RS, LB, JB, NIV, AS, BBE, NEB, NAB, TEV, or the NWT. LUKE 23:38 is absent from every version except the KJ and LV. LUKE 24:12 and 24:40 are deleted from the RS and NEB. LUKE 24:36 isn't in the RS, LB, NEB, or the NAS. JOHN 5:3b-4 is omitted from the RS, NIV, AS, BBE, NEB, TEV and NWT. ACTS 8:37 is not to be found in the RS, JB, NIV, AS, BBE, NEB, TEV or the NWT. ACTS 15:34 is not in the KJ, RS, LB, JB, NIV, AS, BBE, NEB, NAB, TEV, or the NWT. ACTS 24:6c-8a is absent from the RS, NIV, AS, BBE, NEB, NAB, TEV, and NWT. ACTS 28:29 is omitted in the RS, LB, JB, NIV, AS, BBE, NEB, NAB, TEV and the NWT. ROM. 16:24 is not in the RS, LB, JB, NIV, AS, BBE, NEB, NAB, TEV, or the NWT. And finally, the phrase, "and so we are," in JOHN 3:1 is in every version except the King James.

Before ending the entire subject of how versions differ, a few examples that were overlooked earlier need to be covered. GEN. 47:21 ("And as for the people, he removed them to cities from one...."--KJ, ML, AS, NWT, NAS, MT, LV) versus ("...and as for the people, he made slaves of them from one...."--RS, LB, NIV, JB, BBE, NEB, NAB, TEV). Translators can't seem to agree on whether they were removed to the cities or made slaves. Admittedly, many youngsters setting out to make their mark in life have concluded there isn't much difference. MATT. 18:15 ("If thy brother shall trespass against thee"--KJ, RS, ML, LB, AS, BBE, NAB, TEV, NIV, LV) versus ("If your brother commits a sin"--JB, NEB, NWT, NAS). Translations of this verse conflict. The latter refers to sinning in general while the former is only concerned with sins against you in particular. Even if "thee" referred to all of mankind, the problem would remain. LUKE 23:42 ("And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom"--KJ) versus ("And he said, Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom"--all other versions). By omitting the word, "Lord," every version except the King James is implicitly denying the deity of Jesus. Only in the KJ is he addressed as "Lord." ACTS 20:7 ("On the Saturday night"--NEB, TEV) versus ("Upon the first day of the week"--all other versions). Saturday is not the first day of the week. PHIL. 2:6 ("...who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God...."--KJ, ML) versus ("Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with

God something to be grasped...."--NIV, JB, AS, NAB, NEB, TEV, NWT, NAS, RS). This clash is of exceptional importance because every version except the KJ and ML have Jesus denying he can become God's equal. FIRST THESS. 5:22 ("Abstain from all appearance of evil"--KJ, NAB) versus ("Keep away from evil in every form"--all other versions). Rejection of the KJ Version of this verse by nearly every translation available is quite understandable in light of the fact that people should be told to abhor anti-social activities rather than just the appearance of same. Far too many politicians, clergymen, businessmen, celebrities, and other notable public figures appear to be heeding the KJ teaching by abstaining from the appearance of evil while indulging behind the scenes. FIRST TIMOTHY 6:5 ("Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself"--KJ) versus ("And constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain"--all other versions). After listing some characteristics exhibited by people who ignore the teachings of Jesus, only the KJ version of this verse admonishes believers to avoid these individuals. In no other version does this verse say believers are to eschew such people. 1 JOHN 5:7 ("For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one"). The only verse in the entire Bible clearly alleging the Trinity's existence is 1 John 5:7. Yet, it's absent from every version on the market except the King James. Matt. 28:19, 2 Cor. 13:14, and 1 Peter 1:2 have much less potency because oneness is not asserted. And lastly, we have REV. 22:14 ("Blessed are they that do his commandments that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in...."--KJ) versus ("Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter...."--all other versions). Since the KJ version of this verse is teaching salvation by works, one can easily understand why every modern version changed "do his commandments" to "wash their robes." The latter is more nebulous and does not clearly detract from Paul's doctrine of salvation by faith.

In summary, then, what are the obvious conclusions to be drawn from all the material that has been presented over the last four months concerning differences among versions. First, variations in doctrine and theology emerge because translators often can not agree on how a verse should be translated. Second, theological deviations sometimes emerge because they can not agree on whether or not particular words, phrases, or sentences should even be in the "authentic" Bible. And third, variations in the translation of separate verses have generated textual disagreements as to facts. Anyone who says, as was originally stated on the front page of Issue #66, that "there is nothing in the Christian faith that depends on any disputed passage in Scripture, nothing whatsoever" is either deceived or dishonest. Either his research is wholly inadequate or he knows the truth and has intentionally opted for deception. In either case, he's not to be taken seriously.

CHURCH BY ANOTHER NAME?--For more than 30 years the editor of BE has attended meetings conducted by agnostics, atheists, humanists, rationalists, and other freethought advocates. They are usually congenial and entertaining affairs which highlights the problem. One can't help but ask whether they are a force for change or an accommodation to a feeling of isolation. To what extent are they necessary when so much of that which occurs therein resembles activities within a typical church. As in a church, the same people are usually delivering essentially the same message to the same people; guest speakers are invited; the hat is passed; music is played; performers exhibit their talents; the opposition is satirized and vilified; people leave with elevated spirits; picnics and other socials occur; rummage sales and other money-generating programs take place, and items are sold or distributed free. Praying, genuflecting, costuming, symbolic eating or drinking, hand-raising, eye closing, and religious dancing do not occur, but they are also absent from Unitarian/Universalist churches which are churches, nevertheless. All of the previously-mentioned activities are to be encouraged and promoted as long as they are viewed AS ADJUNCTS TO, RATHER THAN SUBSTITUTES FOR, an effective program of engagement and expansion. Every activity should be judged in

terms of how much our effectiveness is enhanced and our membership increased. When meetings become little more than ideological support groups to which we can retire periodically to recharge our batteries, participants are merely temporarily escaping an unfavorable ideological environment to which they must return. Escapism is not the answer. When freethought advocates meet, goals and activities are crucial and real accomplishment must occur. The central issue is whether or not the previously-mentioned activities contribute to a feeling resembling that of a lockerroom at half-time or a barroom at lunch. As long as they help our forces grow and succeed, they are to be promoted. But when they only pacify with temporary feelings of euphoria, changes are in order. When socializing replaces proselytizing, failure replaces success. Interestingly enough, a similar concern is expressed by fundamentalists and evangelicals toward mainline Christian churches; namely, they have jettisoned their fervor to become little more than social organizations. In any event, I'll undoubtedly continue going to freethought meetings whenever practical and voicing my concern as opportunities arise.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #281 from DM of Pasadena, California (Part a)

Dear Dennis. Although your reply to letter #269 contains an element of truth, it needs to be balanced with some additional facts. First of all, you should not use the King James translation as a standard (however imperfect) by which to compare all others.... Although you have not stated it out and out, I get the impression that you view the KJ Bible as a standard in honesty which was established before matters heated up, and that the subsequent "drift" from that standard is politically suspect....

Editor's Response to Letter #281 (Part a)

Dear DM. I certainly would not use the KJ as a standard by which to judge anything, especially all others versions, as its imperfections are numerous. My intent was to show that modern translations have sometimes made changes in the KJ text for reasons of political expediency. Although the KJ is often faulty and in need of change, these are not the changes upon which I focused. I dwelled upon those which appear to be unnecessary and/or suspect.

Letter #281 Concludes (Part b)

With respect to your reply to Letter #268b, a bracketed text need not be taken as an alternative option; it may simply be there as a reference for those familiar with the KJ Bible. Since most readers are familiar with the KJ Bible they would normally be interested in seeing those verses which the new translation deleted. Why make the reader look them up?

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #281 (Part b)

In essence, DM, you're saying the bracketed text does not belong in the Bible according to the translators of some modern versions. And the point I was making is that it does belong according to the translators of other versions. So who is correct? Specifically, we were discussing the last 12 verses of Mark 16 which some versions have and others don't. Your key phrase is "which the new translation deleted." Should it have been omitted is the point upon which translators are at odds. Brackets merely highlight the text in dispute; they don't settle the issue. Either it belongs or it doesn't. How do we know which is correct?

Letter #282 from BF of Louisa, Kentucky

Dear Mr. McKinsey. I've found fertile and informative your first part (Issue #58) summarizing your "Speech" of Aug. 29th before the American Rationalist Convention....

Unless my memory fails me, your 58 issues so far have not included a full-dress critique of Gleason Archer's ambitious 475-page ENCYCLOPEDIA OF BIBLE DIFFICULTIES? Or did I overlook it? I suppose that if BE represents the most sustained research and presentation of "faults" manifold in the bible, Archer's book represents the most impressive defense of scripture against all such data, dismissing all criticisms as themselves mistaken or irrelevant, etc.

For the first time I've been delving into Archer's tome and am alternatively impressed and disgusted. Manifestly his command of Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, all editions of the bible, and all "higher criticism" volumes and articles, make Archer a formidable foe of what BE embodies (though it was published before your series began in 1983). If you have not yet embodied in BE a detailed critique and (where possible or relevant) refutation of his scores of defensive articles, surely one or two BE issues would be a welcome activity.

Archer's book doesn't cover by any means all the items of inconsistency and atrocity that your 58 issues detail.... His harsh defensive judgments in many instances nauseate ethical freethinkers. For example, Archer lauds God's killing of Elisha by 42 boys (2 Kings 22:23-24); those "young men" were equivalent to lethal youth gangs today.... Personally I was aghast at Archer's conclusion that "pacifism is completely lacking in support from the word of God.".... For "the sun stopped" (Joshua 10:12-14) Archer lamely suggests "optical prolongation of sunshine" etc., but admits this exegesis is "of dubious validity."

Editor's Response to Letter #282

Dear BF. I bought, read, and thoroughly redlined Archer's book years ago. Although comments on its contents have occasionally appeared in BE, I have never engaged in a thorough analysis because priority has usually been given to books, articles, and letters directly criticizing BE. Later, I hope to correct the imbalance.

Letter #283 from Namfonos of Annapolis, Maryland

I spent 42 hours discussing theology about 15 years ago with the most educated idiot I ever met. I asked him, "When (not if) you get to Heaven, will you be aware of having been here talking to me?" He said, "Definitely not! Earth is a sinful place, and there is no knowledge of sin in Heaven." After reading Issue #69, I looked in a concordance under heaven, sin, and knowledge but I did not find reference to "no knowledge of sin in heaven."....

Letter #284 from Dan Barker of The Freedom from Religion Foundation, P.O. Box 750, Madison, Wisconsin 53701

Dear Dennis. I am doing some bible study on the contrast between biblical and secular morality (however either of those may be defined.) In the process I "discovered" some contradictions. It is actually kind of fun to find them all on your own. I know you already know about them because you mentioned the first one in the August BE. Seventh (2 Kings 25:8) versus tenth (Jer. 52:12); three (2 Kings 25:17) versus five (Jer. 53:22); five men (2 Kings 25:19) versus seven men (Jer. 52:25); 27th (2 Kings 25:27) versus 25th (Jer. 52:31). You know what I think? Jeremiah's version starts off perfectly, word for word, copying the Second Kings version of the story. But as the narrative continues it becomes slightly different, here and there, until towards the end of sections it gets worse with words being swapped with other words, mistakes, additions, etc. This

is exactly what would happen, I think, if the passage were being recited from memory! You start off strong, then it gets a bit fuzzy. What do you think?

I am hearing good things about your pamphlets....Also, I did an informal radio debate with JW on Phoenix KTAR last week....Whenever I mentioned a bible verse, he would jump in to give the "correct" interpretation, in the light of history and in the proper context. Context: the final defense of Xians.... Of course, we all agree that a proper historical examination of the bible involves context, but there has to come a point where an error is recognized for what it is.

I am doing a debate Friday night in Atlanta: "Is the bible an acceptable guide for moral behavior?" The opponent...is liberal so this should be interesting. I am going to make a point (among others) that the liberals give credibility to the bible, which is used to such devastating effect by the fundies....

Editor's Response to Letter #284

Dear Dan. I agree with both your assertions. Much of Jeremiah appears to be a memorized version of Second Kings and biblicists prostrate the "context defense" by repeatedly resorting to it because nothing else comes to mind.

Letter #285 from Anonymous

(The national furor that has arisen over the movie, THE LAST TEMPTATION OF CHRIST makes the following observation particularly appropriate--Ed.). Hebrews 4:15 says that Christ was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. But other scriptures teach that mankind is born with a sinful nature while Christ was not born with one. So how can the temptations be the same???? Obviously either He was not tempted like as we are or else he was born with a sinful nature, making the temptations equal. I have never met a fundamentalist that could even begin to answer this point and I have brought this up with believers that know the bible very well, having studied it for many years.

Letter #286 from IF of Vacaville, California

Dear Dennis. I was surprised you claimed you are not anti-theist with all your years of proving the "holy bible" is a mass of irrational superstitious rantings of priests and their fellows who believed the earth was flat and the sun went around it. They had no sciences to tell them their supernatural beliefs were hogwash....

Does this supposed deity race after the earth in all its gyrations to listen to millions of supplications and at the same time guide the destinies of mankind around the world? With the religious they feel it pays to be ignorant. They feel comfortable with an unseen, do nothing, silent God. God never did anything about mass murders we call wars. Never did anything about diseases that kill, maim or inflict pain. Our prisons are burgeoning with criminals and this deity never intercedes to prevent crimes. Never did anything to prevent national disasters that take human lives whether by the hundreds or thousands. A theist is an unthinking, unquestioning robot addicted to priestcraft. In short, deism is idiocy made respectable. God is man's most useless invention.

Editor's Response to Letter #286

Dear IF. Before you move me into a category I wholeheartedly reject, let me state my position on god or theism with unmistakable clarity. As I've said on numerous occasions, the burden of proof

lies on he who alleges. Religious people should know that I'm willing to believe in god, ghosts, mediums, demons, angels, spirits, channeling, miracles, horoscopes, astrology, psychics, ouija boards, the supernatural and anything else for that matter as long as they adhere to one proviso. That's all I ask. Just one simple request! Prove it! Don't give me theories, speculations, guesses, hopes, dreams, wishes, desires, beliefs, faith or indoctrinations. Don't give me one-time-only, non-repeatable, non-testable events. Don't give me internal alterations in one's psychology or physiology that can't be tested, observed, or demonstrated, only felt or believed. And don't give me effects that can't be clearly related to the supposed cause. I have no objection to believing in a god as long as proof is forthcoming. Is that too much to ask? But surely theists don't expect me to adopt their belief on the basis of that which has been presented so far. Every "proof" I've heard and every piece of evidence I've seen for the existence of a god is easily countered by evidence to the contrary. No convincing evidence for a god's existence has emerged but I'm more than willing to hear or witness anything to the contrary, as long as cross-examination is permitted. A popular tune on the market containing the lyrics, "Everything is beautiful in it's own way" must have been written by theists because the world reeks with corruption, injustice, deceit, and exploitation. Most of the planet is unfit for human habitation, either physically, mentally, or morally. Most assuredly, if I had the powers of a god most of this world would be dramatically altered. Suffering, injustice, immorality, egotism, exploitation, and deception would experience blows from which they would never recover. No doubt millions of other freethinkers would agree. The theological teaching that adversity exists because people must be tested in order to prove their faith is inane because the tests are unevenly applied; indeed, some people are hardly tested at all while others endure a lifetime of nightmares. Where is solid evidence that an omnipotent being exists somewhere who cares about what happens to people and actively intervenes in human affairs to render assistance? Unless and until convincing evidence emerges, I'll remain a non-theist. "Anti-theist" is too negative an appellation as it conjures up images of one opposing new information or denying a god's existence despite sufficient evidence to the contrary and an atheist is one who flatly states there is no god. As conditions now stand, theology rests far more on superstition and faith than facts and reason.

Letter #287 from LR of North Belmont, North Carolina

First, I would like to commend you on your efforts and fine publication, BE! I think the acronym, BE, is quite appropriate. To the point,...you have talked about tactics in confronting the believers, and I agree with all your suggestions. The salient problem, however, isn't tactics; it is moral courage.... There is a huge population of skeptics and non-believers, I think, who simply lack the courage to confront the religious establishment, even in the smallest of ways--one on one or in letters-to-the-editor. This fear is our largest obstacle. Example: My father and I are both non-believers, but we have to deal with the public (indeed, are dependent upon it) through our small retail business in a small Bible-belt town. The derision that would befall us should our beliefs become public would be economically disastrous.

It is unnecessary to belabor this point by further listing examples. I'm sure you know what you're up against and I wish you well, but I think it is a losing battle. Most non-believers...are content to hold their beliefs to themselves and avoid religious controversy.... I admire you, but your very notoriety provides for you. You can't expect a crusade from people who hold their beliefs in quiet despair. I wish I were wrong.

Editor's Response to Letter #287

Dear LR. A couple of points. Years ago I initiated BE although I was, and remain, no more protected than you. Seeing a tremendous need for accurate responses to biblical rationalizations, I decided to fill the void, regardless. I couldn't hold back any longer. Second, although courage is

crucial, determination, dedication, and enthusiasm are equally important qualities that are absent from most freethinkers. The latter just don't have the fervor that is so obvious in many of their opponents. If that arises from diminished conviction, then the religious/biblical elements are to be noted for their ability to influence, if not weaken, their staunchest opponents. How many freethinkers are willing to donate the amount of time, effort, and money that is so freely given by millions of biblicists? Publishing BE is like having an unpaid occupation and, frankly, there are a few months when it's less inviting than others. But like Christians going to church several times a week, I feel an inner drive to become involved. Self-discipline, determination, and an ability to bounce forward from setbacks are absolute musts. The members of any football team know they are doomed if these qualities are present in their opponents while absent in themselves. Rugged individualists floating in and out of a movement to which they have only periodic dedication have no chance against an army of persistent, determined, and coordinated believers willing to make requisite sacrifices. It's a full-time job in which personal pleasures are relegated to the backburner. Personally, I enjoy writing BE immensely and receive a pronounced sense of satisfaction and accomplishment. Third, many freethinkers want to become involved on a permanent full-time basis but fail to do so, not out of an absence of courage but because they just don't know what to do. They feel frustrated, isolated, and impotent. After trying various approaches that were not as successful as hoped, they have become discouraged. A primary reason BE appeared was to address this shortfall. Lastly, the battle is by no means lost. Indeed, in many respects the situation has never been better. Anyone who thinks religion in general and the Bible in particular are exceedingly influential should study conditions centuries ago when many governments were little more than theocracies. Conditions are better and continue to improve but they can be far better much faster and that's what is not being accomplished.

Issue No. 71

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COMMENTARY

WORKS OR WHIM--Whether people are saved by faith and/or works has been one of the most prominent issues throughout the history of biblical disputation. Most biblicists emphasize salvation by faith and employ such verses as ACTS 16:30-31 ("What must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved....") to prove their point. Others contend salvation is by works and quote verses such as MATT. 19:16-17 ("one came and said unto him [Jesus--Ed.], what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?...And he said unto him...if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments"), and still others use verses such as JAMES 2:14 ("What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? can faith save him") to prove they are of equal importance. There is also a group that quotes verses such as EPH. 1:4-5 ("According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world,....Having predestinated us into the adoption of children by Jesus Christ....") to prove faith and works are of minimal importance since salvation is determined from the beginning. Although salvation by faith is propounded by the largest number of biblicists, especially those of a fundamentalist or evangelical orientation, prior additions of BE clearly showed that many verses of comparable worth teach salvation by works or salvation by predestination rather than salvation by faith. Issues 3, 53 and 54 exposed the conflict between a wide variety of verses each position can rely upon.

But above and beyond the obvious clash between verses per se is the fatal miasma in which faith-alone adherents find themselves. The latter repeatedly tell the world that Christianity is different from all other religions because Christianity alone teaches salvation by faith while all others teach salvation by works: "Ten of the 11 major religions of the world teach salvation by

good deeds. Christianity stands alone with its emphasis on grace rather than works for salvation" (I'm Glad You Asked by Boa and Moody, p. 175) and "...every human religion, except Biblical Christianity, is a religion of salvation through both faith and works...." (The Bible Has the Answer by Morris and Clark, p. 60). Over and over again apologists tell others that salvation is a gift, pure and simple. There is absolutely nothing one can do to earn salvation. It's freely given by the grace of God and is not the result of anything you have done or can do. It's an unearned, unmerited gift wholly unobtainable by works. Apologetic writings, especially those encased in a fundamentalist perspective, are replete with three messages in this regard. First, salvation is not earned but obtained wholly without works or merit on our part: "That there is nothing that man can do to merit forgiveness is the clear teaching of the Scripture" (Answers to Questions About the Bible by Mounce, p. 160). "If salvation is really the gift of God's grace...as the Bible teaches, then how can there be a price one has to pay to earn it...." (The Bible Has the Answer by Morris & Clark, p. 144). "There are numerous other false ideas about salvation that are prevalent, but all of them...consist in man's doing something which he feels will help earn his salvation." (The Bible Has the Answer by Morris & Clark, p. 53). Second, salvation is an unearned free gift: "One of the clearest emphases of the gospel is that salvation is a free gift attained not by works of any kind...." (The Bible Has the Answer by Morris & Clark, p. 144), and "Inherent in the idea of a gift is that it must be received from the giver, and this is true of the gift of salvation" (I'm Glad You Asked by Boa & Moody, p. 202). Third and last, salvation comes from God's mercy, his grace: "Oh, if people would only get the idea out of their heads that salvation is by man's good doing instead of the grace of God!" (Dr. Rice, Here is my Question by John R. Rice, p. 281), "...grace is unmerited favor" (Answers to Questions About the Bible by Mounce, p. 156), "...grace is irritating because there is absolutely nothing meritorious about receiving what we do not deserve...God saves people by His grace alone...Grace means enjoying favor when we deserve wrath...In 40 years the Lord has taught me three precious lessons about His grace: First, I can do absolutely nothing to save myself...." (Answering Christianity's Most Puzzling Questions Vol. 1 by Sisson, p. 63, 68), "...men must be saved by the grace of God, without human merit...." (False Doctrines by John R. Rice, p. 77), "...man must be saved, if he is to be saved at all, by grace and not by anything he has achieved or earned" (Does the Bible Contradict Itself by Arndt, p. 133), "If salvation is really the gift of God's grace...as the Bible teaches, then how can there be a price one has to pay to earn it?" (The Bible Has the Answer by Morris & Clark, p. 144), and "In a real sense this is all quite analogous to the Biblical doctrine of grace, which has been accurately defined as the unmerited favor of God.... The sovereign grace of God (and it is sovereign or irresistible because mankind is its recipient wholly apart from merit) is the agency by which men are finally redeemed.... We must understand, then, that faith and works can never in themselves (or together for that matter) save anyone. It is sovereign grace alone that forms the basis for eternal salvation.... Note carefully that if we could earn our salvation in any way then grace would be annulled, for then it is no longer the gift of God but a debt which God owes to us.... the absolute sovereignty of grace is one of the unshakable foundations of essential Christianity" (Essential Christianity by Walter Martin, p. 72-73, 78-79). Key biblical verses in this regard are EPH. 2:8-9 ("For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast"), TITUS 3:5 ("Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us"), 2 TIM. 1:9 ("Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace,...."), ROM. 11:6 ("And if by grace, then it is no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more of grace....") and ROM. 6:23 ("...but the gift of God is eternal life....").

The fatal flaw permeating all of the above lies in the fact that salvation is not a free gift. There is nothing free about it. Even in Christianity it must be earned. You must take an affirmative act, i.e., accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior or face condemnation. Biblical salvation is not a gift by God's grace; it's earned. One merits salvation when he accepts Jesus. In fact, it can't be denied

if one commits himself to Christ. Biblicists fail to realize that faith, itself, is a work. You must do something, i.e., believe, in order to be saved. It's not a gift and if you don't fulfill the necessary requirement you can't be saved. Jesus clearly said he was the only way, there is no other: JOHN 14:6 ("I am the way, the truth and the life, no man cometh unto the Father but by me"), JOHN 3:18 ("He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already...."), JOHN 3:36 ("He that believeth in the Son hath everlasting life and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life...."), 1 JOHN 5:12 ("He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life"), ACTS 4:12 and 1 COR. 3:11. Thus, you must do something to be saved; you must believe and that's salvation by works. In other words, Christianity is like all other major religions because it, too, requires salvation by works. What you do determines where you go. The only difference lies in the fact that Christianity requires a particular form of work, i.e., belief or faith. If you don't go out of your way to get it, you're lost. Thinking, believing, remembering and other mental processes require effort. Work is involved. If not, then millions of workers are being paid unnecessarily.

Apologists, themselves, admit that faith is a work. "Faith is not feeling; faith is doing" (Dr. Rice Here is my Question by John R. Rice, p. 257) and "Paul goes on to point out that a man's faith in Christ is counted by God as the supreme work of righteousness" (Essential Christianity by Walter Martin, p. 79).

Even the Bible admits faith is a work: 1 THESS. 1:3 ("Remembering without ceasing your work of faith and labour of love,...."), 2 THESS. 1:11 ("...and the work of faith with power"), JOHN 6:29 ("This is the work of God, that ye believe on him...."), and GAL. 5:6 ("but faith which worketh by love"). Faith is as much a work as physical deeds because both require people to do something, to take action. Consequently, salvation is not a free gift. It requires works, is earned or achieved, is based on merit, is not based on grace or God's mercy, and has a price attached. God is burdened with a debt to be paid to all those who fulfill the requirement. Although most biblicists say there is nothing you can do to merit salvation, in reality, precisely the opposite is true. There is not only something you can do; there is something you must do.

The only alternative to salvation by works is salvation by whim in which God, alone, determines who will be saved. This really is salvation by grace because salvation is truly a gift. People are required to do absolutely nothing. Beliefs, behavior, Jesus, morality, faith, and works are irrelevant and immaterial. God simply chooses and salvation really does become a free gift. If you must do anything to receive something, if a price is attached, then it is not a gift. Only when based on God's whim is salvation truly provided gratis.

In essence, all religions, including Christianity, believe in salvation by works or salvation by whim. No third alternative is available. You either earn salvation or you don't. And if you don't, then you freely receive that which others are denied. You receive God's grace which is nothing more than a euphemism for bias and partiality. The concept of grace is clearly antithetical to ROM. 2:11 ("For there is no respect of persons with God"), EPH. 6:9 ("...your master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him") and other verses which deny God plays favorites.

UNIVERSALISM--One of the more interesting biblical teachings, which fundamentalists detest with all the vigor of a Hitler expounding on the Jews, is the concept of universalism, i.e., the belief that everyone is going to be saved, regardless. There are no exceptions. Denying it has any biblical basis or support, apologists try to avoid discussing the topic and relevant verses as much as possible. But, unfortunately, for them, it can't be shoved under the rug. Although universalism is subject to criticism (but what biblical concept isn't), there are at least 18 verses which lend impressive, if not convincing, credence thereto. JOHN 12:32 ("And I, if I be lifted up from the

earth will draw all men unto me"), 1 COR. 15:22 ("For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive"), MARK 3:28 ("Verily I say unto you, All sins shall be forgiven unto the Sons of men, and blasphemies wherewith soever they shall blaspheme"), ROM. 5:18 ("Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life"), ROM. 11:32 RSV ("For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all"), 1 JOHN 2:2 ("And he is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world"), JOHN 1:29 ("Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world") and 1 TIM. 4:10 ("...we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe") are particularly potent and often quoted by proponents of universalism.

Other relevant verses in this regard are JOHN 1:9 ("That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world"), 1 TIM. 2:4 ("Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth"), HEB. 2:9 ("But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man"), 2 COR. 5:19 ("To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation"), EPH. 1:10 ("That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him"), ACTS 3:21 ("Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began"), COL. 1:19-20 ("For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; And having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven"), PHIL. 2:10 ("That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth"), TITUS 2:11 ("For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men"), and 2 PETER 3:9 ("The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance"). With verses such as these is it any wonder that universalism has always had adherents within the Christian community.

JESUS' GENEALOGIES--One of the most discussed contradictions in freethought literature is the clash between the genealogies of Jesus found in Matt. 1 and Luke 3. One need only read the text to see that Luke traces the genealogy of Jesus from Jesus back to Adam and God while Matthew begins with Abraham and tracks it to Jesus. Luke lists 77 generations while Matthew has only 44. In order to see the problem in proper perspective one should create a chart listing the names in correct sequence in parallel columns. If horizontal lines are drawn to connect the same names, one can easily see that the lists are almost identical from Abraham to David. However, from David onward there is no similarity despite the fact that they both conclude with Joseph as the father of Jesus. The major reason for the contradictory names given after David is that the account in Luke traces the genealogy through David's son, Nathan, while that in Matthew traces it through another son, Solomon. This would easily account for the wide divergence in names following David but raises a couple of crucial questions: (a) How could Joseph and Jesus be descended from two different sons of David. How could two sons of David father two completely different genealogies which merge together with the last two individuals and (b) How could Jesus have contradictory genealogies? Few apologists deny differences exist so that's not in dispute. The real issue revolves around the common explanation given by most biblicists for two widely different genealogies of the same man. Their strategy hinges on a rather simple ploy. Jesus' genealogy is allegedly traced through Joseph in Matthew and Mary in Luke. Unfortunately for them, the shortcomings in their rationalization are equally simple. First, Mary's name is nowhere to be found in Luke's genealogy. Everybody's name is mentioned but hers. Imagine a genealogy in which every name is mentioned but that of the person whose lineage is

being traced! Second, there is no genealogical record of any woman in the entire Bible. Are we to believe Mary is an exception? Third, Joseph's name is mentioned in Luke's genealogy so one can reasonably conclude that it's his lineage, not Mary's. Fourth, and last, according to OT prophecy, the Messiah would be a physical descendant of David. Mary appears to have been from the house of Levi, not David, since her cousin, Elizabeth (Luke 1:36) was a daughter of Aaron (Luke 1:5), i.e., from the house of Levi. If Mary was from the house of Aaron, how could either genealogy be hers since they relate David's lineage? On the other hand, Luke 1:27 and 2:4 show Joseph was of Davidic descent. The attempt to attribute Luke's genealogy to Mary is one of the more transparent subterfuges employed by dishonest apologists. Desperation set in because they just couldn't think of any other rationalization.

Another reason for their devious ploy is that it solves a problem created by the Virgin Birth. According to prophecy the Messiah must be a physical descendant of David. If Jesus' only connection to David is through Joseph, then Jesus couldn't be physically connected to David because the birth was virginal; Joseph was not his biological father. So apologists must attribute one of the genealogies to Mary in order to extend a physical connection from Jesus to David. Hence, the rationalization. One can only wonder why they didn't apply the genealogy in Matthew to Mary instead of the one in Luke since one is no more applicable to her than the other.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #288 from Ed McCartney, P.O. Box 79024, Lakewood, Ohio 44107 (Received in Sept. 1987)

Dear Dennis. In Issue #57 on page 6, (Editor's Response to Letter #228, Part b) you said, "The genealogies in Matthew 1 and Luke 3 clearly show Joseph is the physical, the biological father, of Jesus." How do the genealogies in Matt 1 and Luke 3 clearly show that Joseph is the physical, biological father of Jesus?

(A second letter on the same topic was received from Ed in April 1988.)

Dear Dennis.... I'd like to point out that both Joseph and Mary are descendants of David. Joseph's genealogy is in Matthew 1 and the genealogy of Mary is found in Luke 3.

I've written to you before about these two genealogies and why Joseph's is in Matthew 1 and Mary's is in Luke 3 and you didn't print it. You gave a reason for not printing it. Since you are the editor of BE, it's your business what you print. The point is, you've allowed those two genealogies to be criticized in the past in BE without printing an answer refuting the erroneous criticism.... If you intend to print an answer to the criticism...let me know.

Rom. 1:3 and Rev. 22:16 teach that Jesus Christ is a physical descendant of David. It is through Mary his mother. Her genealogy is shown in Luke 3.... Joseph is not the father of Jesus Christ. David is the father of Jesus Christ through Mary, or on his mother's side. On his Father's side (if it can be said that way) is God.... For these reasons Jesus Christ can be called both the son of David (Matt. 1:1) and the Son of God (Mark 1:1)....

Editor's Response to Letter #288

Dear Ed. I can finally address both your letters. The composition and sequence of the genealogies themselves answer your question. Every individual in both lists is the physical father or son of the next person in line. On what basis, other than apologetic expediency, do you assume that one relationship (Joseph to Jesus in Matthew) is an exception. Certainly nothing in

Matt. 1 or Luke 3 warrants it. If 76 relationships in a list of 77 are biological, one would be rather irrational to assume the last is somehow different without strong evidence to the contrary. Following your logic I could make any of the relationships nonphysical.

Moreover, as was mentioned in Issue 6, several verses clearly show Joseph was the physical father of Jesus. Not only did the Jews ("And they said Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know"--John 6:42), ("And they said, Is not this Joseph's son?--Luke 4:22), ("Is not this the carpenter's son?"--Matt. 13:55), Philip ("We have found him, of whom Moses in the law and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph"--John 1:45), and the author of Luke (Luke 2:33, 2:27, 2:41, and 2:43) say Joseph was the father of Jesus, but Mary, herself, said he was ("...and his mother said unto him {Jesus--Ed.}, Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing"--Luke 2:48). And who is in a better position to know?--the woman involved or hundreds of biased biblicists who never met Joseph in their lives and aren't even his contemporaries?

Letter #289 from JW of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Dear Dennis. This is just a letter of support. I admire your quest for truth. It is hard for some people to see the truth as long as they believe what they have been taught to believe. Faith is by definition a belief that does not rest on logical proof or material evidence. I usually challenge Christians by asking them if they are interested in the truth. This is a baited question, because who would not be for truth. I then tell them that if their religion is not sufficient to stand up to inquiry, then it cannot be much of a religion. However, here in Oklahoma, the buckle on the Bible belt, reason is meaningless. A friend of mine, who sends money to Swaggart, was asked by me, how the kangaroos and koala bears got to the Middle East from Australia to get on Noah's Ark. He said, "I don't care; if God said they did, that is good enough for me." I call this "blind faith." I also have another life-long friend who got religion when his marriage started to fail. He attempted to Christianize me, but now that I am starting to show him some biblical errors, he is turning a cold shoulder to me. Which leads me to my maxim: People believe what they want to believe. Christians really are hateful people. They have been taught that everything is either good or evil. Therefore, if you disagree with them or their church, they perceive you as being of the devil. I once asked a street-corner preacher, "What made Satan turn from God, if he had it so good in Heaven?" The preacher turned to the crowd and said, "That's the devil talking through that boy!" It is easier to blame the devil than confront the facts....

Also I admire the way you have taken them on in their own battleground--the Bible. (A prominent national freethought spokesperson--Ed.) misses the whole point. You are not going to change peoples' minds if you ignore the thing that makes up their mind--the Bible.

I tell people they are just a collection of other peoples' ideas and thoughts. I tell them that if you had two babies born at the same hospital on the same day, one a Catholic baby and the other a Jewish baby, and the nurses got them switched accidentally, then the Catholic baby would be raised a Jew, and by the time he or she was 21 years of age, he or she would be convinced that Judaism is the one and only true religion. The Jewish baby would be indoctrinated into the Catholic Church and would just as strongly believe in Catholicism. I use this example to try to get them to be objective about religion.

Letter #290 from JMH of Columbus, Ohio

Dear Mr. McKinsey.... In my short time as a subscriber, I have thoroughly enjoyed your publication, and look forward to it each month. I also enjoyed watching your first debate with Jed Smock and look forward to attending more such debates with biblical "experts" in the future.

I find it continually fascinating that folks will suddenly become nit-picking critics of your critique. If any one of your readers doubts the need for your brand of "bible study," they need only attend one of your debates and observe the tone with which "questions" (read: sermons) are posed to you....

Letter #291 from RM of Salmon Arm, British Columbia

Dear Dennis. To maintain a complete consecutive order of your periodical, I must have Number 66 for which a money order is enclosed. In ordering, it seems that, in all sanctity, I must clutch-and-grab all copies from my voracious readers. Even more, the pamphlets recently published by you are as white caps on a wave....

Letter #292 from Anonymous

Dear Mr. McKinsey....I notice that "Dear Dennis" letters get published as well as those more formally addressed to you as editor. Is there some format that you acknowledge that I can use that will guarantee a letter will not be published in BE? It is somewhat awkward to be always clearly stating or requesting non-publication on the part of your correspondents. Does one need to request explicitly that one's name be withheld or reduced to initials for that to happen? Forgive me for being a little shy. But I suppose some of your readers are too. And it would indeed be a pity if they never established contact for fear of finding themselves in print....

Editor's Response to Letter #292

Dear Anonymous. As I mentioned several years ago, any letter or any part of a letter sent to BE may be published. If you do not want this to occur all you have to do is say so. That's no problem. If you say nothing, we assume there is no objection and it could be entered. That would occur with only your initials and city/state of residence. If you want your full name and address entered, as some do, just indicate as much. You must tell us what you want done. Otherwise, we will proceed on the assumption that there is no problem with publishing its contents.

EDITOR'S NOTE: I would recommend to all supporters of BE that they carry in their purse or billfold copies of the two pamphlets we created last summer. They are of great assistance during unplanned and unexpected encounters with biblicists. For example, when I exited from a theater recently after viewing *The Last Temptation of Christ*, some points contained therein proved to be rather effective against a distributor of baptist pamphlets. He was visibly shaken during our exchange and threatened to summon the police if I pursued him down the sidewalk.

Issue No. 72

Dec. 1988

COMMENTARY

HOMOSEXUALITY--One of the most controversial biblical teachings pertains to whether or not the Bible condemns or condones homosexuality. Homosexuals and sympathetic ministers have tried to employ biblical precepts in their ongoing dispute with biblicists of a more traditional orientation to prove the Bible supports, or at least doesn't condemn, homosexuality. But one need only read the Book to see their efforts are in vain. There is no sense in arguing with the obvious. Many verses can be used to prove the Bible condemns activities of this nature: LEV. 18:22 ("Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is an abomination"), LEV. 20:13 ("If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed

an abomination: they shall surely be put to death"), JUDGES 21:11 ("...Ye shall utterly destroy every male, and every woman that hath lain by man"), 1 KINGS 14:24 ("And there were also sodomites in the land: and they did according to all the abominations of the nations which the Lord cast out before the children of Israel"), 1 KINGS 15:12 ("And he took away the sodomites out of the land....") and DEUT. 23:17 ("There shall be no whore of the daughters of Israel, nor a sodomite of the sons of Israel").

Of course, homosexuals can always contend these prohibitions are from the Old Law, since all of the verses cited are from the OT, and we aren't under the Old Law any more. However, that can be addressed by citing some equally convincing NT verses: ROM. 1:26-27 ("For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use (a degrading word--Ed.) of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly...."), 1 COR. 6:9-10 Mod. Lang. ("...Be not misled; neither profligates, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor partakers of homosexuality...will inherit the kingdom of God") and 1 TIM. 1:9-10 NASB ("...the law is not made for a righteous man, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners...and immoral men and homosexuals....").

The gay community could possibly cite instances in which major biblical figures engaged in activities which could be interpreted as homosexual in nature. For instance, in 2 SAM. 1:26 David said, "I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women" and Paul repeatedly told his followers to greet one another with a holy kiss (ROM. 16:20, 2 COR. 13:12, 1 THESS. 5:26 and 1 PETER 5:14). But these verses are weak and couldn't be used to substantiate strong biblical support for homosexuality.

Is there, then, any approach homosexuals can take to counter the claims of strict constructionists? Yes, indeed. They can always say the Bible is just plain wrong and that's that. The Bible not only allows, but promotes, slavery and that's wrong, and it not only allows, but promotes, the subordination of women and that's wrong (See Issue #8). The biblical stance on homosexuality could be cited as just another instance of an inaccurate and misguided doctrine. Although the editor of BE has no homosexual inclinations, that's the stance he would assume if he did.

ABORTION--Abortion, on the other hand, fares quite differently. Unlike homosexuality, it is not prohibited by any biblical verse or any series of connected verses. The only text that is repeatedly cited in this regard is EX. 21:22-23 ("If men strive and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart from her, and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman's husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life"). Even fundamentalist, John R. Rice, whom Jerry Falwell described as his mentor, admitted that "only in the case of Ex. 21:22-25 does the Bible specifically mention retaliation for the death or injury of an unborn child" (Abortion by John R. Rice, p. 8). Unfortunately for apologists their favorite quotation is inadequate in several respects. First, we are no longer under the Old Law according to biblicists and EX. 21 is a good example of same. Second, and even more important, careful reading of the words will show that they do not prohibit abortion. In fact, they aren't even discussing abortion. Notice what is said! If two men are fighting and hurt a pregnant woman such that a miscarriage occurs, "yet no mischief follows: he shall surely be punished." The man who caused the miscarriage will be punished and forced to pay by the woman's husband and a judge for what he did to the woman, not for what he did to the fetus. Third, the last line says, "if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life." If any mischief to the woman, not the fetus, follows, then the offender will be killed. The key word is "if." "If" any mischief follows. The mischief has already occurred if the miscarriage

was the main concern. Obviously, mischief to the woman is the only concern since the fetus is gone. In truth, Ex. 21:22-23 has nothing to do with abortion. It's actually saying that if two men are fighting and a pregnant woman is injured in the process and has a miscarriage but suffers no other injury, the offender should be punished by the woman's husband. On the other hand, if the woman incurred "mischief," which appears to be death, then the injuring party must die.

Although there are no verses in the Bible clearly in opposition to abortion, is there any strategy by which biblicists can use the Bible to oppose abortion. Yes, there is, but two hurdles must be surmounted. They must not only find verses in opposition to the killing of human beings in general but also find verses saying the fetus is a human being throughout the entire 9-month gestation period. If the fetus is a human being for the entire 9 months and the killing of humans is wrong, then biblical opposition to abortion is demonstrated. If we assume the 6th Commandment (EX. 20:13), REV. 21:8 ("...murderers...shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone..."), 1 JOHN 3:15 ("...and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him"), GEN. 9:6 ("Whoso sheddeth man's blood by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man"), and EX. 21:12 ("He that smiteth a man so that he die, shall be surely put to death") are still operative and refer to the killing of human beings, one can reasonably conclude the first hurdle has been scaled.

The second obstacle, however, is considerably more formidable. Apologists must not only employ verses showing that which lives in the womb is a human being, but that it is a human being throughout the entire 9-month period. Having laid down the requirements we can now analyze the most commonly used anti-abortion texts. EX. 23:7 ("Keep thee far from a false matter, and the innocent and righteous slay thou not..."), DEUT. 27:25 ("Cursed be he that taketh reward to slay an innocent person"), and 2 KINGS 24:4 ("And also for the innocent blood that he shed; for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood which the Lord would not pardon") are inapplicable because they assume the very point in dispute, i.e., that the fetus is a human being. He would have to be a human being in order to be innocent. Everyone would agree that the slaying of innocent people is wrong, but apologists are obligated to prove the fetus is "people" according to the Bible before claiming the Bible prohibits abortion. Humanity precedes innocence.

Moreover, PSALM 58:3 ("The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies"), JOB 14:4 ("Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one"), and JOB 15:14 ("What is man, that he should be clean? and he which is born of a woman, that he should be righteous?") not only show that newborns are not innocent but deal a fatal blow to the whole "age of accountability" idea. In fact, one could argue that PSALM 51:5 ("Behold, I was shapen in iniquity: and in sin did my mother conceive me") shows that the fetus, itself, is not innocent if one believes it's a human being. It's hard to conceive of one being shapen in sin and iniquity while remaining pure.

RUTH 4:13 ("So Boaz took Ruth, and she was his wife: and when he went in unto her, the Lord gave her conception, and she bare a son"), GEN. 29:32 ("And Leah conceived, and bare a son..."), and GEN. 30:22-23 ("...and God hearkened to her, and opened her womb and she conceived, and bare a son...") are used by abortion opponents in a feeble attempt to ignore the nine month gestation period by equating conception with bearing a son. All three verses say a son emerged at birth, but none says he was a son at conception or during the nine months of gestation.

The point at which a human being comes onto the scene is the key question not only with the biblical but the scientific and legal community as well. Is it at conception, at birth, or at some point during the nine intervening months? ISA. 49:5 ("And now, saith the Lord that formed me

from the womb to be his servant...."), ISA. 45:1 ("...The Lord hath called me from the womb; from the bowels of my mother hath he made mention of my name"), and Eccle. 11:5 are used by anti-abortionists but only prove fetuses become human beings at some point during the gestation period, not at conception. Whether formed "from" the womb (i.e., after leaving) or "in" the womb, the fact remains that these verses are not saying he was formed at conception.

Biblicists also rely upon PSALM 139:13-16 RSV ("For thou didst form my inward parts, thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb...my frame was not hidden from thee, when I was being made in secret,.... Thy eyes beheld my unformed substance....") to prove the fetus is a human being but fail to realize these verses could only be used to prove the fetus formed at conception becomes a human being at some point during the nine months. How could one be a human being at conception, if one is knit together, formed, and made in secret during the pregnancy?

MATT. 1:18 ("When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost") and GEN. 25:21-24 ("...and Rebekah, the wife of Isaac, conceived, and the children struggled together within her.... And the Lord said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels, and the one people shall be stronger than the other people....and when her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold there were twins in her womb") are stronger than any anti-abortion verses that have been discussed so far because they clearly show the fetus is a child at some point during the gestation period according to the Bible. They are strongly supported by LUKE 1:41 ("And it came to pass that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her [Elisabeth's--Ed.] womb....") and LUKE 1:44 ("For lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy") which, when used in conjunction with LUKE 1:36 ("And, behold, thy cousin Elizabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren"), prove the Bible teaches the fetus is a human being by the 6th month of the pregnancy.

What, then, can we conclude from all of the verses discussed so far. In essence, biblicists can use the Bible to prove the fetus is a human being not only at birth but by the 6th month of gestation. However, they can't use the Bible to clearly prove the fetus is a human being at conception or during the 1st and 2nd trimesters and that's when nearly all abortions occur.

They do have one final verse that could be interpreted as their strongest suit, however. JER. 1:4-5 ("Then the word of the Lord came unto me saying, Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations") appears to be the only verse in the entire Bible alleging someone is not only a human being at conception but prior to same. Unfortunately for the anti-abortionists the key phrase ("Before I formed thee in the belly, I knew thee") is ambiguous. Does it mean the speaker did not yet exist but God had already planned what he would be prior to conception or he already existed and God knew what he was? Obviously, antiabortionists will favor the latter. Second, God is speaking to Jeremiah alone. Upon what basis do they assume this applies to all of humanity. And finally, retreat to a verse of this nature means that apologists have abandoned any attempt to prove from the Bible that the fetus is a human being physically during the first 6 months of gestation. Instead, they are saying the fetus is a human being before conception, spiritually speaking, which is much less demonstrable and harder to prove.

REVIEWS

Some time ago we received a pamphlet distributed by the Gay Rescue Mission of San Francisco entitled *Gay Life in the Holy Bible*. The document clearly seeks to allay the fears and

apprehensions of homosexuals influenced by biblical teachings. It states, in part, "The OT is contradictory about Gay sex. Leviticus says that men who lay with men should be put to death.... Leviticus does damn Gay sex, but with equal vehemence it condemns "leaving thine abode with thy head uncovered, traveling in a wheeled vehicle on the Sabbath, cutting thy hair and trimming thy beard.... And it is further said by Leviticus that if ever in your entire life you eat so much as one morsel of pork, duck, or goose, you are going to burn in hell forever without the slightest chance of redemption. The next time someone quotes the anti-Gay verse in the OT, tell them they should spend equal time damning the hatless, the clean-shaven, the short-haired, the Sunday riders, and pork eaters." Although some of the narrative is subject to dispute and there is more than one anti-gay verse, the pamphlet's point is well taken and that's why biblicalists resort to NT quotes.

The pamphlet continues, "Homosexual love is praised as greater than the love of man for woman in 2 SAM. 1:26 ('...thy [Jonathan--Ed.] love to me [David--Ed.] was wonderful, passing the love of women'). God's favorite person, David, had a homosexual love affair." But can one automatically conclude that strong love between two men must involve homosexuality. Many men, including myself, have had intense love for their fathers without homosexuality being involved. The text is not sufficiently clear in the example cited to draw that conclusion.

The pamphlet then made a poignant observation that seems to have eluded the apologetic community. "The OT condemns heterosexual rape in Judges 19 and many other places, but no one has ever interpreted that to be a condemnation of consenting heterosexuality. The story of Sodom and Gomorrah in Gen. 19 (mainly verses 1 to 12--Ed.) is about homosexual rape and those who hate Gays have interpreted it as a condemnation of voluntary, consenting homosexuality." Threats and intimidation were a dominant theme in Gen. 19 and that's not what gays are advocating. What was condemned in Gen. 19 is the question. Was it homosexuality per se or threats and intended rape by homosexuals?

And finally, using a variation on the "God is Love" theme, the pamphlet said, "Jesus never mentioned homosexuals. Exactly opposite from the hate-filled Paul, Jesus taught us to love everyone, even our enemies and those who hate us. The only time Jesus mentions hell as a punishment for sin is in reference to the sin of hate (Matt. 5:22). He refused to condemn anyone, saying, 'I have come not to condemn mankind but to save the world.' (At this point the incident wherein Jesus absolved the adulteress of guilt was related--Ed.)... Paul taught a vengeful God that will punish us for even the slightest offense. Jesus taught a forgiving, loving Heavenly Father. Once Jesus was asked to read a scripture, (Isaiah 61:1-2), ending with 'the day of the vengeance of our God.' When Jesus came to the part about a vengeful God, He refused to read it, but He 'closed the book handed it back to the attendant and sat down' (Luke 4:16-20)."

The pamphlet continues, "Jesus approved of physical affection between men. He often kissed other men, and at the Last Supper, 'One of the disciples, he whom Jesus loved was reclining with his head on Jesus' bosom' (John 13:23). 'He whom Jesus loved....' is mentioned 17 times in the Gospel...."

We don't advocate the "God is Love" or "Jesus is Love" approach because of major reservations about its textual viability. Nor would we assume kissing and hugging are to be equated with homosexuality.

On page 246 in the Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties apologist Gleason Archer opened the abortion issue with an important observation. He says that since the "human status of a fetus in the womb until it reaches an advanced stage of gestation" is under scrutiny, it becomes essential to establish the Bible's viewpoint. He asks, "At what stage does God (which he equates with the

Bible--Ed.) consider the fetus to be a human being...?" He begins by alleging that Psalm 139:13 RSV ("For thou didst form my inward parts, thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb") indicates very definitely that God's personal regard for the embryo begins from the time of its inception." But where does the verse say anything with respect to God's personal regard for the embryo or when this alleged respect began? All the speaker is saying is that he was put together in his mother's womb. If he was formed in his mother's womb, then how could he have been a human being at conception?

After quoting Psalm 139:16 ("Thy eyes beheld my unformed substance; in thy book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there were none of them") Archer continues with, "It is reassuring to know that even though many thousands of embryos and fetuses are deliberately aborted every year...God had their genetic code all worked out and has a definite plan for their lives." In effect, Archer is admitting verse 16 does not definitely say people are human beings prior to conception because having "their genetic code all worked out" and "a definite plan for their lives" does not mean they exist, only that plans have been laid for their existence.

In 1975 Sword of the Lord Publisher, John R. Rice, made an anti-abortion argument based on Psalm 51:5 ("Behold I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me"). On page 13 of Abortion he said, "Now give attention for a moment to that tiny bit in the womb of David's mother. As it begins to take shape, David said, 'I was shapen....' It was David even then....When the conception took place, it was David who was conceived. The honest inference is that from the very time of conception it was the person who would later be known as David." The arguments of Rice are not valid for several reasons. First, the phrase "I was shapen in iniquity" clearly refers to someone or something being brought into existence, something that does not yet exist, like a house under construction. At what point does the house exist? Certainly not when only the basement has been dug or the foundation laid. Second, if David was shapened in iniquity then he was not shapened at the moment of conception. Rice clearly refers to the "tiny bit" beginning to take shape. How could the "tiny bit" be David if it was yet to be shapened? How could something be human that has no shape? Even an amoeba has shape. Third, according to several versions (ASV, NIV, NASB), the phrase "shapen in iniquity" could refer to the period from birth onward, not from conception onward. And finally, based on his analysis of the verse, Rice came to the unwarranted conclusion that "when the conception took place, it was David who was conceived." He assumed the very point in dispute, i.e., humanity was created at conception. In the minds of many humanity may arise at conception, but that isn't what this verse says. The honest inference to be drawn from Psalm 51:5 is not that a person exists from conception but that Rice has taken liberties with an imprecise text.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #293 from AGH of Sonoma, California

Dear Dennis. I do hope that real soon you will be able to do a commentary on what the Bible has to say about Lesbians and Gays. I went to the San Francisco Gay Freedom Day Parade, along with 250,000 others, and I was shocked to see all the Gay religious groups represented and marching. Could you state exactly what the Bible says about this subject: homosexuality....

Going on the assumption the Bible doesn't approve of Gays, how is it possible that there are so many Gay priests, ministers, and others claiming to be Christians, who promote Christianity. How is it possible that anyone could promote the very thing that promises them eternal hell, and demands they be put to death on earth? I watched Troy Perry and Jerry Falwell on Phil Donahue, and Perry said he was aware of the various verses (he stated the verses) that were used to justify

discrimination against Gays, but that there were 10 times as many that talked about love and positive things. Either the Bible is God's word and all of it is true, as Falwell claims, or it is not, which can be verified simply by reading it. I feel that lesbians and gays really need to be informed about what is in the book, and Dennis, as the only real authority on the Bible as far as I know, anyway, I am hoping that you can put together another of your objective and impartial works of art (Commentary). Dennis I could never thank you enough for what you are doing to free America. I really hope that I will see freedom in my lifetime.

I feel that I am the best person to make my decisions for me, what I read, what I watch, what I say, what I put into my body. I don't do drugs, or cigs, or alcohol and I don't feel the government has the right to interfere in my peaceful, noncoercive, behavior....

Well I've taken enough of your time, thanx again so much, Dennis, for the wonderful job you are doing. I never tire of rereading all issues of BE over and over again.

Oh, I did write Phil Donahue and told him he should beg you to be on his show. I guess I should have included a copy of BE....If you are on TV or the radio you should announce it in BE....I'd feel real disappointed if I missed you on a program.

Editor's Response to Letter #293

Dear AGH. As you probably realize, this month's commentary sought to address most of your questions. As far as the Bible having 10 times as many verses talking about love and positive things is concerned, I'm not sure what verses Perry is referring to. I know of none advocating love of homosexuality. The Bible speaks of God's love but not his love of anything and everything. The "God is Love" approach is an ineffective strategem that's fraught with inadequacies. The God of the Bible displays anything but love in many instances. A sizable number of verses show he is clearly deficient in sympathy and compassion for those who violate his maxims and many who don't. Wailing and gnashing of teeth in eternal torment for finite crimes are hardly indicative of one consumed by love at all costs.

Letter #294 from Dan Barker of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, P.O. Box 750, Madison, Wisconsin 53701

Dear Dennis. Hardly a week goes by when I am not able to refer someone to B.E. It is so nice to have you as a resource. Just yesterday a man from Tennessee called to ask about bible contradictions. He liked our "Confused" nontract, but he wanted more.

I think you have a good point about freethought gatherings. Our annual conventions are always a lot of fun, and they are usually quite informative, but I feel they are necessary. We are required to meet, at least the board of directors, by law. And they are fun. They are a chance to finally meet some of the people around the country with whom we have been corresponding. There are a lot of atheists and agnostics who feel like they are the only ones in the world -- they are simply hungry to be around other freethinkers. Many of them (too many, I think) would rather not get involved in any activism, for various reasons, including possible job loss, or family strains, etc. (One of our members had her house burned down! She will be telling her story this week at our convention.)

I remember when I was a brand-new freethinker: I was starving for some "fellowship" and interaction with other rational minds. Not that I had anything particular in mind--I just wanted to be where some of their experience and knowledge could "rub-off," if you know what I mean. Often, just being around other activists can be "inspiring" or motivating. We usually have people

at conventions who say, "I have been challenged to do something, say something, write letters, challenge local ministers...." And we always have some people who say, "This is the first time I have ever been around people who think the same way I do, where I am not afraid to say what I feel....."

Editor's Response to Letter #294

Dear Dan. Meetings by your board of directors are certainly necessary. That wasn't what I had in mind nor did I mean to disparage the "supportive" aspect of freethought gatherings. I was primarily referring to meetings in which supporting supersedes reporting, playing supersedes planning, and eating supersedes beating.

Incidentally, I want to take this opportunity to thank you and other leaders in your organization for the support and cooperation they have given BE. And after seeing you on national TV several times, I've concluded you are doing well as a sensitive, articulate and representative spokesperson for the freethought movement.

EDITOR'S NOTE: New corrected editions of the two pamphlets we created last summer for distribution to biblicists are now available on gold paper. .10 Each--Minimum order \$1

Issue No. 73

Jan. 1989

COMMENTARY

With this issue we will continue our ongoing policy of devoting an entire issue every year or so to letters from our readers.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #295 from WAA of Madera, California (Part a)

Dear Dennis. I would like to make some comments on the difference of translations you began in issue #66. At the present time I have only four different versions to go by, the KJ, NIV, NAS, and the LB.

The following are two conflicts that I did not see in any of your issues of BE. Exodus 22:9 ("...both parties shall come before the judges; and whom the judges shall condemn..."--KJ, NIV, NAS) versus ("...both parties...shall come before God...and the one whom God declares guilty...."--LB).

Exodus 22:28 ("Thou shalt not revile the gods, nor curse the ruler of thy people"--KJ) versus ("Do not blaspheme God or curse the ruler of your people"--LB, NIV, NAS).

Editor's Response to Letter #295 (Part a)

Dear WAA. You are correct. They weren't included and probably should have been.

Letter #295 Continues (Part b)

On page 1 in Issue #70 you stated the following were not in the versions you listed, but actually they are. Matt. 12:47 is in the NIV; Luke 17:36 is in the LB, but written a little differently; Luke 23:38 is in the NIV, NAS, and LB; Luke 24:26 is in the NAS and LB, and John 3:3-4 is in the NIV.

In Issue #66, page 3 you quoted the part of Acts 20:28 which says ("...of God, which he obtained with the blood of his own Son"). You incorrectly stated "his own Son" appears in the NIV, NAS, and the LB. Actually these three versions agree with the KJV which has "his own blood" rather than "his own Son."

Editor's Response to Letter #295 (Part b)

I rechecked my notes and the versions involved and discovered you are correct on every count WAA. Your thorough homework is to be commended. Too bad you aren't available to check my research each month. That's the kind of assistance I need. Errors of this nature aren't major, but they are irritating and do occur occasionally. My notes were correct but that wasn't sufficient. They were transferred incorrectly. Luke 24:26 should have been Luke 24:36 and John 3:3-4 should have been John 5:3b-4. I said Luke 23:38 is absent from every version except the KJ and LV. Actually that's only true of that part of the verse which says, "in letters of Greek and Latin and Hebrew."

Letter #295 Continues (Part c)

Since you didn't list the RSV, ML, NAS, LV and MT among those versions not having Acts 15:34, I assumed these five do. However, of my four versions (the KJ, LB, NIV, and NAS), I could only go by the NAS which...does not have the verse in the text itself.

Editor's Response to Letter #295 (Part c)

I'm afraid you are in error this time WAA. My copy of the NAS has Acts 15:34, although a footnote says many of the early manuscripts do not. Interestingly enough, although you do not have a copy of the RSV you mentioned it and piqued my interest. I should have listed it among those versions not having Acts 15:34, since the verse only appears in a RSV footnote.

Letter #295 Continues (Part d)

On page #1 of Issue #69, Psalm 145:15 should have been 145:17. This verse is not omitted in the NIV as you stated.

On page 2 of Issue #69, you said Luke 9:55-56 was in the NAS but it is not in mine....

Editor's Response to Letter #295 (Part d)

As far as Psalm 145:15 is concerned, WAA, we both erred. You said it should have been 145:17 and I said 145:15 when it should have been 145:13. I also mistakenly listed all the versions that have the latter half of Psalm 145:13 rather than all those that don't. Again, my notes were correct but I miscopied.

Your version of the NASB may not have Luke 9:55-56 but mine does. Again, our versions of the NAS appear to be in disagreement.

Letter #295 Continues (Part e)

You stated 1 John 5:7 ("For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one") is the only verse in the entire Bible clearly alleging the Trinity's existence. Would Matt. 28:19 ("Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost") be another one?

Editor's Response to Letter #295 (Part e)

As I said on page 2 in Issue #70, WAA, Matt. 28:19 has "much less potency because oneness is not asserted." The verse does not say they are equal or identical; whereas, 1 John 5:7 says "these three are one."

Letter #295 Concludes (Part f)

Of the 15 different Bible translations you listed in issue #66 could you please tell me which versions religious denominations use...? Thank you for your time and once again keep up the good work with BE.

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #295 (Part f)

In simple terms I would give the following analyses of the standard versions listed earlier. The King James or Authorized Version was issued in 1611 and has been the most widely accepted protestant version in the English-speaking world. By the late 1800's so many changes were needed in the KJ that a Revised Version (RV) was issued in England in the 1880's. Because the RV was oriented toward the old country, an American Version known as the American Standard Version (ASV) appeared in 1901. The ASV was itself revised in 1952 by a group of essentially liberal protestants who created the Revised Standard Version (RSV). The New World Translation (NWT) appeared in 1961 and is the standard text of the Jehovah's Witnesses. The Jerusalem Bible (JB) of 1966 and the New American Bible of 1970 are products of the Catholic Church and reflect the philosophy of same. The former is oriented toward England while the latter is essentially the standard catholic text in the United States. The New English Bible (NEB) of 1970 and the New American Standard Bible (NASB) of 1971 are new conservative translations with a more scholarly orientation. The New International Version (NIV) of 1973 is also a recent conservative translation that's less difficult to read. The Bible in Basic English (BBE) of 1949, Today's English Version (TEV) of 1966 and the Living Bible (LB) of 1971 are written in a popular, if not simplistic, style that often sacrifices accuracy for ease of reading. The LB is so inaccurate that it's not worthy of serious consideration. Personally I think the NIV and LB are the most political, the RSV is the least political, the RSV is the most liberal, the LB is the most inaccurate, the KJ is the most nebulous, and the LB is the easiest to read.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #296 from DAP of St. Petersburg, Florida

Dear Mr. McKinsey. I thought I was a fairly smart guy until I read your work. I now see I'm just a beginner. What you have produced is simply outstanding. I have in my miniscule library works by some of the authors that are mentioned in your offerings. (Kersey Graves, Ingersoll, Joseph McCabe, etc.). I would suggest to you, and rightfully so, that the works you have generated are of equal literary status! I would also suggest that you may have exceeded these aforementioned gentlemen in that you seem to have written more for the comprehension of "the common man." Literary enlightenment is useless to someone who cannot understand what he is reading; Clarity, Brevity, and Ease of Understanding are musts. Now that you have demonstrated conclusively that which is NOT real, I will ask you to remark on what IS real: (1) Where do we come from? (2) Why are we here? (3) Where do we go at death....

In closing, I would like to thank you for what you have done. I fear the loving Christians among us may not give you your fair due, so I will do it for them....

Editor's Response to Letter #296

Dear DAP. Your comments are very gracious. We always appreciate positive reinforcement. As far as your questions are concerned, I have no idea where we came from, if anywhere, why we are here, if there is a reason, or where we are going, if anywhere, nor does anyone else. Speculation and guesswork abound. Untold numbers of people with all sorts of answers will assure you they know, when, in fact, they are only whistling in the dark. I learned years ago that most of life's critical questions have no definitive answers. That's a major reason conflicts abound. With no demonstrably correct and provable answers to life's fundamental questions, people proceed from a wide divergence of basic assumptions.

Letter #297 from Mark Potts, 8510 E. 66th Pl. #A, Tulsa, Oklahoma 74133-2008

(Mark has undoubtedly contributed more letters to this publication than any other reader. Adjectives applicable to many of his points range from picayune and provisional to probing and profound. We have never devoted a substantial portion of BE to a series of letters from one individual, but an exception is in order. Anyone as energetic and "evangelistically-minded" as Mark deserves recognition--Ed.) (From Letter #1)--Dear Dennis. According to 2 Cor. 4:4 ("In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not....") and John 16:11 ("Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged") Satan runs this planet. That being the case, why do Christians pray to God rather than him for rain?

Some Christians argue that there is "no time" in heaven. But according to Rev. 8:1 RSV, "there was silence in heaven for half an hour." The "tree of life" in heaven also yields its fruit each month (Rev. 22:2).

Heaven also has linear dimensions because the heavenly city can be measured with a "rod" (Rev. 21:15-17 RSV). And apparently there is gravity there as well because angels fall on their faces (Rev. 7:11)....

(From Letter #2)--...When a biblicist points to someone like Hitler as an example of the dangers of "unbelief" you might say, that according to Romans 13, all governments are instituted by God, and the ruler is not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Doesn't that mean Germans had to follow Hitler? And why does God allow people like Hitler to become rulers?....When biblicists challenge you about "going to heaven" you can say, "Why would anyone want to go to heaven when that's where Satan came from?"

Another good question is: Can Christians choose to rebel against God once they get to heaven? If the answer is yes then existence in heaven will be insecure. If the response is no, then once you get to heaven you'll become a robot. Moreover, Jesus indicated that "Heaven and earth shall pass away" (Matt. 24:35), so Christians better not expect to stay there very long.

(From Letter #3)--I have yet to see any signs of intellectual honesty or humility coming from...any apologist. It would be so refreshing for one of them to publicly say to you, "You've brought up a genuine problem. I'll give you the answer I learned in seminary though I don't know if it's correct."

I have an answer for those apologists who insist you must know Greek and Hebrew to "understand" the Bible. You don't need to know how a television set works to be able to judge the quality of the programming. If the message is defective, it doesn't matter what language it's written in.

Apologists maintain that biblical assertions constitute fundamental knowledge about reality. But if all the scientific literature in the world were destroyed and the knowledge lost, most of it could be rediscovered and reconstructed through experiment. However, if all the biblical literature were destroyed and the knowledge of biblical traditions lost, there would be NO WAY to rediscover the stories about the six days of Creation, Adam and Eve, Noah and the Ark, the Crucifixion, the Virgin Birth, the Resurrection, Heaven, etc. The Bible is the only source for this information, and there is nothing inherently true about it.

(From Letter #4)--...According to 1 Sam. 15:23 ("For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry....") rebellion is comparable to witchcraft. I was not aware that George Washington was a witch.

According to Col. 2:2-3 ("...and of Christ; in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge") Jesus possesses all knowledge. But in Matt. 24:36 ("But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only") Jesus admits ignorance of the time of his "return."

Matt. 24:36 also bears on those modern biblicists who try to predict Jesus' "return" on the basis of Daniel, Ezekiel and other OT books. Jesus had access to the SAME books, so if HE couldn't figure it out, why should we expect modern end-of-the-age predictors to be any wiser?

A comment on Christian expectation about heaven. Heaven is supposed to be a "spiritual" place, yet the Book of Revelation describes it as full of material artifacts--linen, scrolls, robes, bowls, swords, gold, pearls, minerals, and thrones. Heaven sounds more like a Middle Eastern market than the home of the saints. Doesn't that strike you as odd?....

(From Letter #5)--I agree with your response to Letter #258 that Christians are capable of logical thought processes. Many of the apologists whose works I've read could have made brilliant careers as creative writers or attorneys. It's a shame they just happen to waste their brain power on defending the Bible.

Speaking of logic, I have trouble understanding the reasoning of liberal Christians. The inerrantists argue, in effect, that the Bible is magic paper from heaven. One step away from this, and it seems to me you'd be on a slippery slope which eventually leads to BE's position--namely, the Bible is the product of fallible human forces.

But in practice, the slope from inerrancy to errancy seems to be sticky. These inbetween people seem to argue, "Well, part of the Bible is inerrant." But this is illogical. Which parts are inerrant, how do you distinguish the inerrant from the errant, and how do you resolve differences? At least the inerrantist position is logically consistent, as is BE's position.

Another thing: I've noticed a curious thing about apologists. When they seek to convert the typical credulous, uncritical, unsophisticated "unbeliever," common English translations of the Bible are adequate--often amazingly so. But when the same apologists confront someone who asks critical questions about the Bible's validity, all of a sudden English versions become impotent and the critic needs 10 years of university education in Greek and Hebrew to understand the Bible.

This behavior reveals the mendacity of many apologists. They go around "saving" the masses by preaching to them in their native tongue, not by packing them off to a university to study biblical languages first. The Greek/Hebrew defense is basically a way of intimidating the Bible's critics.

The admiration by fundamentalists for the reformers of the reformation is ironic in light of a major scholarly project of the Reformation: the translation of the Bible into the common languages of Europe. The purpose was to give any literate person access to god's word "without having to depend on the authority of the Roman Church." I am sure there were many Catholic theologians who opposed this effort on the grounds that you need to know Greek and Hebrew to "understand" the Bible. Were the Reformers mistaken?....

(From Letter #6)--Recently I told you about Edgar Whisenant, who was advertising that the "rapture" of the church would occur some time over Sept. 11-13, 1988. On Tuesday morning, Sept. 13th, from midnight till 5:00 AM, the Tulsa radio station KRMG held a "rapture watch party" on the parking lot of its office building. A live talk show was being broadcast there, so a fellow Bible critic and I went there to educate people about the errors of the Bible. Each of us

got about five minutes of airtime. When I got my turn, I pointed out the saying in computer science known as (GIGO) "Garbage in, garbage out." (If your assumptions are flawed, then your conclusions can't be too reliable). The Bible is full of things that just ain't so. So, when people use it to try to predict the future, OF COURSE they'll be wrong.... Alas, people have drawn the wrong conclusion from the failure of Whisenant's prophecy. Instead of concluding that biblicism is probably nonsense from cover to cover (though you and I can delete the "probably"), they are concluding that of that day and hour knoweth no man. What does it take to pound sense into people?

(From Letter #7)--(Mark wrote the following to an apologist who criticized BE--Ed.)....I have a few comments on your answer to Dennis McKinsey's question about what happens to people who never hear about Jesus. First, you state that "God...has the perfect right to do with his creation as he sees fit." I doubt you really believe this. You are actually hoping that God will treat you in a way you see fit. Otherwise, God could "see fit" to renege on his promises without notice and set up a new system of rules. You might argue that God wouldn't do such a thing, but "God does not sit before the judgment bar of man's reason or man's sense of what is right and wrong." Neither you nor I are in a position to tell God what to do or to predict his behavior. God did repent on numerous occasions. Remember?

Second, you compared God to a governor who pardons one prisoner on death row while leaving the rest to face execution, with the implication that all humanity is jailed in this death row. But this is a bad analogy, for prisoners on death row know: (1) why they are there; (2) the punishment they face; (3) the existence of the governor, and (4) the fact that a pardon is possible....

Third, you allude to Zwingli's belief that the "mentally incompetent" belong to God's elect. If that's true, we could create as many "elect" as we like by inflicting brain damage on babies. Moreover, do unsaved adults join the "elect" when they develop Alzheimer's disease?

And fourth, I have to side with McKinsey's claim that the only way to get saved is through the technicality of accepting Jesus. You claim people are punished for their behavior; yet you and I have heard conversion stories that begin with, "Before I met Jesus, I was a bulimic, promiscuous, heavy metal, coke-addict with AIDS who had an abortion." These converts used to be despicable, yet I have never heard a Christian say that these people will still be punished for their sins after accepting Jesus. If Hitler had accepted Jesus just before he died in his bunker, he would have been saved according to Christian teaching. Yet, if harmless Anne Frank (who was above the age of accountability and mentally competent) had died in a Nazi death camp without saying the magic words at the last moment, she would have gone to hell. (Is she there now?)....

(From Letter #8)--Recently I attended a lecture by John Clayton, who twists science to support the Bible. His organization is called "Does God Exist".... I had an opportunity to publicly ask him a couple of BE-derived questions, but they seem to have had little effect. First, I asked him about the people who never hear about Jesus, such as the modern Japanese. He denied this was a problem and indicated that God had it all worked out somehow. I then asked that if such unevangelized people are in no kind of danger, why do Christians send missionaries to them? He responded that it was to give them the social advantages of Christianity. I ridiculed his reply by pointing out that the Japanese are healthy, orderly, and productive (not to say rich) without the Gospel; so it is hard to see what "social advantages" they could derive from it. He responded that all those reports about the "utopian" nature of modern Japan are lies and that Japan is actually sickly and crime-ridden.... At another opportunity I asked about the problems involved with salvation. I objected to the "escape clause" nature of "accepting Jesus" and noticed that Hitler could have gotten "saved" in his bunker before he died. I also pointed out the biblical

inconsistencies regarding salvation, such as Jesus' advice to the young man in Matt. 19 versus salvation by faith and predestination in other verses. This didn't faze Clayton either, because he said I was merely repeating what other Christians had told me without really reading what the Bible says....

Of course, when it gets really sticky in informal debates, he can always fall back on 1 Cor. 2:14 which says I can not receive spiritual things because I am the natural man. But how can he understand them? Wasn't he the natural man at one time? Then how could he have understood and followed the spiritual instructions for getting saved?....

(From Letter #9)--In Gen. 9:9-10 god makes a covenant not only with Noah and his family, but also "with every living creature." Why would god make a covenant with animals and plants?....

In Mark 5:7 a "man with an unclean spirit" says to Jesus, "I adjure thee by God, that thou torment me not." If the man is speaking, why would he beg gentle Jesus not to torment him? And if the "unclean spirit" (whatever that is) is speaking, why would it call on god for help and protection?....

In the "Lord's Prayer" (Matt. 6:9-13), we are supposed to pray "lead us not into temptation." Why do we have to ask god not to tempt us? I thought tempting people was satan's job.

(From Letter #10)--Biblicists can point to verses such as John 3:16, 1 Tim. 2:3-4, and Rev. 7:9 to bolster their claim that Jesus' actions were for the benefit of everyone. But how did Jesus understand his own mission? In Matt. 15:24 Jesus stated that he was "not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." And he referred to the Gentiles as "dogs" when a Canaanite/Syrophenician woman asked for his magic to cure her possessed daughter (Matt. 15:26 and Mark 7:27). If Jesus' actions by his own admission are EXPLICITLY intended for the Jews ONLY, how could he be the savior for anyone else? Sounds like they had "spin doctors" to heal the truth even back then. The NT itself could be the ultimate result of spin-doctor surgery on Jesus' original message.

EDITOR'S NOTE: (a) We would like to take this opportunity to thank those unsung heroes who have contributed funds to BE on their own initiative. We occasionally receive support of this nature and are most appreciative. Financial assistance provides the oil that keeps the whole apparatus rolling. We have never solicited money but it's certainly nice to know there are people who realize it's a pre-requisite and donate without requests.

(b) Not long ago we received a call from a woman who wanted to oppose biblicism and aid our cause but wanted to have as little contact with the Bible as possible because she "couldn't stand the thing." She wanted to know if there was some way to effectively debunk the Bible without reading it. I said that's like a student asking a literature teacher if there was some way he could pass his course with an "A" without reading the textbook. The teacher would probably respond, "None that I can think of, but if one emerges I'll definitely tell you and everyone else, as I'm sure many would like to know."

Issue No. 74

Feb. 1989

COMMENTARY

THE APOSTLES--Although nearly everyone knows there were 12 apostles, most do not realize their names are listed four different times in the NT and the listings conflict. Who were the twelve apostles; that's the question. Ten of the names present no problem. Simon (Peter), Andrew, James (Zebedee's Son), John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, and James (Alphaeus' Son) are found in all four accounts. Judas Iscariot is found in the first 3 accounts and his replacement, Matthias, is in the fourth. But the final two names create a problem. Matt. 10:2-4 and Mark 3:16-19 have Lebbaeus (Thaddaeus) and Simon the Canaanite, while Luke 6:13-16 and Acts 1:13 & 26 have Simon (Zelotes) and Judas (James' brother). Since there is no scriptural basis for assuming Lebbaeus (Thaddaeus) is Judas (James' brother), a contradiction exists between Matt./Mark and Luke/Acts and unless Simon the Canaanite is Simon Zelotes (Simon the Zealot), another conflict is evident.

POLYGAMY--Many people have condemned the practice of polygamy as repugnant, if not immoral. In fact, the admission of Utah into the Union was held in abeyance until the Mormons officially repudiated the practice. Utah became a state in 1896 only after the policy had been changed by clerical/political leaders. In defense of their position Mormons repeatedly invoked the Bible and, unfortunately for biblicists opposed to polygamy, the Bible not only fails to condemn the practice but lends considerable support to its legitimacy. Many of the OT heroes, the patriarchs, had several wives. Scriptural backing for Mormon behavior is not hard to find. Key figures in this regard are Gideon ("Gideon had threescore and ten sons of his body begotten: for he had many wives"--Judges 8:20), Solomon ("And he had 700 wives, princesses, and 360 concubines...."--1 Kings 11:3), Jacob ("Then Jacob rose up, and set his sons and his wives upon camels"--Gen. 31:17), Esau ("Esau took his wives, and his sons, and his daughters...."--Gen. 36:6), Rehoboam ("Rehoboam loved Maachah the daughter of Abraham above all his wives and his concubines...."--2 Chron. 11:21).

But, undoubtedly, the most prominent polygamist is the OT patriarch, David. He is crucial to this discussion not only because an exceptional number of verses show he had many wives: 2 Sam. 5:13 ("David took him more concubines and wives out of Jerusalem...."), 1 Chron. 14:3 ("David took more wives at Jerusalem...."), 1 Sam. 25:43, 27:3, 30:5, 30:18, 2 Sam. 2:2, 3:2-5, 12:7-8, and 12:11, but also because many verses show he was the essence of moral rectitude: 1 Sam. 25:28 ("...because my lord {David--Ed.} fighteth the battles of the Lord, and evil hath not been found in thee all thy days"), 2 Sam. 19:27 ("...but my lord the king {David--Ed.} is an angel of God..."), 1 Kings 15:3 ("...his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father"), Acts 13:22 ("I {God--Ed.} have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart which shall fulfill all my will") and 1 Kings 9:4, 11:4, 11:6, 15:11 and Neh. 12:36. If David was an angel of God in whom evil had not been found in all the days of his life, if his heart was perfect with the Lord and he was a man after God's own heart, it's virtually impossible to find biblical condemnation of polygamy that is worthy of serious consideration. David lived after the Old Law in general and the Ten Commandments in particular were enacted so there could not have been any laws in opposition to his behavior "because David did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord, and turned not aside from anything that he {God--Ed.} commanded him all the days of his life, save only in the matter of Uriah the Hittite" (1 Kings 15:5). Even if NT maxims in opposition to polygamy could be produced, they would be all but worthless since they would only prove God had changed his mind with respect to what was moral. While moral in the OT, polygamy became immoral in the New. In effect, morals would be changing with time and biblicists would be hardpressed to reconcile this with Mal. 3:6 ("For I am the Lord, I change not") and the "Situation Ethics" which they constantly deplore.

Deut. 21:15-16 not only fails to condemn polygamy but actually provides rules by which the sons of one's wives are to be treated. The only verse that seems to forestall polygamy is Deut.

17:17 ("Neither shall he multiply wives to himself...."), but it appears to be applicable only to one individual in a particular situation.

NT SUPPORT FOR THE MIRACULOUS--A large number of biblicists adhere to what is known as the liberal view of the Bible, a critical component of which is that many well-known biblical events are to be viewed allegorically or symbolically rather than literally. From their perspective, Adam and Eve, the Flood, Jonah and the Whale, and Balaam's Talking Ass, for example, are not to be taken as actual accounts of real events but mythological stories created to convey a message. Fundamentalists and other inerrantists are seen as childish ideologues rigidly adhering to a literal interpretation. Unfortunately, liberals fail to realize their position is biblically untenable and wholly inconsistent. You can't relegate these stories to the realm of fable and folklore without simultaneously destroying not only the divinity and existence of Jesus but the veracity of Paul and Peter. And, of course, if these occur the NT all but disintegrates and Christianity rapidly follows suit. The reasoning in this regard is rather simple. Adam and Eve had to have been real live human beings because Jesus ("Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning and made them male and female...."--Matt. 19:4), ("But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female"--Mark 10:6) and Paul ("For Adam was first formed then Eve"--1 Tim. 2:13), ("Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses"--Rom. 5:14), ("The first man Adam was made a living soul"--1 Cor. 15:45) said they were. To say they were fictional is to say Jesus and Paul were lying. And if these two men are deceivers, all of Christianity could be fraudulent. In 2 Cor. 11:3 ("But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtily....") and 1 Tim. 2:14 ("Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression") Paul said a real serpent tempted a real Eve. Anyone holding to the contrary simply doesn't believe Paul is a credible source. If Adam and Eve were fictional then so was Original Sin. And if it's fabulous there would have been no evil in the world and no need for Jesus to have died for our sins. The Passion, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection, would have been useless. Even more important, if Adam was fictional then so were Jesus, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David because the genealogy of Jesus in Luke 3 clearly shows they descended from Adam. Real people can't be descended from a mythological figure.

Noah and the Flood had to have been real because Jesus ("But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark. And knew not until the flood came and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be"--Matt. 24:37-39, Luke 17:26-27), Paul ("By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house...."--Heb. 11:7), and Peter ("...when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water"--1 Peter 3:20), ("and spared not the old world, but saved Noah the 8th person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly"--2 Peter 2:5), ("Whereby the world that then was being overflowed with water perished"--2 Peter 3:6) said they were. Fire and brimstone had to have rained on Sodom and Gomorrah because Jesus ("But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all"--Luke 19:29), Paul ("...we would have fared like Sodom and been made like Gomorrah"--Rom. 9:29) and Peter ("and turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah into ashes...."--2 Peter 2:6) said they did. The murdering of a real Abel ("From the blood of Abel unto the blood of Zacharias"--Luke 11:51, Matt. 23:35), the swallowing of Jonah by a whale ("For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly"--Matt. 12:40), the eating of manna in the wilderness ("your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness"--John 6:49), the punishing of Lot's wife ("Remember Lot's wife"--Matt. 17:32) and the meeting of Moses with the burning bush ("Now that the dead are raised, even Moses shewed at the bush...."--Luke 20:37) must be believed if Jesus is God and God cannot lie ("God is not a man that he should lie...."--Num. 23:19). If Jesus is always truthful, then Moses ("For had ye

believed Moses, ye would have believed me; for he wrote of me"--John 5:46) could not have been fictional as some liberals contend, nor could Elijah (Luke 4:25), Isaiah (Matt. 12:17), Daniel (Matt. 24:15), David (Matt. 22:45), Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob (Matt. 8:11). Jesus upheld the existence of angels (Matt. 25:31, 18:10, 13:39) and a real Devil (Luke 10:18, Matt. 4:7, 25:41), and his followers must believe likewise. Otherwise Jesus is a deceiver. Anyone who does not believe the Israelites crossed the Red Sea on dry land ("By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned"--Heb. 11:29) and the walls of Jericho collapsed ("By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days"--Heb. 11:30) is simultaneously contending Paul is not credible. And anyone who claims belief in talking donkeys ("...the dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbad the madness of the prophet"--2 Peter 2:16) is nonsense is doubting the truthfulness of Peter. In essence, anyone who takes the Bible seriously must believe in a large number of incredible events or undermine not only the reliability of key NT figures but the Bible itself.

PETER VERSUS THE NT--The third most important NT individual, Peter, not only made a sizable number of comments that conflict with verses in the OT, which will be discussed later, but a number of comments in the Book of Acts that fly in the face of other parts of the NT: (1) "The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. For of a truth against the holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together,...." (Acts 4:26-27) versus "When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, but that rather a tumult was made, he took water, and worked his hands before the multitude, saying I am innocent of the blood of this just person...." (Matt. 27:24). In Acts Peter alleged that Pilate, along with Herod, was against Christ, but Matthew clearly shows that Pilate not only was not against Jesus but considered him an innocent and just person. (2) "The God our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree" (Acts 5:30) versus "If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross" (Matt. 27:40). Peter and Matthew can't agree on the particulars of the Crucifixion. Did Jesus die on a tree or a cross? Was he hanged or crucified? And was he slain before being hanged as Acts implies or was he conversant while being crucified as Matthew implies? (3) "And they were all {including the Apostles--Ed.} filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to...." (Acts 2:4) versus "And when he had said this, he breathed on them {including the Apostles--Ed.}, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost...." (John 20:22). Acts 2:4 says the apostles, among others, were all filled with the Holy Ghost; yet, according to John 20:22, they had already received the Holy Ghost. If they lost the Holy Ghost which later returned, then they temporarily lost the assurance of salvation which fundamentalists claim they obtained forever when they accepted Jesus. (4) "Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he {Judas--Ed.} burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out" (Acts 1:18) versus "Then Judas, which had betrayed him, when he saw that he was condemned, repented himself, and brought again the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders. Saying, I have sinned in that I have betrayed the innocent blood. And they said, What is that to us?.... And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself. And the chief priests, took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. And they took counsel, and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in" (Matt. 27:3-7). Peter's account in Acts of what occurred with respect to Judas' betrayal differs from Matthew's in several respects. (a) Peter says Judas used the 30 pieces of silver to purchase a field, while Matthew says he threw the money on the temple floor and left. (b) Peter says Judas purchased a field with the 30 pieces of silver, but Matthew says the priests used the money to purchase a potter's field. (c) And Peter says Judas burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out, whereas Matthew says he died by hanging himself. (5) "...and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out. And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Aceldama, that is to say, The field of blood" (Acts 1:18-19) versus "And the chief priests

took the silver pieces, and said, It is not lawful for to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood. And they took counsel, and bought with them, the potter's field, to bury strangers in. Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood,...." (Matt. 27:6-8). Peter says the field was called "The field of blood" because the blood of Judas was poured on it, while Matthew says it was called "The field of blood" because it was bought with blood money.

Lastly, a couple of comments by Peter in the Book of Acts generate problems of their own. (6)"Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). How could God have made Jesus both Lord and Christ when that would have meant he was neither at one time? (7)"He seeing this before spoke of the resurrection of Christ that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption" (Acts 2:31). When was the soul of Jesus in hell? "Left" in hell means it was there at one time.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter # 298 from PM of CATHOLIC ANSWERS, San Diego, California

Dear Dennis.... I'm glad to know you found the books I sent, Catholicism and Fundamentalism and Theology for Beginners, to be interesting. I'm looking forward to seeing a review of both in one of your upcoming issues.

If you really want to tangle with the "True" Christian Church you need to focus on the Catholic Church. Train your sights on Catholic Answers. That's what we are here for--to offer a reasoned defense of the faith using Scripture, history, and logic. You're wasting your time jousting with the garden variety Fundamentalists I read about in your newsletter. They do a superb job of making a lot of noise, but their arguments have rather little substance.

Would you be interested in engaging us in a written debate, perhaps one that would appear in installments in both Biblical Errancy and Catholic Answers? It could focus on some particular facet of the Atheist/Christian polemic such as the Incarnation of Christ, the historicity and inspiration of the Bible, the Resurrection, the Trinity or any of a number of germane topics. I'm certain your readers would love it--I know ours would.

Dennis, if you want a real challenge (and I suspect you do), take us on. I think you'll find the exchange quite stimulating. Looking forward to hearing from you.

Editor's Response to Letter #298

Dear PM. Although we are willing to accept your challenge to a reasoned debate, several points should be made beforehand. (1) I'm certainly not wasting my time by jousting with "garden variety Fundamentalists." They are: a substantial portion of this country's population, a force to be reckoned with, at the forefront of most regressive social ideas and anti-freethought initiatives, extremely well-financed, and providers of the best apologetic for the most powerful and influential piece of literature in North America. (2) Many, if not most, of the arguments used in BE are as applicable to catholicism as fundamentalism, unless you no longer believe in the Resurrection, the Crucifixion, the Trinity, Original Sin, the Atonement, and a multitude of other biblical concepts. If catholics believe the Bible is God's Word and Jesus and Paul are not only wholly consistent in their statements but also perfect examples of moral rectitude, then catholicism is by no means exempt from BE's critique. (3) BE is primarily concerned with the Bible's validity and our dialogue would have to focus on catholicism vis-a-vis the Bible. (4) The most productive role for BE would probably be that of a judge between catholicism and

fundamentalism since they have you trapped on some points and you have them cornered on others. (5) Before entering into an extended debate of this nature, I intend to exhaust my notes on the Bible's inadequacies and that will require some time. Still, there is no reason we can't address some of catholicism's deviations from, and conflicts with, the Bible. (6) As far as periodic installments are concerned, we can't make any guarantees. That's bad policy. Each issue must be weighed on its merits. (7) BE has never focused on any denomination or religion, per se, since that not only would be a major deviation from the purpose of this newsletter, which is to expose the Bible, but could lead people to the erroneous conclusion that organizations that aren't addressed are somehow correct. Once our notebooks have been exhausted, however, this policy will be modified to include particular organizations and their theological approaches to the Bible. (8) Since catholicism gives many extrabiblical writings, documents, and decrees importance comparable to that of the Bible, you must provide me with a list of that which you consider to be as authoritative as the Bible. I've read many but by no means all. Before we can engage in a dialogue I need a current, comprehensive listing of all catholic teachings on faith and morals that are comparable to that which emanated from the Council of Trent. I want to know what biblically-related doctrines catholics consider to be of such importance that they can be viewed as having "ex cathedra" standing, not those you consider customs or disciplines, which can be changed on a moment's notice. Analyzing doctrines that can be changed at will would be a waste of time. That truly would be jousting of a fruitless variety. The big advantage in debating fundamentalists is that they have a definite and limited set of authoritative writings that can't be increased or decreased, i.e., the 66 books within their Bible. I need a list of yours.

Note from Charlie Kluepfel:

For the viewpoint of a **former Catholic**, including a review of Patrick Madrid's **Surprised by Truth**, follow this link:

[The Truth Shall Set You Free.](#)

Letter #299 from WAA of Madera, California

Dear Dennis. First of all, I would like to commend you on the tremendous job you are doing with BE. I enjoy every issue. The point I would like to make is this: in Issue #68, first page, you quoted from 2 Samuel 6:23 ("Michal the daughter of Saul had no child unto the day of her death...") versus 2 Samuel 21:8 ("...and the five sons of Michal the daughter of Saul...").

It seems to be a good contradiction, but reading the complete verse of 2 Samuel 21:8, the five sons of Michal were not actually her own but the adopted sons she brought up for Adriel. This being the case, wouldn't 2 Sam. 6:23 be correct and not really a contradiction?

Editor's Response to Letter #299

Dear WAA. Suggestions are welcome but I think you should reread 2 Sam. 21:8. What led you to believe the five sons of Michal were adopted? My ASV and Masoretic Text say, "...and the five sons of Michal whom she bare to Adriel the son of Barzillai...."

Letter #300 from DM of Pasadena, California (Part a)

Dear Dennis. If you do not support the accuracy of the KJ Bible, at least with respect to the appropriate verses, then what is your motive in comparing the KJ Bible to later translations. Your strongest argument here is to show that there are a significant number of unjustified differences between the KJ Bible and the modern translations, differences which are best explained in terms of political expediency. If you accept that, as suggested by your reply to my letter #281, then you should defend the necessary verses in the KJ Bible. Differences which seem unnecessary as political to you may not be so clear to another....

Editor's Response to Letter #300 (Part a)

Dear DM. I think you missed my point. BE does not defend any version of the Bible as you might have noticed from the recent commentaries devoted to differing versions. Sometimes the KJ translators covered up problems which more recent translations exposed and sometimes the reverse was true. No preference is intended. The preference many modern translations have toward "Thou shalt not murder" rather than "Thou shalt not kill" is a classic example of what I call political expediency. However, "political expediency" is based on judgment calls by myself and I'm not going-to-the-mat to defend them. I only ask observers to objectively judge the facts themselves after viewing the evidence, the trends, and the changing views of the latest biblical teachings and interpretations. It's sufficiently clear to me that the Bible is a political document used for partisan purposes that's constantly rewritten and reinterpreted as conditions dictate.

Letter #300 Continues (Part b)

Some of the differences among the translations do look suspicious and a book devoted to a careful study of these differences would make for fascinating reading. I hope that somebody, somewhere, has the time and ability to write it, and I hope that the translators' own reasons for the changes will be sought out. I look forward to reading that book someday.... The fact that Bibles disagree on a point does not imply that the issue cannot be resolved....

Editor's Response to Letter #300 (Part b)

You are assuming that the differences can be reconciled when the fact that they haven't been lends more credence to the belief that they can't be. The point repeatedly made in five consecutive recent issues of BE is that versions clash in far too many instances. How differences arose and whether or not they can be resolved is another issue. The point is that they exist; they haven't been eliminated, and that's what matters. To just gratuitously assume that they can be reconciled is unwarranted.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #301 from MJ of Wenatchee, Washington

Dear Dennis. Enclosed you will find a check in the amount of \$10 for 100 of your corrected editions of your two pamphlets created last summer. I distributed the previous 100 to individuals in two western provinces of Canada and five western states of the U.S. I have observed that they have been of great interest to most of the individuals I have distributed them to and greatly influenced several Christians I am associated with. These Christians were completely unaware of any internal contradictions contained within the Bible. In my opinion, your pamphlets are a great informative and educational tool.

I recently read a question and answer article written by Billy Graham concerning personal wealth.... Dennis, I was absolutely shocked by Dr. Graham's response to the reader's question of

whether the Bible condoned or condemned the accumulation of personal wealth. Dr. Graham virtually ignored almost all of the phrases attributed to Jesus concerning Jesus' admonition against the accumulation of personal wealth.... In my encounters with Christians (conservative, moderate or liberal) I have found the issue of Jesus' teachings concerning personal wealth to be one of the most sensitive issues they do not want to discuss. In our Western culture where material possessions and personal wealth are often equated with success, many Christians find it very convenient to ignore the phrases on personal wealth attributed to Jesus. Keep up the good work.

Letter #302 from JF of Decatur, Georgia

Dear Dennis McKinsey. Enclosed is my BE subscription renewal which affords me an opportunity to let you know how much I enjoy your publication. The amount of study that must go into your commentaries truly amazes me. Your refutation of positions taken by the religionist letter writers are, in my mind, irrefutable....

Letter #303 from HKA of Portland, Oregon

I had a conversation with a died-in-the-wool believer the other day and the words began to get a little heavy. I said, "Just where is god and point out just one thing that he has done." It was a nice, warm, sunny day and he said, "Look outdoors and you can see god everywhere--the birds, grass,trees, etc. "Everywhere," I asked. "Absolutely," he answered. I said, I have a pain in my neck. Is he there too?" End of conversation.

Issue No. 75

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COMMENTARY

JESUS ISN'T QUALIFIED--For nearly 2,000 years Christians have contended Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah predicted in the OT. Unfortunately, they have conveniently ignored eight major reasons Jesus couldn't fill the bill. There is no way he could qualify as the following facts show. (1) NT verses repeatedly say that Jesus was not only from the province of Galilee: MATT. 26:69 ("Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee"), LUKE 23:6-7 LB ("Is he then a Galilean? Pilate asked. When they told him yes,...."), LUKE 22:59 RSV ("Certainly this man {Peter--Ed.} also was with him {Jesus--Ed.}, for he is a Galilean") and the Galilean city of Nazareth specifically: MARK 1:24 ("...what have we to do with thee thou Jesus of Nazareth"), JOHN 1:45 ("...Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph"), and LUKE 1:26 ("...the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth"), but also was a prophet: ("And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee"--MATT. 21:11). Yet, scripture says that no prophet can come from Galilee ("Search and you will see that no prophet is to rise from Galilee"--JOHN 7:52 RSV) and nothing good can come from Nazareth ("We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth.... Nathanael said to him, 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth'"--JOHN 1:45-46 RSV). (2) MICAH 5:2 predicted the Messiah would come from Bethlehem in the province of Judea. But John 7:40-42 RSV ("When they heard these words, some of the people said, This {Jesus--Ed.} is really the prophet. Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, Is the Christ to come from Galilee? Has not the scripture said that the Christ is descended from David, and comes from Bethlehem {in Judea--Ed.}....") disqualifies Jesus by showing he came from Galilee not Judea. (3) Jesus is a descendant of Coniah (Jeconiah, Jeconias) as the genealogy in MATT. 1:11 ("Jeconias begat Salathiel") through MATT. 1:16 ("And Jacob begat Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ")

shows. In JER. 22:28-30 ("Is this man Coniah a despised broken idol? is he a vassal wherein is no pleasure? why are they cast out, he and his seed, and are cast into a land which they know not? Thus said the Lord, Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah") God said Coniah would never have a descendant who sat on David's throne. Yet, many prophecies, such as that found in LUKE 1:32 ("He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David"), show that Jesus must sit on David's throne eventually. (4) We have already seen that Jesus is a descendant of Coniah. FIRST CHRONICLES 3:16 ("And the sons of Jehoiakim: Jeconiah {Coniah--Ed.} his son....") shows that Coniah is a son of Jehoiakim. So Jesus is a descendant of Jehoiakim too. But JER. 36:30 ("Therefore thus saith the Lord of Jehoiakim king of Judah; He shall have none to sit upon the throne of David") says Jehoiakim would never have a descendant upon the throne of David. So, again, we see that Jesus is disqualified since he must sit upon the throne of David. God's commands given through Jeremiah that neither Jehoiakim nor his son Jeconiah (Coniah--Ed.) could have any progeny who would sit on David's throne exclude Jesus. (5) Jesus couldn't be the Messiah because LUKE 3:31 ("...which was the son of Nathan, which was the son of David {in the genealogy of Jesus--Ed.}") shows Nathan is an ancestor of Jesus and Nathan was excluded from any claim to the throne of David because his brother, Solomon, was chosen to head the Davidic line instead: 1 CHRON. 29:1 ("Furthermore David the king said unto all the congregation, Solomon my son, whom alone God hath chosen...."), 1 CHRON. 28:5 ("And of all my sons, for the Lord hath given me many sons, he hath chosen Solomon my son to sit upon the throne of the Kingdom of the Lord over Israel"), and 1 CHRON. 29:24 ("And all the princes, and the mighty men, and all the sons likewise of King David, submitted themselves unto Solomon the king"). (6) In MATT. 20:28 ("Even as the son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many") Jesus said that he came to minister, not to be ministered unto. But, that is diametrically opposed to the OT's presentation of the Messiah. According to PSALM 72:11 ("Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him"), DAN. 7:14 ("And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations and languages, should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away...."), and DAN. 7:27 ("And the kingdom and dominion...shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose Kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him"), the Messiah will come to be served, not serve others. (7) ROM. 1:3 ("Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh"), PSALM 132:11 ("The Lord hath sworn in truth unto David; he will not turn from it; Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne"), ACTS 2:30 ("Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne"), ACTS 13:22-23 ("...I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfill all my will. Of this man's seed hath God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Savior, Jesus"), 2 TIM. 2:8 ("Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel"), and PSALM 89:3-4 ("I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations") clearly show that the Messiah must be an actual son of David according to the flesh. Since Joseph could not be his physical father if there was a Virgin Birth and the genealogies in Matthew 1 and Luke 3 show that Jesus is related to David through Joseph only, then Jesus couldn't be the Messiah. There is no physical connection to David. (8) And finally: (a) Nowhere throughout the OT is the power of redeeming from sin and the authority of spiritual salvation attributed to the Messiah; (b) Nowhere in the OT does it mention the Messiah's power and glory in heaven, any statement that the Messiah is God, or that God claims to be a man or the son of man ("God is not a man, that he should lie...."--NUM. 23:19); (c) The word "Messiah" means "anointed" and signified neither holiness nor godliness. Kings and priests were anointed as signs of distinction and authority, but they claimed neither equality with God nor sinlessness. Several

verses prove as much: 1 SAM. 10:1 ("Then Samuel took a vial of oil, and poured it upon his head, and kissed him, and said, Is it not because the Lord hath anointed thee to be captain over his inheritance"), LEV. 4:3 ("If the priest that is anointed do sin according to the sin of the people...."), ISA. 45:1 ("Thus saith the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus...."), PSALM 105:15 ("Saying, Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm"), and 2 SAM. 23:1 ("Now these be the last words of David....the anointed of the God of Jacob....").

IGNORED TEACHINGS (Part 4)--Issues 16, 17, and 18 dealt with NT and OT teachings that were conveniently ignored by Christian apologists for the sake of expediency. As was stated at the beginning of Issue 18, biblicists "leap in and out of the Old Law like a porpoise in a ship's wake. If they like it, they quote it; if they don't, they won't. What follows are additional OT maxims supplementing those in Issue 18's Commentary that are systematically ignored. (a) EX. 22:2-3 MOD. LANG. ("When a burglar is caught breaking in and is fatally beaten, there shall be no charge of manslaughter, unless it happened after dawn, in which case there is manslaughter"). One can readily understand why this rule is not quoted since the time of day would have little relevance to whether or not a killing was manslaughter. Justice and OT teachings are often at odds. (b) EX. 22:25 RSV ("If you lend money to any of my people with you who is poor, you shall not be to him as a creditor, and you shall not exact interest from him") and LEV. 25:35-37 RSV ("And if your brother becomes poor and cannot maintain himself with you, you shall maintain him.... Take no interest from him or increase, but fear your God.... You shall not lend him your money at interest, nor give him your food for profit"). Adherence to these rules would all but abolish capitalism. So they aren't quoted very often either. (c) EX. 22:29-30 ("Thou shalt not delay to offer the first of thy ripe fruits, and of thy liquors: the firstborn of thy sons shalt thou give unto me. Likewise shalt thou do with thine oxen, and with thy sheep: seven days it shall be with his dam; on the 8th day thou shalt give it me"). Verses clearly advocating child-sacrifice are systematically ignored and no longer quoted either. (d) DEUT. 22:8 RSV ("When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof, that you may not bring the guilt of blood upon your house, if any one fall from it"). One would be hard-pressed to find any home-builder who would put any credence in an OT maxim requiring parapets to be added to the roofs of homes for reasons of safety. (e) DEUT. 22:12 RSV ("You shall make yourself tassels on the four corners of your cloak with which you cover yourself"). Nor do many people urge others to put four tassels on the corners of their cloak. (f) DEUT. 23:24-25 RSV ("When you go into your neighbor's vineyard, you may eat your fill of grapes, as many as you wish, but you shall not put any in your vessel. When you go into your neighbor's standing grain, you may pluck the ears with your hand, but you shall not put a sickle to your neighbor's standing grain"). One can understand why biblicists don't quote this requirement very often. What right does anyone have to take his neighbor's property at will. Because there is no sign of the owner's acquiescence in this instance, God appears to be condoning theft. (g) And LEV. 19:19 ("...neither shall a garment mingled of linen and woolen come upon thee"). Almost no one in the garment industry pays any heed to this OT decree and many people wear clothing in which wool and linen are mixed.

On the other hand, Christians have not hesitated to use other OT maxims that are found along with those that are rejected. In fact, some have been given great importance despite the fact that distinctions between that which is acceptable and that which isn't are wholly arbitrary. If one is going to utilize the Old Law, then he must accept all of its precepts, not just those that are expedient. One can't pick and choose without some kind of valid, objective criterion for making distinctions. Just as the rules that have already been quoted are almost universally rejected, those which follow have been employed to regulate human behavior by sizable segments of the population in recent history. (h) DEUT. 22:5 ("The woman shall not wear that which pertaineth unto a man, neither shall a man put on a woman's garment: for all that do so are abomination unto the Lord thy God"). Opponents of changes in female dress in recent years have quoted this verse repeatedly. (i) EX. 22:18 ("Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live"). This has been one of the

most notorious of all verses found in the Old Law. Not long ago it was cited profusely and brought devastation to the lives of thousands. (j) LEV. 3:17 ("It shall be a perpetual statute for your generations throughout all your dwellings, that ye eat neither fat nor blood"), LEV. 7:26 ("Moreover ye shall eat no manner of blood, whether it be of fowl or of beast, in any of your dwellings"), LEV. 17:10 ("And whatsoever man there be of the house of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among you, that eateth any manner of blood; I will even set my face against that soul that eateth blood, and will cut him off from among his people"), LEV. 17:14 ("...Ye shall eat the blood of no manner of flesh: for the life of all flesh is the blood thereof: whosoever eateth it shall be cut off"), DEUT. 12:23 ("Only be sure that thou eat not the blood: for the blood is the life; and thou mayest not eat the life with the flesh"), and GEN. 9:3-4 ("Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you, even as the green herb have I given you all things. But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat"). Even though we are supposed to no longer be under the Old Law, Jehovah's Witnesses use these verses every day in their on-going opposition to blood transfusions. What is the relationship between the eating of blood and transfusions, you ask? On page 216 in *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth* the JW's clearly explain why they are opposed to blood transfusions. "Another common practice in various parts of the world is the eating of blood. Thus animals not properly bled are eaten or the blood may be drained out and used for food in a meal. Yet God's Word forbids the eating of blood. (Genesis 9:3-4; Leviticus 17:10) What, then, about taking a blood transfusion? Some persons may reason that getting a blood transfusion is not actually 'eating.' But is it not true that when a patient is unable to take food through his mouth, the doctor often recommends feeding him by the same method in which a blood transfusion is given? The Bible tells us to 'abstain from...blood.' What does this mean? If a doctor were to tell you to abstain from alcohol, would that simply mean that you should not take it through your mouth but that you could transfuse it directly into your veins? Of course not! So, too, 'abstaining from blood' means not taking it into your body at all." On page 73 in *Reasoning from the Scriptures* the JW's say, "In a hospital, when a patient cannot eat through his mouth, he is fed intravenously. Now, would a person who never put blood into his mouth but who accepted blood by transfusion really be obeying the command to 'keep abstaining from blood'?" Simply stated their position is that people are fed intravenously every day in hospitals. If you are given blood intravenously, then you are eating blood and this is forbidden by the Bible, especially in the OT. (k) EX. 23:10-11 ("For six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield; but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the wild beasts may eat. You shall do likewise with your vineyard, and with your olive orchard"). Apologists cite this verse as an example of biblical wisdom with respect to the agricultural policy of allowing one's land to lie dormant periodically. (l) And finally, some Christians even quote LEV. 7:23 ("Speak unto the children of Israel, saying. Ye shall eat no manner of fat....") to prove the OT was ahead of its time because of the Levitical injunction against the consumption of fat.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #304 from DEM of Pasadena, California (Part a)

Dear Dennis. I received your two leaflets today, *THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD?* and *JESUS CHRIST IS THE ANSWER?* A couple of points are either erroneous or weak, and they need to be addressed: (a) Did Solomon's house contain 2,000 baths {1 Kings 7:26} or 3,000 baths {2 Chron. 4:5}. "Baths" refers to a unit of volume and not to washing stations in Solomon's house! It is the volume of the molten sea (a large bronze basin) whose volume is twice given with conflicting numbers.

Editor's Response to Letter #304 (Part a)

Dear DEM. This topic was covered in the VERSIONS DIFFER section in a prior issue. Eleven of the 15 versions I have say "baths;" a couple say barrels, and three say gallons. Even if your correction is valid, the contradiction remains.

Letter #304 Continues (Part b)

The fact that the Hebrews classified the bat as being a "bird" is an error only if the Hebrew word for "bird" is identical to our word for "bird." Certainly, they have the right to define the use of their words, and if they choose to include bats within the group of flying creatures they call "birds" that's their business. The best that the critic can do is argue that "birds" should not be used in the translation, and that God should have differentiated between the bat and our "bird" if only for the sake of us modern readers.

Editor's Response to Letter #304 (Part b)

If the Hebrew word for "bird" is not identical to our word for "bird," then you are saying scholars can't translate correctly. Could I ask what your qualifications are with respect to a knowledge of Hebrew? Virtually every translator says they are identical. Do you have any evidence to the contrary? When the biblical text has a bat listed at the end of a list of 19 flying creatures, which the text calls "birds," that's pretty conclusive evidence the author of Leviticus considered the bat to be a bird. Every version I have says "birds" and includes the bat in the list.

You stated that "the best that the critic can do is argue that 'birds' should not be used in the translation." Not true! Critics such as myself don't have the problem. Critics such as yourself have the burden of proving you know Hebrew better than the translators of nearly every version on the market and can prove the word "bird" was not the correct English word to use for the Hebrew term.

Letter #304 Continues (Part c)

Jesus may not have said "It is more blessed to give than to receive" at least in the Bible, but the reader will simply assume that Jesus made the statement outside the Bible. The point is too weak to be of any use.

Editor's Response to Letter #304 (Part c)

The last point made in the pamphlet, *THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD*, was that Jesus never made the quote attributed to him by Paul to the effect that it's more blessed to give than to receive. You said that the "reader will simply assume that Jesus made the statement outside of the Bible." No, many will conclude that he didn't make it at all since Paul had no personal contact with him. Paul talked to the Lord on the road to Damascus, not Jesus per se. It will also diminish the strength of an important concept--concern for others--that has always been attributed to Jesus. Finally, when you gratuitously assume that he made the statement outside the Bible, you are guessing, pure and simple. I want them to know the statement is definitely not in the Book.

Letter #304 Concludes (Part d)

I feel that your pamphlet could be strengthened if you took only 10 items and included the usual rationalizations. The latter step would go far to wake up those who "know" that all the problems have been "answered." Showing that such answers fail is a strong point you shouldn't omit as it adds another dimension.

Editor's Response to Letter #304 Concludes (Part d)

Again we disagree, DEM. Most people receiving my pamphlets don't even know there are contradictions in the Bible. If you present only a few which they might be able to resolve in their own minds and add some apologetic rationalizations, that will not only tend to undermine the critical thought process I'm trying to create but dramatically reduce the strength of the pamphlets. This could very well be the only time these people will ever have any contact with the other side and it's important to inundate them with so many problems that they will feel overwhelmed and lose any will to respond. They hear enough "answers" to biblical criticisms as it is. How many pamphlets of any organization give the other side's point of view? We leave activities of that nature to BE itself, while nearly all others exclude it entirely.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #305 from FG of East Pittsburg, Pennsylvania (Part a)

Dear Dennis. You have produced a body of literature in the last 5 or 6 years which has, more than any writer I know, shorn of external philosophy, demonstrated that the Bible is self-contradictory. It's your achievement in life, Dennis. As Mr. Potts said, "The Bible is not magic paper from Heaven." The Bible's self-contradictions are evident even from casual reading. It should come as no surprise that many more seminarians have doubts than true believers in the general public. But those doubts are often never discussed or even discussable except on a one-to-one basis.

In writing to you today I mean to ask two questions I am asking myself. Quite possibly you've considered them before. First, is it possible to be a Christian without an inerrant Bible? I don't quite buy the idea that "if all is not inerrant, the whole thing collapses." After all, some statements out of a given set may be true and some may be false. Which are which can be separated in principle by reference to externalities, e.g., historical scholarship and archeology....

Editor's Response to Letter #305 (Part a)

Dear FG. We appreciate your gracious comments but would like to respond to several of your observations. First, whether or not one can be a Christian while doubting the Bible's inerrancy is a question that should be directed to the Christian community. We are far more concerned with ascertaining what is accurate and consistent than ascribing labels to individuals and groups. Who is a Christian and who isn't means far less to us than who is telling the truth and who isn't. Secondly, once you admit the Bible is not inerrant, you're going to have a hard time proving it emanated from a perfect being. How are you going to prove it's God's word? How can a perfect being produce an imperfect book? Third, once you admit there are errors and mistakes within the Bible, you face the hurdle of separating that which is true from that which isn't. At that point opinions, theories, guesstimates, preferences, and feelings assume precedence. As subjectivity comes in the door, objectivity goes out the window. What is your criterion for determining what is true? You say that true and false statements "can be separated in principle by reference to externalities e.g., historical scholarship and archeology." In fact, scholars are by no means in agreement with respect to historical events. But, even more important, hundreds of biblical contradictions, such as theological and doctrinal conflicts, are entirely contained within the text. How are they going to be resolved? For example, can you provide an historical or archeological resolution of the problems that are on the two pamphlets we created? Can you use historical information to determine whether or not salvation comes by works, faith, or predestination? Perhaps I'm wrong, FG, but I sense a Christian background in your philosophy that you can't seem to jettison.

Letter #305 Continues (Part b)

....If one seeks to be able to call oneself a Christian because to do otherwise nowadays is to invite public disapproval, then one is not being intellectually honest.... People have asked me if I am. I say, "define Christian." The answer is: "Do you believe Christ was the son of God?" I think, well, the term "son of God" is used allegorically elsewhere in the Bible and indeed Christ was not specific in stating that he and God had a genetic relationship. I mean, are we demanding Christ's chromosomes be partly nonhuman? If not, we are talking about an allegorical 'son of God', who was at most an extraordinary human. So I say, "Yes." If they ask, "Do you believe in the Bible?" I ask, "Which version?" And then I must honestly answer "No." The above strategy is one of a person lacking courage of convictions and it is a strategy which I quickly discarded because it is dishonest and cowardly....

Secondly, what program do you envisage for getting BE's message out to the nation at large? I've asked this of myself. I can only do a one-to-one on students or street proselytizers. Random radio appearances and one-to-one diffusion do not seem like an efficient program. But perhaps I seek a gigantism that just isn't feasible.... In my daydreams I can imagine a county-wide pilot program. It would consist of a low cost ultra-cheap (or even free) well-written paperback at the high school sophomore level that would persuasively deal with BE's best questions. Then videotapes of BE-based Biblical discussions could be installed in every library in that county.

Editor's Response to Letter #305 (Part b)

Rest assured we are always contemplating ways to expand BE's influence, FG. We appreciate your interest in this question. As you know, BE is a strong believer in proselytization and persuasion and any effective plan to aid that effort is always welcome. As you have probably noticed, throughout the history of this publication letters in which people are relating their experiences and efforts to influence, inform, and persuade others to reject the Bible have always received precedence in BE. Activities of this nature have always been of prime importance to us. After all, if you don't take it to the other side, you have left them in control, unhindered and unopposed.

Letter #306 from RH of New York, New York

Dear Dennis....Your work continues to astound and illuminate. The words on liberal interpretation in the last issue do a perfect job of refuting the more moderate Christians; they have no more leg to stand on now in my eyes than the fundies whom you refute in every issue. You have my admiration and every hope for continued success. Whenever BE gets incorporated into a big book, I'll really look forward to seeing sparks fly.

Issue No. 76

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COMMENTARY

MESSIANIC PROPHECIES (Part One of a Five-Part Series)--With the possible exception of eschatology (biblical predictions of what is to come) in no area of scripture does the Christian imagination wander more wildly and irresponsibly than in that of messianic prophecy (OT predictions of the coming Messiah). Christian apologists have diligently searched the OT for any verse, any text, any word, that could possibly be twisted, distorted, or perverted in such a manner as to link Jesus with the foretold Messiah. With what can only be described as reckless abandon,

they have interpreted sizable portions of the OT for purely partisan theological purposes. Regardless of relativity, anything and everything of a positive or uplifting nature has been depicted as a type or harbinger of Jesus and everything of a negative, but equally applicable import, has been ignored or minimized. Hundreds of verses have been interpreted either literally or figuratively, as conditions dictate, with little regard for context or original intent. Except in the arena of eschatology, here, more than anywhere else, the full breadth and depth of Christian duplicity rears its ugly head. Perversion, prevarication, and pathetic prognostication are only some of the descriptive terms one could apply to their strategy of deception. "Everything in the Jewish books is perverted and distorted into meanings never intended by the writers." ("Examination of the Prophecies", The Life and Works of Paine, Vol. 9, p. 241) and "...whoever will take the trouble to read attentively, will find in all those passages where the OT is cited, only an obvious abuse of words, and the seal of falsehood on almost every page" (Voltaire on Religion by Ken Applegate, p. 147). Interestingly enough, apologists rely heavily and freely upon the very tactic--taking out of context--which they so readily attribute to their opponents. As Paine said, "The practise which the writers of the books (gospels--Ed.) employ is not more false than it is absurd. They state some trifling case of the person they call Jesus Christ, and then cut out a sentence from some passage of the OT and call it a prophecy of that case. But when the words thus cut out are restored to the places they are taken from, and read with the words before and after them, they give the lie to the NT" (The Life and Works of Paine, Vol. 9, p. 269).

Not long ago we heard a debate in which a noted fundamentalist contended Jesus had to be the Messiah because no one else could fulfill so many of the OT prophecies. From his perspective there was no one else who could "fill the bill." A few of the prophecies may fit certain individuals but no one else could fit so many. The odds were just too great. Josh McDowell expressed the attitude typical of most apologists when he said, "Now the OT was written over a period of a thousand years and contains over 333 messianic prophecies....all of the prophecies that were fulfilled in one person, Jesus Christ, were written down at least 400 years before he was born because the OT was completed around 450-400 B.C...there are 60 major prophecies and 270 ramifications, all fulfilled in one person, Jesus Christ....Let's apply the modern science of probability. For only 48 of these prophecies to be fulfilled in any one individual using the modern science of probability, is one in every 1×10 to the 157th power. That means 157 zeroes" (Evidence for Faith, Practical Apologetics by Josh McDowell, pages 159 & 161). The importance of this entire field lies not only in its alleged "proof" that Jesus is the long-sought Savior of the world but in the constant reliance upon accurate biblical prophecy as proof of the Bible's uniqueness. As the apologist in the debate said with reference to the Bible's predictive accuracy in general, "There aren't that many atoms in the universe." In other words, pure mathematics not only proves Jesus is the Messiah but the Bible is God's Word. No other book even comes close to having so many accurate prophecies; at least that's the theory. When asked how their book differs from the writings of the Moslems, Hindus, Buddhists, etc., the most common reply by biblicists is that the Bible contains hundreds of accurate prophecies which the others lack. The ability to predict the future is seen as proof that the Bible alone is God's word because only God knows the future.

So what's the problem biblicists ask. The problem is quite simple. Not one of the prophecies cited clearly pertains to Jesus. The entire messianic structure is built on conjecture, speculation, and interpolation. Ingersoll stated BE's position even more forcefully. "There is no prophecy in the OT foretelling the coming of Jesus Christ. There is not one word in the OT referring to him in any way--not one word. The only way to prove this is to take your Bible, and wherever you find these words; 'That it might be fulfilled' and 'which was spoken' turn to the OT and find what was written, and you will see that it had not the slightest possible reference to the thing recounted in the NT--not the slightest" (Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 5, p. 277). Because this topic is

of such importance to the Bible's validity in general and the messiahship of Jesus in particular, an all but exhaustive critique of the "Messianic prophecies" is in order.

Having emphasized the importance of this subject in general, we can now proceed to a discussion of specifics. Some of the major prophecies allegedly applicable to Jesus were presented in prior issues and need not be repeated. Micah 5:2-5:6 was covered on pages 2 & 3 of Issue #7; Isaiah 7:11-20, 8:2-8, & Psalm 22 were covered on pages 3-5 of Issue #24; Gen. 21:12, Num. 24:17-19, Deut. 18:15-18, Psalms 2:6, 72:10, & Isaiah 52:13-53:12 were covered on pages 1-4 of Issue #30; and Isaiah 42:1-2, 19-20, and Gen. 49:10-12 were covered on pages 1 & 2 of Issue #31. What follows is an almost exhaustive listing in biblical order of the remaining OT verses that are alleged to be messianic and the reasons they aren't applicable to Jesus. (1) GEN. 3:15 ("...and I will put enmity between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel"). There is no reason to believe the seed referred to is Jesus specifically. It could just as easily apply to any good person who ever lived, any person who ever fought evil. The verse is much too vague to refer to anyone in particular. (2) GEN. 9:27 ("God shall enlarge Japheth, and he {allegedly Jesus--Ed.} shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant"). (a) It says Japheth, not Jesus or God, will dwell in the tents or be a descendant of Shem. (b) Canaan was never a servant of Jesus. (3) GEN. 17:19 & 21:12 ("...and thou shalt call his name Isaac; and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him"). (a) Many people are descended from Isaac. Why assume this refers to Jesus in particular? "Seed" refers to all of one's descendants. This covenant is being established with all of Isaac's descendants, not just one particular, unspecified individual. (4) GEN. 22:18 ("And in thy {Abraham's--Ed.} seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because thou hast obeyed my voice"). (a) Christians allege that this promise given to Abraham regarding the blessing of all nations through his seed referred to Jesus as the pre-eminent posterity of Abraham. Yet, the prior verse, Gen. 22:17 ("That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore...") clearly shows that no single person is meant. It is referring to all of Abraham's posterity. (b) By saying "descendants," which is plural, instead of "seed," the RSV translation clearly shows far more than one person is being referred to. (c) All the nations of the earth have not been blessed in Abraham, in Jacob, or in their descendants, the Jews. (d) Even if this did apply to Christianity, it is unfulfilled since most of the earth does not believe in Jesus. (e) And lastly, one could easily argue that Christianity has been anything but a blessing to humanity. (5) GEN. 26:4 ("And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed"). Again "seed" is obviously referring to many people, not just one particular person who is unspecified. (6) EX. 12:46 ("In one house shall it be eaten; thou shalt not carry forth aught of the flesh abroad out of the house; neither shall ye break a bone thereof"). Christians allege John 19:36 ("The scripture should be fulfilled, a bone of him shall not be broken") in the NT was a fulfillment of this prophecy. But this couldn't be referring to Jesus because: (a) Ex. 12:46 in the RSV and Num. 9:12 in the KJV show that John 19:36 should have been translated: "Nor break any bone of it," not "of him." "Of it" is neuter, not masculine. John 19:36 was translated as "of him" so it could refer to Jesus; (b) A prior verse Ex. 12:5 ("Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the 1st year: ye shall take it out from the sheep or the goats") shows an actual sheep is being discussed, not a man; (c) The verse says the flesh thereof can only be eaten in one house, whereas Jesus can be eaten in any home; (d) The prior verse Ex. 12:45 ("A foreigner and an hired servant shall not eat thereof") says foreigners and hired servants can't eat of the flesh, whereas Jesus came for everybody; (e) And finally, verse 48 says no uncircumcised person can eat the sheep whereas Jesus can be eaten by anyone. (7) DEUT. 21:23 ("His body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt in any wise bury him that day; {for he that is hanged is accursed of God}"). (a) How could Jesus, the perfect being, be "accursed of God?" (b) The prior verse, Deut. 21:22 ("And if a man have committed a sin worthy of death, and he be put to death, and thou hang him

on a tree") clearly shows that hanging, not crucifying, is being referred to, and Jesus was not hanged. (c) The same prior verse is pronouncing sentence on a man who actually committed a sin. This couldn't be referring to Jesus since he was allegedly sinless. (d) And Jesus died on a cross, not a tree. (8) 2 SAM. 7:12-13 ("...I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever"). (a) Jesus' kingdom is yet to be established at all, much less, forever. (b) The next verse, 2 Sam. 7:14 ("...If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of man, and with the stripes of the children of men"), shows Jesus is not the person being discussed. God would certainly not imply that his perfect son, Jesus, would sin and might have to be punished. (9) 1 CHRON. 17:11-12 ("And it shall come to pass, when thy (David's--Ed.) days be expired that thou must go to be with thy fathers, that I will raise up thy seed after thee, which shall be of thy sons...."). (a) The "Seed" couldn't be Jesus because the seed is to appear "when thy days be expired" not 1,000 years after David, when Jesus appeared. (b) Also, one can't help but wonder how Jesus could be the person under discussion since he was a "descendant" of David, not one of his "sons." (10) PSALM 2:2 ("The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord, and against his anointed...."). (a) When did the kings of the earth set themselves against Jesus who is supposedly the anointed? They knew nothing about him nor did they have any hand in his death. They probably did not even know he lived. They neither conspired nor took counsel together against him. A few Roman soldiers, some Jews, and local governors did the killing. (b) David was the anointed being referred to as 1 Sam. 16:3 & 12-13 show. He was the chief (anointed) of Israel by the express command of God. (11) PSALM 2:6 ("Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion"). When did this occur to Jesus? Moreover, "have set" is past tense, not future. (12) PSALM 2:7 ("...the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee"). (a) Ex. 4:22 ("Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son") shows Israel itself was referred to as the son of God. Why assume it's Jesus? (b) How could Jesus have a less than eternal life span as "begotten" implies? (13) PSALM 2:9 ("Thou shalt break them--the heathen--with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel"). The Christian idea of the Messiah is different from the OT presentation. Jesus did not "break with a rod of iron" or "dash to pieces." This could hardly be applicable to the "prince of peace." (14) PSALM 2:12 ("Blessed are all they that put their trust in him"). This means trusting in "Jehovah," not the Messiah, as the prior verse, Psalm 2:11 ("Serve the Lord with fear") shows. "Him" is referring to the Lord, not the Messiah. (15) PSALM 16:10 ("For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption"). (a) Over and over again "Holy One" is used in the OT with reference to the Lord, not the Messiah or Jesus. (b) Some scholars say the Psalmist used a Hebrew word that should have been translated as "thy follower," "thy worshipper," "thy servant," or "thy disciple," but not "thine holy one." (c) That David was referring to himself when he said "not leave my soul in hell" can be seen in Psalm 45:15 ("But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave: for he shall receive me"). "Grave" and "hell" come from the same Hebrew word "sheol." (16) PSALM 21:3 ("...thou settest a crown of pure gold on his head"). Jesus never received a crown of gold, pure or otherwise. If anything, his was composed of thorns. (17) PSALM 21:4 ("He asked life of thee, and thou gavest it him, even length of days for ever and ever"). (a) According to Matt. 27:46 ("My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me") Jesus was given death not life. (b) If this refers to the divine Jesus, how could he have been given something he already had, namely, eternal life. (c) If this refers to the human Jesus, he can't be said to have had much of a life since he only lived approximately 33 years. He certainly did not live forever on earth. (18) PSALM 21:5 RSV ("His glory is great through thy help; splendor and majesty thou dost bestow upon him"). (a) If this were applicable, Jesus would not be divine since deity already has splendor and majesty. He would be a mere human receiving splendor and majesty. (b) If this is referring to his humanity, in fact, he was belittled and scorned. (19) PSALM 21:7 ("For the King {allegedly Jesus--Ed.} trusteth in the Lord, and through the mercy of the most High he shall not be moved"). (a) If this refers to Jesus' divinity, he has no need to trust in another--God. Nor

would he have need for the Most High that he should not be moved. (b) If this refers to his humanity, he was certainly moved--in downfall and death. (20) PSALM 27:12 ("Deliver me not over unto the will of mine enemies; for false witnesses are risen up against me, and such as breathe out cruelty"). Supposedly this pertains to Jesus and is fulfilled in Matt. 26:60 ("...though many false witnesses came, yet found they none. At last came two false witnesses...."). It does not pertain to Jesus because: (a) In Psalm 27:9 the speaker who is allegedly speaking for Jesus says, "...leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation." How could God be the salvation of Jesus, his equal? Why would a perfect being need to be saved? And God did forsake Jesus as Jesus stated in Matt. 27:46 ("My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?"). (b) In Psalm 27:6 the speaker says, "I will sing praises unto the Lord." There is no evidence in the gospels that Jesus ever sang praises to the Lord. (c) In Psalm 27:10 the speaker says, "When my father and my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up." Nowhere do the gospels say that the father and mother of Jesus forsook him or that he was taken up when this occurred. (21) PSALM 30:3 ("O Lord, thou hast brought up my soul from the grave...."). This could not be referring to Jesus because: (a) The rest of the verse ("...thou hast kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit") shows he never died and was never buried. (b) According to the prior verse ("O Lord my God, I cried unto thee, and thou hast healed me"), Jesus was to have been healed. Being crucified is hardly equivalent to being healed. (c) Would the same speaker, who is supposedly Jesus--mankind's saviour, make the following comment found in the ninth verse-- ("What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit?")? (22) While on the cross Jesus supposedly fulfilled PSALM 31:5 ("Into thine hand I commit my spirit....") when he said, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Luke 23:46). But the comment in Psalms is not applicable to Jesus as several subsequent verses show. (a) Psalm 31:6 RSV ("I have hated them that regard lying vanities") immediately follows and would mean Jesus hated people. (b) Jesus was delivered into the hands of his enemies which contradicts Psalm 31:8 RSV ("...and hast not delivered me into the hand of the enemy"). (c) Psalm 31:10 RSV ("...my strength faileth because of mine iniquity, and my bones are consumed") would mean he committed iniquity. (d) And Psalm 31:17 RSV ("...let the wicked be ashamed and let them be silent in the grave") would mean he wished the worst upon his enemies. (23) PSALM 31:2 ("...deliver me speedily: be thou my strong rock, for an house of defence to save me") is not applicable to Jesus because it contradicts the NT teaching that Jesus died in accordance with his will. The Psalmist prayed to be rescued. (24) And PSALM 34:20 ("He keepeth all his bones; not one of them is broken") is supposedly fulfilled by John 19:33 ("...they brake not his legs") and John 19:36 ("...that the scripture should be fulfilled. A bone of him shall not be broken"). But Psalms couldn't be referring to Jesus because: (a) Psalm 34:4 ("I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears") says he sought the Lord and was delivered; whereas Jesus cried vainly for help while on the cross. (b) And Psalm 34:19 ("Many are the afflictions of the righteous but the Lord delivereth him out of them all") which immediately precedes the verse under discussion says a righteous person (singular) would be delivered from all affliction; whereas the allegedly righteous Jesus was crucified.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #307 from DM of Pasadena, California (Part a)

Dear Dennis. (Generally speaking--Ed.) if you intend to claim that verse "x" in the King James Bible has been changed by Bible version "B" for political reasons, then a necessary condition is the elimination of the case whereby Bible "B" sports a superior translation of verse "x"..... In that sense you must defend the translation of verse "x" in the King James Bible as being superior to that in Bible "B"..... I thought that you might be subscribing to a general conspiracy theory--a serious error.... If you intend to claim that political expediency is an important factor in the

writing of modern Bibles, then you are obliged to "go to the mat." It's one of those jobs that must either be done whole-hog or not at all....

Editor's Response to Letter #307 (Part a)

Dear DM. There is no doubt in my mind that the Bible is completely enveloped in political expediency and the text has been altered as times and conditions dictate. Before you choose to believe otherwise, I'd strongly suggest that you compare the top 15 versions on the market with respect to many key verses. Note the date the version emerged, the environment in which it appeared, the individual or organization sponsoring its appearance, the audience for which it's intended, and the implications of the alterations. You may not see a pattern of tendentious reasoning, but I do. I am not obliged to "go to the mat" to defend my position because it's only offered as a personal observation which others are free to view as they choose.

Letter #307 Concludes (Part b)

...Finally, I want to point out an excellent pamphlet item. Jonah 3:3 ("...Now Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three day's journey") asserts that the city of Nineveh {the old Assyrian capital} is a very great city which takes 3 days to cross! Thus, we easily have a city which is 60 miles in diameter! Archaeological digs reveal Nineveh to be no more than about 2 miles at its greatest extent. I quoted this verse to a Jehovah's Witness and stumped her cold. She promised to research it and get back to me, but I never heard from her again! The Hebrew word which is rendered as "city" also applies to Jerusalem, Jericho, and virtually every other city mentioned in the Bible. That sinks any claim that a "province" was "really" referred to. Another answer claims that, actually, the circumference was being referred to. But a city with a 19 mile diameter is hardly an improvement! Another potential claim views Jonah as walking "through" the city in a roundabout way. Not only would that be a very improbable (and unreliable) way to describe the size of a city, but the ruse is clearly shot down in many of the better translations. The 3 day figure is an attempt to impress the reader with the size of Nineveh--the Assyrians having been the first world-class power that Israel ran into. In doing so, the inspired writer of Jonah got carried away! One of the nice features of the above item is that it...presents a simple, concrete image which immediately presses the absurdity home.

Letter #308 from LWC of Lufkin, Texas

Dear Dennis. This is to call your attention to an important typo in Issue #74. Under "Polygamy" in line 10 (wives...) shouldn't Judges 8:20 be changed to Judges 8:30? Please understand that my intention is to be helpful, not critical. Your outstanding work is most helpful and much appreciated. Keep it up.

Editor's Response to Letter #308

Dear LWC. You are correct; we erred. Although painful, corrections of this nature are always welcome. My ego will have to bow to precision.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #309 from Steve Roelke of Anaheim, California

Dear Dennis. I've some ideas on how to considerably increase the amount of exposure, national and local, that B.E. now gets. I recently bought myself a personal computer and a modem and I've started engaging Christians in discussions of biblical errancy at every opportunity I get. I'm

on a couple of local Christian boards and several other boards that have religious conferences, some of which are transmitted nationally. I have typed up your "Sample" B.E. issue and several of your commentaries. I type more of the commentaries as I have time, but once typed I can send them to a bulletin board with ease. Each of your commentaries that I upload to a board has a header with your name, address, and subscription information. What I would like to do is to get in touch with any of the subscribers of B.E. that would be interested in working together. The keys are communication, cooperation, and organization. There are relatively so few subscribers to B.E. that we need to pool our resources and share ideas. We need to start putting Biblical Errancy's name out there for more people to see. We have the ability to reach a tremendous number of people, at little or no cost. We could divide up the work of typing 73 commentaries (I've done 4 so far), exchange copies of our discussions with Christians (I have a long one on the Tyre prophecy that's pretty good), and just work together in discussions on the Bible on various bulletin boards. I'm sure some of your subscribers have been doing much of this already, and I'd like very much to get in touch with them. Ideally a nationally centralized bulletin board or nationally echoed religious conference would be best and least expensive, but for now anyone interested can leave a message for me VIA MODEM at the PCLAIR in Santa Ana, CA (phone 714-839-9580 [8-n-1]); the KANDY SHACK in Garden Grove, CA (ph 714-636-2667 [8-n-1]); or write to: Steve Roelke, 4313 E. Riverdale, Anaheim, California 92807. Also, do you know of anyone who has made or is in the process of making, a complete index of B.E? Finally, I want to commend you for the outstanding job you have been doing all these years Dennis. No doubt the rewards have been few, but what you are doing is of considerable importance. Thanks alot for all your hard work and dedication!

(A Subsequent Letter by Steve Re-addressed the Same Topic--Ed.).

Hello Dennis. I'd like to commend you once again for the excellent work you are doing....I am just beginning to really get into the fray myself. I am concentrating on computer bulletin boards....It is a really wonderful medium in which to discuss the Bible. You have plenty of time to analyze, research, and prepare responses which can then be saved and sent to any number of persons. I am typing a collection of files on various subjects, derived from BE of course, which I can upload easily at any time. Furthermore, as you well know, it really helps one to learn the ins-and-outs of apologists' arguments....

Editor's Response to Letter #309 and the Subsequent Letter

Dear Steve. You have come across an idea that is well worth exploring. Putting BE on boards via modems has great promise. Hopefully subscribers to BE who have computers and modems will contact you and seek to establish a modus operandi. Most freethought advocates have little or no contact with biblicists on a daily basis and this appears to be an excellent way to remedy the situation. You can't expose someone's mistakes if there is no means by which to reach him or her on a routine basis. BE will publish the ID numbers of anyone who wishes to join you or others in this endeavor.

We do have someone who is creating an index of BE by listing the location of every verse in the Bible mentioned in BE. I haven't contacted him lately so I'm not sure how far that has progressed. We do need an individual, however, to create an index showing the location of every subject discussed in BE. Perhaps someone will volunteer.

Your compliments are most kind and your dedication is to be applauded. If only we had thousands of like mind! Fortunately, BE has a number of supporters behind the scenes who distribute our literature, disseminate our ideas and otherwise aid the cause. They don't receive the notoriety that is so richly deserved, but they are out there, nevertheless. We heartily salute them.

COMMENTARY

MESSIANIC PROPHECIES (Part Two of a Five Part Series)--This month's commentary will continue last month's listing of messianic prophecies attributed to Jesus and explain why they are inapplicable. (25) PSALMS 35:11 and 35:19 ("False witnesses did rise up; they laid to my charge things that I knew not....Let not them that are mine enemies wrongfully rejoice over me: neither let them wink with the eye that hate me without cause") are not fulfilled by Matt. 26:59-61, Mark 14:57-58 and John 15:24-25 for several reasons. (a) When did witnesses come forward to ask Jesus questions? Some testified, but they didn't query him. (b) If the Psalms are referring to Jesus and Jesus is God, how could he not know something? (c) Psalm 35:16 says, "they gnashed upon me with their teeth." When was Jesus bitten, literally bitten, by his opponents? (d) Psalm 35:7 RSV ("...without cause they dug a pit for my life") and Psalm 35:19 say he was hated without a cause. Jesus, on the other hand, was hated with justifiable cause in that he did not deny he claimed to be "The King of the Jews." (e) In Psalm 35:23 the speaker, who is allegedly Jesus, is talking to a being he refers to as "my God and my Lord." Did Jesus have a God? (f) The speaker asks to be judged by God in the next verse ("Judge me, O Lord my God, according to thy righteousness; and let them not rejoice over me"). Would Jesus ask to be judged and did God ever judge Jesus? (26) Jesus supposedly fulfilled PSALM 38:11 ("My lovers and my friends stand aloof from my sore; and my kinsmen stand afar off") in Matt. 27:55 ("And many women were there beholding afar off...."), Mark 15:40, and Luke 23:49. But it couldn't be referring to him because of the following verses which are referring to the same person: (a) Psalm 38:3 ("...neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin") says he sinned. (b) Psalm 38:4 ("For mine iniquities are gone over mine head....") says he committed iniquities. (c) In Psalm 38:5 ("My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness") the speaker says he is foolish. (d) In Psalm 38:7 ("For my loins are filled with a loathsome disease; and there is no soundness in my flesh") the speaker says he has a loathsome disease. (e) In verse 11 the speaker says he has "lovers." (f) In Psalm 38:11 ("For I will declare mine iniquity; I will be sorry for my sin") he says he committed sin and iniquity. (g) And in Psalm 38:22 ("Make haste to help me, O Lord of my salvation") the speaker seeks salvation. Could these verses apply to Jesus? Would the perfect Jesus need to be saved? (27) PSALM 40:7-8 ("Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea thy law is within my heart"). (a) Would Jesus call God, "my God"? (b) The same speaker also uttered Psalm 40:12 ("...mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head....") which could not be applicable to Jesus. (c) In Psalm 40:13 ("Be pleased, O Lord to deliver me: O' Lord, make haste to help me") the speaker prayed earnestly to be delivered which conflicts with Paul's statements in Gal. 1:4, 2:20, Eph. 5:2, 25, 1 Tim. 2:6, Heb. 7:27, & Heb. 9:14 that Jesus died willingly. (28) PSALM 41:9 ("Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me") is not a reference to Judas by Jesus because: (a) The speaker in Psalm 41:4, who is also allegedly Jesus, says, "...Lord, be merciful unto me; heal my soul, for I have sinned against thee." Would Jesus have sinned against God? Moreover, it's hard to imagine Jesus, who is God, having a soul. (b) The speaker says in Psalm 41:8 ("An evil disease, say they, cleaveth fast unto him; and now that he lieth he shall rise up no more"). Yet Jesus died by crucifixion, not a disease. (c) The same speaker, who is allegedly Jesus, says in Psalm 41:11 ("By this I know that thou favorest me, because mine enemy doth not triumph over me"). But his enemies clearly triumphed over Jesus since they killed and buried him. (d) The speaker also says in Psalm 41:10 ("But thou, O Lord, be merciful unto me, and raise me up, that I may requite them"). Jesus, the perfect, forgiving being, wants to get even? (29) PSALM 45:3, 5 ("Gird thy {allegedly Jesus--Ed.} sword upon thy

thigh, O most mighty, with thy glory and thy majesty....Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the King's enemies; whereby the people fall under thee"). (a) These verses do not suit the purported character of Jesus. Who can apply the praises of these warlike attributes to the "Prince of Peace?" This language is contrary to the idea of Christ presented in the NT. (b) When did the people fall under Jesus' arrows? (c) Psalm 45:8 says, "All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces...." Would a poor peasant have clothes that smelled of expensive fragrances? According to Scripture Jesus was poor and possessed few garments. (d) Psalm 45:8 RSV ("From ivory palaces stringed instruments make you glad....") doesn't apply to a lowly man of the people. Moreover, what ivory palaces had stringed instruments that were making Jesus glad? (e) Since Psalm 45:9 says, "Kings' daughters were among thy honorable women", most apologists would prefer to avoid this one entirely. (f) Psalm 45:9 ("...at your right hand stands the queen in gold of Ophir"). What queen stood at the right hand of Jesus in gold of Ophir? (30) PSALM 55:12-13 RSV ("It is not an enemy who taunts me; then I could bear it: it is not an adversary who deals insolently with me, then I could hide from him. But it is you {allegedly Judas--Ed.}, my equal, my companion, my familiar friend"). (a) Judas was far from being the equal of Jesus. (b) Would Jesus say "Destroy, Oh Lord" which the speaker says in verse 9? (c) Would pacific Jesus ask God to let his enemies "go down quick into hell" as is stated in verse 15? AGAIN AND AGAIN WE SEE THAT CONTEXT IS FATAL TO THE APOLOGETIC POSITION. (31) PSALM 68:18 ("Thou didst ascend the high mount, leading captives in thy train, and receiving gifts among men...."). When did Jesus lead captives to a high mount? (32) The speaker in PSALM 69:5 ("O God, thou knowest my foolishness; and my sins are not hidden from thee") and PSALM 69:9 ("For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me {allegedly Jesus--Ed.} up; and the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me") couldn't be Jesus since he is allegedly perfection personified and couldn't have committed sins. (33) PSALM 69:4 ("They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of mine head: they that would destroy me, being mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty...."). Jesus allegedly fulfills this prophecy in John 15:23-25. Yet, the verse is clearly not referring to him because: (a) The next verse says, "O God, thou knowest my foolishness; and my sins are not hid from thee." According to NT verses Jesus was neither foolish nor sinful. (b) Nowhere in John 15:23-25 does Jesus state that his enemies are more than the hairs of his head. (c) And, as was stated earlier, Jesus was not hated without cause. (34) PSALM 69:21 ("They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink"). Jesus did not fulfill this prophecy either because: (a) the same sinful person is speaking who spoke in Psalms 69:4-5. (b) Matt. 27:34 ("They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall") says the gall and vinegar were mingled together, not given separately. (c) Matt. 27:34 RSV ("...they offered him wine to drink....") says he was given wine to drink, not vinegar. Wine is not vinegar. (d) Referring to the same person, the 26th verse says, "For they persecute him whom thou hast smitten, and him whom thou hast wounded, they afflict still more". God never smote Jesus nor did he ever wound him. (e) Would the allegedly kind and forgiving Jesus curse his enemies as the same individual did in verses 22 to 29 ("Let their own table before them become a snare; let their sacrificial feasts be a trap. Let their eyes be darkened, so that they cannot see; and make their loins tremble continually. Pour out thy indignation upon them and let thy burning anger overtake them...."). (35) PSALM 72:1 ("Give the King thy judgments, O God, and thy righteousness unto the King's son") is not applicable to Jesus either because: (a) If "the King's son" is Jesus, who was the father of Jesus who was also a King? (b) If the King is Jesus, when did Jesus have a son and when was he a king? (c) How could Jesus be given righteousness when he already had it? (d) How could God give Jesus anything when Jesus already had everything God had? According to John 10:30 ("I and my father are one") they are equal? (36) PSALM 72:2, 4 ("He shall judge the people with righteousness, and the poor with judgment....He shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy, and shall break in pieces the oppressor"). (a) Jesus never judged the poor of the people or saved the children of the needy. (b) He never broke the oppressor into pieces. (37) PSALM 72:7 ("In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so

long as the moon endureth"). The righteous did not flourish in his days and there was no peace, although the moon still endures. (38) PSALM 72:8 ("He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth"), PSALM 72:9 ("They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him; and his enemies shall lick the dust"), PSALM 72:11 ("Yea, all Kings shall fall down before him: All nations shall serve him"), PSALM 72:14 ("...and to him shall be given of the gold of Sheba...."), and PSALM 72:17 ("All nations shall call him blessed") say that Jesus shall rule. None of these occurred while he dwelled on earth. (39) PSALM 72:14 ("He shall redeem their {the poor and needy} soul from deceit and violence"). Jesus never redeemed the soul of the needy from deceit or violence. (40) PSALM 88:8 ("Thou {God--Ed.} hast put away mine acquaintance far from me {Jesus--Ed.}; thou hast made me an abomination unto them...."). This verse couldn't be referring to Jesus because: (a) The 1st verse ("O Lord God of my salvation....") says the speaker seeks salvation which the perfect Jesus wouldn't need. (b) In the 4th verse ("I am a man that hath no strength") the speaker says he has no strength while Matt. 28:18 ("And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth") says Jesus was all powerful. (c) In Psalm 88:7 ("Thy wrath lieth hard upon me, and thou hast afflicted me with all thy waves") the speaker says God afflicted him; in Psalm 88:14 ("Lord, why castest thou off my soul") the speaker says God cast off his soul, and in Psalm 88:15 ("...I suffer thy terrors I am distracted") and Psalm 88:16 ("Thy fierce wrath goeth over me; thy terrors have cut me off") the speaker says he was a victim of God's terrors. In none of these verses could the speaker be Jesus. (41) In PSALM 89:3-4 ("I {God--Ed.} have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, Thy seed will I establish for ever: and build up thy throne to all generations"). As was stated previously, "seed" is referring to all of David's descendants, not just one particular individual. The RSV translation actually says "descendants." The same principle applies to Psalm 89:29-30 ("His {David's--Ed.} seed also will I make to endure forever, and his throne as the days of heaven. If his children forsake my law...."). The verse mentions "his children" so why assume its referring to Jesus specifically? (42) PSALM 109:6-8 RSV ("Appoint a wicked man against him; let an accuser bring him to trial. When he is tried, let him come forth guilty; let his prayer be counted as sin! May his days be few; may another seize his goods!") is allegedly referring to the trial, possessions, and lifespan of Jesus but is inapplicable because: (a) A prayer of Jesus couldn't be counted as sin. (b) Jesus had no goods to seize according to Luke 9:58 ("...but the Son of man hath no where to lay his head"). (c) Verse 9 ("Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow") clearly shows Jesus is not the person under discussion since he had neither a wife nor children. (43) Finally, we have PSALM 109:4-5 ("In return for my love they accuse me, even as I make prayer for them. So they reward me evil for good and hatred for my love"). The magnanimity of love shown in these verses couldn't apply to Jesus because subsequent verses demonstrate the speaker wanted retaliation. Psalm 109:20 and 28-29 ("May this be the reward of my accusers from the Lord, of those who speak evil against my life!... Let my assailants be put to shame; may thy servant be glad! May my accusers be clothed with dishonor; may they be wrapped in their own shame as in a mantle") express an attitude that is directly contrary to that exhibited by Jesus in Luke 23:34 ("Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do").

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter # 310 from TF of Pasadena, Maryland (Part a)

(TF is the founder and coordinator of the MENSA special interest group called "Bible Answers," and editor of its monthly publication, Bible Answers Newsletter. Two of his recent issues were devoted to rebuttals of BE's two pamphlets. Before beginning his critique he stated the following-Ed.). A reader of the July 1988 issue of our publication apparently noticed my statement, "We have not yet had the benefit of any challenges from atheists, let alone well-informed atheists." He has sent me two pamphlets written specifically to challenge Bible-

believers. The pamphlets also give the name and address devoted to the goal of proving or demonstrating biblical errancy. The organization is not identified as atheistic, but it is explicitly opposed to the inerrancy of the Bible. Therefore it serves our purposes. Judge for yourselves whether the challenges are "well-informed." My thanks to the person who sent the material. He is not a subscriber but I will send him the issues which contain the answers proposed by our readers....I truly enjoyed doing the research. My job is a whole lot easier when readers submit specific questions or challenges. (After reproducing BE's pamphlet, THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD?, TF said--Ed.). I left the grammar and punctuation as they were, so that I would not misrepresent the author in any way. I now address the author: Before I respond to the numbered challenges, I extend a challenge of my own: Prove that your assertion is true, that the Bible "contains hundreds of problems and contradictions that can't be solved." Mere assertion is not enough.

(At this point TF addressed BE's first point which was: If you must accept Jesus as your savior in order to be saved {John 14:6}, what about the billions of beings that die as fetuses, infants, mental deficient, etc.? For them to accept Jesus would be impossible, so they are condemned to hell because of conditions over which they had no control. Deut. 32:4 says God is just, but where is the justice?--Ed.).

You assert that it is "impossible" for certain people to accept Jesus as Savior. Suppose each person has a conscious, competent soul at conception? I don't advocate that doctrine, but I see that you haven't proved yours.

However much we speculate about the degrees of penalty and reward for various individuals, all Bible-believers agree that God will judge with righteous judgment. You cite John 14:6 which states that "no man cometh unto the Father, but by" Jesus. All who are saved are saved by his power. That verse does not say that anyone goes to hell or that anyone goes to heaven. John 3:16-19 concludes with "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil." People are responsible individually for the arrogant rejection of the truths God has made clear to them individually. Children are less culpable. "But Jesus said, Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven." (Matt. 19:14).

Editor's Response to Letter #310 (Part a)

Dear TF. With all due respect, I think you would do well to consult notable apologists before engaging in apologetics. I'd suggest Josh McDowell and Gleason Archer for openers. Their grasp of the imbroglis our pamphlets expose is much more perceptive and their rationalizations are more relevant. Your explanations, on the other hand, are often without substance, disjointed, and not germane. The present example is a case in point. First, you say, "suppose each person has a conscious, competent soul at conception." Surely you not saying an embryo can consciously accept Jesus as his or her savior, because that is what is required. You admit you are "supposing" rather than providing evidence. I can understand your reluctance to advocate such a doctrine directly; it's inane. Leaving aside the tangential issue of whether or not an embryo is a "person" at conception, an embryo is neither competent nor conscious, in any meaningful sense, at conception. You say that I "haven't proved" my doctrine in this regard. But I am under no obligation to prove something does not exist which you claim does. The burden of proof lies on he who alleges; that's axiomatic. You are obligated to prove that an embryo is "conscious and competent" at conception sufficient to make a calculated decision to accept Jesus. You can "suppose" anything you like but that has nothing to do with proof. Second, if embryos and infants were as conscious and competent as you imply, why wouldn't they also be morally responsible for their behavior? Third, how would they even learn about Jesus? Were they

preached to through the abdominal wall and in the crib? How far do you want to carry this? Fourth, mentally deficient people with very low IQ's couldn't accept Jesus no matter where they were. Many are not conscious of what is required nor are they competent to make decisions. Fifth, you say that, "all Bible-believers agree that God will judge with righteous judgment." But what people believe is irrelevant. The question is what the Book says. And the Book repeatedly says that if you don't accept Jesus as your saviour you are doomed. John 14:6 ("I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man {NO MAN--Ed.} cometh unto the Father, but by me"), John 3:18 ("He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God"), John 3:36 ("He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him"), 1 John 5:12 ("He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life"), Acts 4:12 ("Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved"), and 1 Cor. 3:11 make that abundantly clear. What biblicists, such as yourself, don't realize is that the Book has locked you in; there is no escape. Absolutist statements are always dangerous and this is a prime example. Christianity has no answer for this problem; it never has and never will. More sophisticated strategies try to employ the 1st chapter of Romans but that's doomed from the start because salvation requires acceptance of Jesus in particular as one's Savior not a general belief in God. Sixth, believers may believe that God will judge with righteous judgment but that's not in accordance with the text. The latter shows he will judge on the basis of one's attitude toward Jesus. Righteousness has nothing to do with the issue. Even if you were to find statements to the effect that judgment will be based on righteousness, you would have only escaped one contradiction to face another. Seventh, you say that "all who are saved are saved by his power." But the Book says we are saved by accepting Jesus, not "by his power," except in so far as it comes over you after you have accepted him. You save yourself; he doesn't do it for you. Eighth, you say that John 14:6 "does not say that anyone goes to hell or that anyone goes to heaven." But it most assuredly does. If you aren't saved, where else can you go except to hell? If being saved means attaining heaven, then being lost means condemnation to hell. Are you saying there is a third option? If so, could you provide biblical support? Ninth, I'm not sure why you quoted John 3:19 when the prior verse proves precisely the point I'm making and was quoted earlier. When read in context one can easily see that this is the kind of verse you should avoid. Tenth, after quoting John 3:19 you say that, "people are responsible individually for the arrogant rejection of the truths God has made clear to them individually." But what has this to do with the issue? When and how could fetuses, infants, and the mentally deficient "arrogantly reject" anything and how was the requisite information "made clear" to them? Eleventh, you say that, "children are less culpable." What do you mean, "less culpable"? They either are or they aren't culpable. The Bible rarely allows for shades of gray or intermediate stages. You either are or you aren't. You talk as if the Book were rational and allowed for gradations. And lastly, you quoted Matt. 19:14 which says that children compose heaven. As used by you, the verse means either that children, including fetuses and infants, have accepted Jesus and attained heaven or heaven is composed of people who did not accept Jesus, which would contradict the verses I quoted earlier. Either way, a problem remains.

Letter #310 Continues (Part b)

(After addressing our pamphlet's first point, TF criticised the second--Why are we being punished for Adam's sin? After all, he ate the forbidden fruit, we didn't; it's his problem not ours, especially in light of Deut. 24:16 which says the children shall not be punished for the sins of their fathers--Ed.). It is more accurate to say that we are penalized by Adam's sin, rather than for his sin. (A hemophiliac may die of AIDS because of someone else's sin.) We should recognize that we inherited the earth from Adam. As a result of Adam's offense, God chose not to renew some of the blessings he had previously renewed on a daily basis. God never took away anything

that Adam (or you) had a right to possess. We may resent the fact that Adam did not give us a better inheritance. Better yet, let's rejoice that Jesus has obtained a greater inheritance than Adam ever could (and has offered it to us). See 1 Peter 1:4 ("To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you").

Incidentally, Deut. 24:16 refers only to the death penalty as enforced by the government of Israel, and is not otherwise generalized.

Editor's Response to Letter #310 (Part b)

Your response to this contradiction also merits a reply, TF. First, your preference to use "by" rather than "for" Adam's sin only creates a distinction without a difference. The fact is that we are bearing the burden, we are being punished, for what someone else did. Your hemophiliac example isn't analogous because a conscious decision by a just being was not involved. Fate and chance rather than conscious intent determined the outcome. It was not consciously willed by an outside power that the hemophiliac would suffer because of another's behavior. Second, your comment that "...God chose not to renew some of the blessings he had previously renewed on a daily basis" is nothing more than an attempt to soft-pedal an event which gave rise to a catastrophic injustice. Because of Adam and Eve's sin, the world allegedly reeks with antisocial behavior, mankind was denied a heaven-on-earth, and women must bear pain in childbirth. Third, you say that "God never took away anything that Adam (or you) had a right to possess." I beg to differ. When I'm denied something which I would have received except for another's misbehavior, that's losing something I had a right to possess. I did nothing to lose it and would have received it but for another's bad deeds. That's injustice. Fourth, you say that "we may resent the fact that Adam did not give us a better inheritance." Judging from the world's condition, that's putting it mildly. But more importantly, we have a right to be resentful not only against Adam but against God. At least that's the logical conclusion to which Christian theology leads. Fifth, your comment that we should "rejoice that Jesus has obtained a greater inheritance than Adam ever could (and has offered it to us)" is one of the most common subterfuges used by the more subtle apologists. In effect, they are saying, "Wasn't Jesus marvelous to provide us a way out of this quagmire." But that's irrelevant. The fact remains that if God had been just from the beginning we would never have been in the dilemma to begin with. How we get out of the problem is not the issue. The issue is how we could have gotten into it from the beginning if God was just. Realizing the obvious injustice that is involved, apologists often try to shift the focus from how we got into the problem to how Jesus provided a way out. And lastly, your comment that Deut. 24:16 ("The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers, every man shall be put to death for his own sin") refers only to the death penalty as enforced by the government of Israel and is not otherwise generalized exemplifies a ruse often employed by biblicists. If they like an OT verse, or a NT verse for that matter, they say it applies to everybody. If they don't like it, such as verses requiring death for: striking your father or your mother (Ex. 21:15), committing adultery (Deut. 22:22), or being a witch (Ex. 22:18), they say it is no longer applicable. Upon what basis do you assume that it only applies to the government of Israel and is not to be generalized? Are you going to apply the same criterion to every maxim in the OT including the Ten Commandments and if not, why not? Where do you draw the line and upon what basis? (To Be Continued)

EDITOR'S NOTE: While praising BE, a couple of readers have criticised the quality of its printing. We admit the print is rather condensed and columns might help. But the latter would require a new computer and double-spacing would mean twice as many years would be required to exhaust our notes, unless we doubled our number of pages. The latter would entail increasing our prices substantially which we are determined to avoid. Although we recently experienced an increase in printing and mailing costs, we are determined to hold the line. More white space

means less information. Deep inside I can't help but feel that anyone who can't or won't navigate 3 or 4 pages of single-spaced commentaries each month probably won't have sufficient stamina over the long run to cope with the determination of biblicists, regardless.

Issue No. 78

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COMMENTARY

MESSIANIC PROPHECIES (Part Three of a Five-Part Series)--April and May's commentaries focused on the inapplicability of the alleged messianic prophecies and this month's commentary will continue that enumeration. (44) PSALM 110:1 ("The Lord {allegedly God--Ed.} said unto my Lord {allegedly Jesus--Ed.}, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool"). (a) If "my Lord" were Jesus this would contradict one of the primary tenets of Christianity (1 Cor. 15:24, 25, 28) which is that Jesus is to do the work of subduing the enemies of God and not God himself. (b) My "Lord" comes from the Hebrew word addressed to one of superior age, rank, or influence. It has nothing to do with Jesus, God, or any part of the Trinity. The Hebrew word for lord, "adonee," was applied by David to King Saul on at least two occasions (1 Sam. 24:8, 10). Thus, if this lord refers to a person who is part of and one with God, Saul, to whom David also refers as "adonee," could be also. If David wrote this Psalm, then Saul must be the "adonee" of the Psalm, since he is the only person David ever acknowledged as his lord and master. (c) "Adonee" appears often in the OT, but nowhere is it applied to the Almighty. However, it is applied to Abraham (Gen. 23:6, 11, 15), the king of Egypt (Gen. 40:1), Laban (Gen. 31:35), and Esau (Gen. 32:4). (d) The language implies God is speaking to a person already existing, i.e., David, not Jesus. David is the "my Lord." (e) "Lord" in "my Lord" should not be capitalized as the RSV shows. It refers to a lord here on earth, i.e. nobility, not a divine being. It is only a title of courtesy. There is only one Lord with a capital "L" and that refers to God as 1 Kings 1:36-37, for example, shows. (f) This was probably written by a contemporary of David who is referring to David, his sovereign, as "my lord." (45) PSALM 110:2-3 ("The Lord shall send the rod of thy strength out of Zion: rule thou in the midst of thine enemies. Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power..."). The rod of thy strength is inapplicable to Jesus because he never ruled in the midst of his enemies and never had a day of power. (46) PSALM 118:26 ("Blessed be he that cometh in the name of the Lord..."). It says, "cometh in the name of the Lord." It did not say he was the Lord. Why assume it is referring to Jesus? (47) PROV. 30:4 ("Who hath ascended up into heaven, or descended? who hath gathered the wind in his fists? who hath bound the waters in a garment? who hath established all the ends of the earth? what is his name, and what is his son's name, if thou canst tell?"). This couldn't be referring to Jesus because his name was known then and is known now. Moreover, he had no son. (48) ISAIAH 9:6 ("For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace"). Although taunted as a prime messianic prophecy this verse is inapplicable to Jesus for several reasons: (a) The use of "us" and "is" shows that he (Isaiah--Ed.) is speaking only in the present tense, to the Jews living in his own time around 742 B.C. Isaiah's contemporaries will receive the child, not their distant descendants. (b) Nobody calls or called Jesus Wonderful, Counsellor, or Everlasting Father. (c) He is the Everlasting Son, not Father. How could Jesus talk to God the Father if he were God the Father as this verse contends? (d) The "Prince of Peace" is contrary to Matt. 10:34 which says Jesus came to bring a sword, not peace. (49) ISAIAH 9:7 ("Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever"). Jesus did not set up a government of peace without end or, indeed, any government. (50) ISAIAH 11:1-3 ("And there shall come forth a rod out of the

stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge, and the fear of the Lord: And shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord...."). (a) How could Jesus gain the spirit of the Lord, the spirit of wisdom and the spirit of might? As God's co-equal he would already have had them. (b) Would Jesus fear his co-equal, God? (51) ISALIAH 11:4 ("But with righteousness shall he judge the poor,....and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked...."). When did Jesus judge the poor, smite the earth with the rod of his mouth and slay the wicked? The allegedly meek victim, i.e. Jesus, who went as a lamb to the slaughter, can hardly be described as slaying the wicked with the breath of his mouth. (52) ISALIAH 11:6-7 ("The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: And the lion shall eat straw like the ox"). When the Messiah came there was to be peace between ferocious and domestic animals and they were not to injure human beings. This is also predicted in Isa. 65:25, Ezek. 34:25, 28, and Hosea 2:18. Jesus certainly never brought in an era of universal peace. Beasts and nations still fight and slay as of yore. (53) ISALIAH 11:11 ("And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people...."). This isn't saying the Messiah will come a second time as some allege, but only that the Lord will again try to bring his Remnant back to Israel. (54) ISALIAH 16:5 RSV ("Then a throng will be established in steadfast love and on it will sit in faithfulness in the tent of David one who judges and seeks justice and is swift to righteousness"). Jesus never sat in David's tent or judged while he was on earth. (55) ISALIAH 32:1 ("Behold, a king shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment"). (a) There is no divinity implied here. Ishmaelites could just as easily say this passage refers to their supreme ruler. Their evidence is just as good as that for Jesus. (b) The entire verse is speculative, anyway. (56) ISALIAH 40:4-5 ("Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill shall be made low...and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it"). Christians apply this prophecy to Christ; but "all flesh" have not seen this glorious revelation, or even heard of it, although nearly 2,000 years have elapsed since the boasted fulfillment in Christ. (57) ISALIAH 49:5 RSV ("...and my God has become my strength"). (a) Yet, God did not become Jesus' strength or protect him from his enemies. (b) Would Jesus, who is God's equal, say this or needs God's strength? (58) ISALIAH 49:6 ("I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth"). (a) If this is Jesus, it contradicts his description of his mission in Matthew 15:24 ("But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel"). (b) How did Jesus illuminate the eyes of the Gentiles or the nations? Most of the nations, such as Moslems, do not accept him as the Savior. (59) ISALIAH 49:7 ("...Kings shall see and arise; princes, and they shall prostrate themselves...."). Kings and princes have never paid homage to Jesus. (60) ISALIAH 49:8-9 RSV ("...I have kept you and given you as a covenant to the people, to establish the land, to apportion the desolate heritages; saying to the prisoners, come forth, to those who are in darkness, Appear"). This could not be referring to Jesus since Christ did not conduct the people out of captivity. (61) ISALIAH 50:6 ("I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to those who pulled out the beard; I hid not my face from shame and spitting"). (a) This could not be referring to Jesus because the same verse says his oppressors pulled out his beard. When did Jesus have his beard pulled out? (b) Verse 8 ("he who vindicates me is near....Who is my adversary? Let him come near to me") says the speaker's justifier is near. Yet, all of Jesus' justifiers were far away while his accusers were near. According to Matt. 27:46 and Psalm 22:1-2 ("My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not....") even his father in heaven was far away in his time of trouble. (62) ISALIAH 61:1-2 ("The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the

brokenhearted...to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn"). (a) This couldn't be Jesus because it implies the person under discussion received the Spirit of the Lord which Jesus always had. (b) Jesus has always been anointed. He didn't receive it. (c) Ishmaelites and the other nations could also say that this was said of their leaders. (d) This statement was actually made by Isaiah concerning himself long before Jesus was born. (63) ISAIAH 63:3-6 ("I have trodden the winepress alone; and of the people there was none with me: for I will tread them in mine anger, and trample them in my fury; and their blood shall be sprinkled upon my garments, and I will stain all my raiment. For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come....therefore mine own arm brought salvation unto me; and my fury, it upheld me. And I will tread down the people in mine anger, and make them drunk in my fury...."). (a) But Jesus did have some of the people with him. (b) The meek and mild Jesus admits he will exhibit anger and fury and tread people down?? (c) Since the NT never refers to "their blood" being sprinkled on the garments of Jesus, it is nothing more than speculation that this refers to Jesus. (d) Instead of "the year of my redeemed is come" the RSV and Mod. Lang. Versions have "my year of redemption" and "the year of my redemption has come" respectively. They certainly couldn't be referring to Jesus who needed no redemption. (e) How could the perfect Jesus have a "day of vengeance in his heart?" Would Jesus want to get even with people? (f) How could the arm of Jesus bring salvation to himself when he needed no salvation? (64) And finally, ISAIAH 65:9 ("And I will bring forth a seed out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor of my mountains. And mine elect shall inherit it and my servants shall dwell there"). By saying "bring forth descendants" from Jacob, rather than "bring forth a seed," the RSV shows that "seed" refers to many people, not one. The RSV and Mod. Lang. Versions say "inheritors" not "an inheritor" which also shows that many people are being referred to rather than one. So the verse couldn't be referring only to Jesus.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #310 Continues from Last Month (Part c)

(BE's 7th point on its pamphlet, THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD, was: Rom. 3:23 says "All have sinned." All means all. Yet, Gen. 6:9 says Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations. Job 1:1 and 1:8 say Job was perfect. How could these men have been perfect if all have sinned? What follows is TF's reply--Ed.). Noah and Job were "perfect." In 2 Tim. 3:16-17 Paul tells us that "all scripture is given by...God... that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." Those who are "perfect" are complete, healthy, and exemplary in their relative moral development.

Nevertheless, all have sinned, except for Jesus. Even our best actions are corrupted by impure motives (Isa. 64:6). Jesus alone was perfect and sinless.

Editor's Response to Letter #310 (Part c)

You say "those who are perfect are complete...and exemplary in their 'relative' moral development." What does that mean? If it means they are perfect, then they are morally perfect, period, and that contradicts Rom. 3:23. If it means they are more moral than anyone else, but less than perfect, then they are morally imperfect like everyone else. Either they are morally perfect or they aren't. There is no inbetween. You are engaging in doubletalk, TF. The Bible says they are perfect and that settles it. If Noah was not morally perfect, then he had no more right to be saved on the Ark than anyone else because he was a sinner like everyone else. The difference between Noah and all others would be one of degree not kind. If Jesus, alone, was perfect and sinless, then Noah and Job were morally imperfect and Gen. 6:9 and Job 1:1 are false. You can't have it both ways.

Letter #310 Continues (Part d)

(BE's 23rd point on the same pamphlet was: For justice to exist, punishment must fit the crime. No matter how many bad deeds one commits in this world, there is a limit. Yet Hell's punishment is infinitely greater. What follows is TF's reply--Ed.). I haven't found the verse which defines hell's punishment as being "infinitely greater" than we deserve. Punishment must fit the crime. Hell is not "infinitely greater." It is infinite in its duration. It is easy to define an infinite series which has a finite total. Nevertheless, hell is clearly something to avoid.

Editor's Response to Letter #310 (Part d)

Again, TF, your answer is wholly inadequate for several reasons. First, unless biblical authors completely take leave of their senses, no verse is going to admit "hell's punishment is 'infinitely greater' than we deserve." Logic rather than biblical authors provide the evidence. Matt. 25:46 ("And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal"), Matt. 3:12 ("...but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire"), Dan. 12:2 ("And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt"), Rev. 14:11 ("And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night who worship the beast..."), Rev. 20:10 ("And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone...and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever"), and Rev. 20:15 show that people are punished in Hell for eternity. Yet, there is no way anyone can commit an infinite number of sins, since we only live for a finite number of years. The obvious conclusion is that if anyone is punished in hell for eternity, then the punishment is far greater than that which is warranted. Second, your assertion that "hell is not infinitely greater. It is infinite in its duration" is another distinction without substance. One's punishment in Hell is either infinite or it isn't; there is no inbetween. Since the prior verses show it is eternal, justice is impossible. No one's evil deeds are infinite. Third, perhaps you're trying to say Hell is eternal but punishment in Hell is finite? If so, could you provide biblical support for this and state where people go after serving their time in agony? Fourth, I'm not even sure you understand simple math. How can an infinite series have a finite total? The number of finites within an infinite series is infinite, not finite. (To Be Continued)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #311 from Paul Keller of Grand Forks, North Dakota

Dear Dennis.Last Thursday I spoke on atheism to two classes at a high school. They were "Bible as Literature" classes. Your leaflets were very useful for provoking questions. Please send 50 more of each. There were some questions about the "Jesus Christ is the Answer" pamphlet. The teacher looked up #5 in I don't know what version and found that the cock crowed after the second denial. Number 5 says it occurred after the first. Of course, it is still not the third, as was prophecied. Also, in #4 the bible says the first day of the week. She thought maybe that was Monday. I said it is considered to be Sunday.... My goal was to get the students to question and I sure did that. By the end of each class they were peppering me with questions even though both classes started out very quiet.

Editor's Response to Letter #311

Dear Paul. First, I want to congratulate you on getting into a high school class with this kind of information. Most "Bible as Literature" classes are little more than subterfuges used by biblicists for worming biblical indoctrination into public education. I'm surprised you even got a hearing. The teacher must have been exceptional. Second, I rechecked my pamphlets and found no errors.

Mark 14:66-68 clearly contradicts the prophecy found in John 13:38. You might ask the teacher what she was referring to. I'd like to know. Third, I don't think there is much dispute about Sunday being the first day of the week. That's not a real issue. The seventh day is Saturday and that's the sabbath, the day of rest. Keep up your excellent work. If only more people were doing the same!

Letter #312 from DL of Ipswich, Massachusetts

(DL sent the following letter to a radio talk-show host. For this, we are most grateful--Ed.). Dear Mr. Burns. I had hoped that Dennis McKinsey, editor of the national periodical Biblical Errancy, would have been a guest on your talk show by now. Since that has not taken place I felt I should write to you again and include some additional BE literature. I don't think I could impress upon you in a letter the importance of the work that Mr. McKinsey is so dedicated to concerning the Bible. However, I have sent you his powerful commentary taken from Issue #31 of BE entitled What is Needed which I hope you will take the time to read. I've also included an article taken from Issue #69, on Heaven which I think is a classic.... I want to wish you continued success with the best and most informative talk show in the New England area. Yours in Freethought!

Letter #313 from DL of Ipswich, Massachusetts

(DL is undoubtedly one of BE's most energetic and dedicated supporters as another one of his letters demonstrates--Ed.). Dear Mr. Donahue. I try to look in on your program as often as possible. You are without question the number one host of all the talk show hosts. The wide variety of interesting topics and the superb manner in which you present them to the public is quite apparent. You are a really great communicator. Phil, you are deserving of many compliments, one being for having done a number of shows on religion....Just recently you had Dan Barker from the Freedom From Religion Foundation on one of your shows.

There is another gentleman that needs to be heard on a national talk show. His name is Dennis McKinsey and he has a national periodical called Biblical Errancy. I have been in contact by letter with three excellent local talk shows out of the Boston area and hope he will soon be a guest on at least one of those programs.... Mr. McKinsey has been on a number of local talk shows around the country and a little over a year ago I heard him on a radio program out of Buffalo, New York. The show was just about the most interesting and liveliest of programs on religion that I have ever heard! Dennis will be on national television eventually for it's just a matter of time, so why not have him make his first appearance as a guest on the Donahue Show. I can not think of one reason why the Bible should not be discussed on national television, can you?

I have been receiving Biblical Errancy for about two years and also have all of the prior issues of this periodical. Along with this letter, I have sent you his sample issue and issue #58. I might suggest to you or anyone else who will be reading these newsletters, and I hope they will, to read No. 58 first and be sure to read the letter from South Pasadena, California and the Editor's response in the sample issue. I've also included an article taken from the 1988 September issue on Heaven which I think is a classic.

Phil, I wish you continued success with the best and most informative talk show in the country and please don't pass up the opportunity to be the first to have Dennis McKinsey as your guest on a program in the near future. Yours in freethought!

Letter #314 from Dennis McKinsey to the Federal Communications Commissioner on Sept. 11, 1976

(Long before BE existed I struggled against religious dominance of the air-ways. BE has published many letters from others so I thought it might be interesting and informative to print one of my own which was recently unearthed--Ed.). Dear Commissioner Wiley: My name is Dennis McKinsey and I live in the Miami Valley of Western Ohio. In my area there exists a call-in radio station known as WAVI which is hosted by several talk-masters, some of whom are quite unjust in the methodology by which they conduct conversations. One individual is particularly flagrant in this regard. His name is Keith Hardin and he acts as an emcee for a couple of religious call-in programs on Sunday mornings. Apparently he feels that callers should be allowed to speak, providing they do not imply that the Bible lacks validity or accuracy. One does not need to make statements; asking questions is sufficient. Several times he has found himself without an answer and rather than reason through the problem he has simply terminated the call. In so far as I can remember he has never allowed me to complete any concept I sought to develop. The censorship which he exercises is clear and obvious to anyone who cares to listen. After receiving far too many unwarranted cut-offs, I challenged him to a debate over the Bible and stated my willingness to go to the station on any Sunday of his choosing. He not only stated that he felt it would be a waste of time (something only the audience is prepared to judge objectively) but no longer will allow me to speak because I challenged him. I told him a much more balanced presentation of both positions would be possible if he did not "have all that electronic equipment down at the station to run interference." Several times, including the last Sunday in August, 1976, he has resorted to a clearly deceptive and quite dishonest maneuver by which to give the audience the impression that the caller is being unreasonable. Essentially what happens is as follows: When Hardin finds himself in a predicament from which there is no escape, he will turn down the volume which prevents the caller, i.e. me, from hearing him while all other controls remain the same. While the caller, i.e. me, is talking and hearing no response from the other end of the line he naturally assumes that the talkmaster is continuing to listen. The caller ends each sentence and, hearing no response, continues to speak. Deception lies in the fact that the caller does not realize that the talkmaster is simultaneously making such statements as, "But sir, may I say this" or "I would like to say" or "Could I just say this." Meanwhile the caller keeps talking not realizing that the host is trying to speak or, at least giving the impression of same. Finally the talkmaster will hang up the phone with such words as, "Well, if he isn't going to allow me to speak there is no sense in continuing the conversation." Of course, members of the audience, who can hear everybody, have been deceived as to what really occurred and say to themselves, "I would have cut him off too if I had been the talkmaster."

It is clear that I am not going to receive a hearing with respect to the Sunday morning programs conducted by Keith Hardin. He not only hosts nearly two hours of programming but operates the electronic equipment during Mike Willis' one hour Bible Forum program. As now constituted the programs are little more than propaganda agencies for groups that will allow no significant criticism of the Bible. Arguments over interpretation of the Bible are permitted; discussions concerning the validity of the book itself are not. I have tape recordings of the conversations that have occurred and would be glad to make them available to anyone who may have questions as to what occurs. After listening to the tapes I am sure you would agree that a doctrine of fairness is not a significant factor in this matter. Even when one is allowed to propound a question, the talkmaster will often waste little time in terminating the call so that he can provide any response, no matter how weak, fully cognizant of the caller's inability to rebut. To be heard fully without interruption is my only concern. They seek a monologue; I seek a dialogue. I have called several talkmasters to express my dissatisfaction, but to no avail. The program manager told me he has received complaints from other people concerning Keith Hardin and promised to "talk to him." As of the present nothing has changed. I would appreciate action by your office in this matter. I might add that after many calls to Pastor Mike Willis he stated, "I am simply not going to allow you to destroy the effectiveness of this program."

(Readers of BE might be interested in knowing that I received a reply from the FCC to the effect that they do not, and will not, exercise any kind of oversight in matters of this nature. The moral of the story is that one need only buy himself a program or radio station in order to repeatedly tell the world that black is white without fear of correction--Ed.).

Letter #315 from RWH of Piqua, Ohio

Dear Dennis. Thanks to BE I have shown many people that the Bible does have major problems. I love it. Please send me #32 and #33. Also, please send me 10 each of your two pamphlets....

Issue No. 79

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COMMENTARY

MESSIANIC PROPHECIES (Part Four of a Five-Part Series)--For several months we have been listing the OT messianic prophecies that are allegedly referring to Jesus and explaining why they are inapplicable. This month's commentary will continue that enumeration and begin with the book of Jeremiah. (65) JER. 23:5-6 ("Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS"). (a) Jesus could not be that Branch because he was not a physical descendant of David. Joseph was not his physical father and that breaks the genealogical chain. (b) The Branch of David was to be a king who would save them from their enemies. Jesus was not a king and he did not save them from their enemies. (c) Jesus never reigned, prospered, or executed judgment. During his time Judah was still subjugated by Gentiles and Israel had apparently vanished amidst captivities. (d) Several Hebrew scholars claim the KJV should have translated the final underlined part as: "this is the name whereby they shall call themselves: The Eternal is our righteousness." They claim the following deceptive changes were made in the KJV: (d1) "The name" was changed to "his name." (d2) The pronoun "they" relating to the people of Judah and Israel was changed to "he." (d3) The word "Eternal" was incorrectly translated as "Lord." (d4) "The Lord our righteousness" was printed in capital letters to point to an atoning redeemer when the same phrase is used in Jer. 33:16 but not capitalized. (e) Some critics claim there should be an "is" between "Lord" and "our." Leaving out the "is" imputes both lordship and righteousness to Jesus rather than God. It wrongly imputes divinity to the Messiah. The RSV correctly translates this verse as "The Lord is our righteousness." (f) There are no indications of Jesus ever being called "The Lord our righteousness" except by those seeking to fulfill the prophecy. (66) DAN. 7:13 ("I saw in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of man came with clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before him"). (a) It says one "like" the Son of man came.... It doesn't say he "was" the Son of man. (b) Even if the Son of man is the Messiah, the text distinguishes between him and God by saying he was brought to God, the Ancient of Days. (67) DAN. 9:24-25 ("Seventy weeks (70 X 7 = 490 years) are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins....and to anoint the most Holy....from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks and threescore and two weeks (7 + 62 =69) and (69 X 7 = 483 years): the street shall be built again, and the wall even in troublous times"). This begins, of course, the famous prophecy of Daniel which apologists have seized with maximum celerity. Unfortunately, problems abound. (a) The words "week" and "weeks" come from the Hebrew word which means 7 days, not 7 years. (b) Unlike the RSV which says, "Seventy weeks of years," the KJV says "Seventy weeks." These weeks are real weeks of seven days each, not

years. Dan. 10:2-4 shows as much: (b1) "I Daniel was mourning 3 full weeks." Would he mourn 21 years? (b2) "I ate no pleasant bread, neither came flesh nor wine in my mouth, neither did I anoint myself at all, till 3 whole weeks are fulfilled." Would he have gone without eating these things for 21 years? (b3) "And in the four and twentieth day (24th) of the first month...." Would he talk about the 24th day in verse 4 after just talking about 21 days (3 weeks) in verse 2 if these 3 weeks meant anything other than 21 days, such as 21 years? If 21 days means 21 years then the 24th day should be the 24th year. The KJV does not mention "years." (c) 483 years were supposed to elapse from the command to rebuild Jerusalem to the coming of Jesus. The decree of Cyrus to rebuild the temple and Jerusalem was made in 536 B.C. (Isa. 44:28) which is 532 years before the birth of Jesus in 4 B.C., not 483 years. The prophecy was 49 years short. (d) The KJV says "the most Holy," which implies a person, not a place; while the RSV says "a most holy place" and shows a place, not a person, is being referred to. (e) The word "Messiah" is never applied to the expected deliverer of the Israelites in the whole Bible. It is indifferently applied to kings, priests, prophets, and those who are inducted into their office. (f) In order to make "Messiah the Prince" apply to Jesus one must distort the text because he was no prince or "Nagid". The Hebrew word "Nagid" always denotes a prince or ruler with temporal authority which Jesus lacked. (68) DAN. 9:26 ("And after threescore and two weeks (62) or (7 X 62) = 434 years shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood..."). (a) After what? If after Cyrus' decree in 536 B.C., there is a problem. Jesus died in 33 A.D according to most accounts. From 536 B.C. to 33 A.D. is 569 years. Five hundred and sixty-nine years exceeds 434 years by 135 years. The prophecy is 135 years short. (b) If after Jesus' birth, it would mean Jesus lived to be 434 years old. (c) How could Jesus be cut off, i.e. die, after 62 weeks when verse 25 said he would not be born or appear until after 69 weeks? (d) The word "and" implies that Jerusalem was destroyed when the Messiah came. Yet, this did not occur until 70 A.D. which was more than 40 years after the Messiah was cut off. (e) When was Jerusalem ever destroyed by a literal flood? Apologists will, no doubt, abandon their literal approach and claim this is referring to a flood of people. (69) HOSEA 6:1 ("Come, and let us return unto the Lord; for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up"). Apologists let their imaginations run wild in many instances and this is a good example. (a) "Us" shows that more than one being is under discussion, not Jesus alone. (b) How could Jesus return to the Lord unless he left him, which is impossible, since he is the Lord. (c) When did God tear Jesus? (d) When did God smite Jesus? (70) HOSEA 6:2-3 ("After two days will he revive us: in the 3rd day he will raise us up...Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord....and he shall come unto us..."). (a) Again, "us" and "we" show that more than one person is being raised, not Jesus alone. (b) In Matt. 27:63 and Mark 8:31 Jesus said he would rise after 3 days, not "in the 3rd day." (c) "To know the Lord" implies that Jesus did not yet know him which is impossible. (d) How could God come to "us," to Jesus, when Jesus is the Lord? (71) MICAH 5:1 ("...they shall smite the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek"). Apologists claim this was fulfilled by Matt. 26:67 ("Then did they spit in his face, and buffeted him; and others smote him with the palms of their hands....") when nothing is said in Matthew about hitting Jesus on the cheek with a rod. (72) HAGGAI 2:6-7 ("For thus saith the Lord of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea and the dry land; And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come"). (a) Jesus was never the desire of all nations. (b) The universal earthquake which was to precede his coming appears to have passed unnoticed. Haggai 2:21-23 ("Speak to Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah, saying, I will shake the heavens and the earth; And I will overthrow the throne of Kingdoms, and I will destroy the strength of the Kingdoms of the heathen.... In that day, saith the Lord of hosts, will I take thee, O Zerubbabel, my servant, the son of Shealtiel...And will make thee as a signet....") shows that Zerubbabel, the governor of Judah, was to be taken when the earth and heavens quaked. He was to be taken by the Lord "in that day," which shows that this prophecy is referring to the immediate future and not to Jesus who lived 500 years later. (c) The verse says "a little while;" yet the "desire," which is allegedly

Jesus, appeared over 500 years after the prophecy. (d) The RSV says "treasures" (pl.) rather than the "desire" (sing.) of all nations.

THE HOLY GHOST--Anyone who has studied the Trinity with any degree of objectivity knows that Christians believe in tritheism--three gods. They hold that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God, yet we are to believe simultaneously that there is only one god. Supposedly, within the one God are three persons--the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. With logic such as this, is it any wonder that they concede the Trinity is not to be understood but accepted on blind faith. Besides the problems with the Trinity that were discussed in the commentary of Issue #15 and on page 5 of Issue #36, several other points are worthy of note. First, the word "person" is never used in the Bible in the manner employed by biblicists. In fact, within the King James NT the words "person" and "persons" only appear 10 and 14 times respectively and none has any reference whatever to the Trinity. Creation of an artificial word such as "persons" is nothing more than a subterfuge to evade an obvious imbroglio. As used by biblicists the word "persons" refers to three separate and distinct beings with all the powers and prerogatives of a god. Thus, in effect, the deceptive euphemism, "person," becomes nothing more than another word for "god," and the words "god" or "godhead" become generic terms encompassing the three gods. "Godhead" or "god" no longer refer to a being per se but become general terms referring to three gods. Second, nowhere in the Bible is the third person in the Trinity--the Holy Ghost--directly referred to as God. The Father (1 Peter 1:17) and the Son (Titus 2:13) are referred to as God, but the Holy Ghost is not. Apologists seek to use Acts 5:3-4 ("But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost....thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God") but conveniently ignore the fact that "agency" is a well-known precept in communication. One does not have to have said something directly to someone in order for communication to have occurred. If someone says something to a company's lawyer that is treated as if one had said it to the company's executives or CEO. Communication with a person's physician is often treated as communication with that person. Many relationships are often considered so close that contact with one element is equated with contact with the other. But that does not mean the elements are identical. Third, many verses clearly show that the Holy Ghost is a spirit, not a person, as biblicists use the term. It has no mind, will, or personality, but is only a feeling or attitude. For example, Luke 1:15 ("...and he--Jesus--shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb") says that Jesus was filled with the Holy Ghost. How could this have occurred when they are separate persons? How can one person fill or indwell another person? Acts 10:38 says, "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power...." One person can not be anointed with another. The verse says Jesus was anointed "with the Holy Ghost" not "by the Holy Ghost." Matt. 3:11 makes the same point by saying "...he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire" not by the Holy Ghost. Luke 4:1 says, "Jesus was full of the Holy Ghost....". How could one person in the Trinity be filled with another person of the Trinity? Second Tim. 1:14 says, "That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us". If one can be filled by the Holy Ghost which is allegedly one person of the Trinity, then why couldn't one be filled by Jesus the Son or God the Father as well, since they are all allegedly equal?

Other relevant verses in this regard are: Luke 1:41 ("...and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost"), Acts 2:4 ("And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost"), and Acts 13:9 ("Then Saul, filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes...."). Granted, another group of verses say the Holy Ghost is a being, but that only exacerbates the problem.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #310 from TF of MENSA in Pasadena, Maryland Continues from Last Month (Part e)

(The 4th point in BE's pamphlet, THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD?, was: How can Num. 23:19 ["God is not a man, that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent...."] which says God doesn't repent, be reconciled with Ex. 32:14 ["the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people"] which clearly says he does? What follows is TF's reply--Ed.).

God does not "repent" or "turn back" from his eternal principles, standards, and criteria. He does not "turn back" from his purposes and plans. Thus, if God provides an "umbrella" or shelter to deflect his wrath from us, we may seek that protection or reject it. God doesn't change as a result of our choices. Yet our relation to him changes. Our choice can "turn back" his wrath. Even in Exodus 32:11-14 when God chooses to "turn back" from imminent judgment of the children of Israel, he chooses on the basis of eternal criteria and objective facts which were eternally foreseen. The dialogue in that passage occurs and is recorded so that creatures may learn those eternal criteria.

Editor's Response to Letter #310 (Part e)

Dear TF. This answer, like your others, is fatally flawed. First, the text says God does not repent, period. It says nothing about his eternal principles or standards. Could you show me where the text has qualifiers? Where does the text say "repent" only has your limited application? You are engaging more in eisegesis than exegesis. Second, God's "umbrella" or "shelter to deflect his wrath" has nothing to do with the text and is something you have added gratuitously. Third, the text says nothing about our relationship to God changing. In effect, you are rewriting the script as you would like the Bible to read. Man's relationship to him is irrelevant. The fact is that the text says he does not repent and that settles the matter. He either does or he does not. If he does, regardless of the reason, then Num. 23:19 is false. Fourth, you obviously don't like the word "repent" and have created a phrase of your own--turn back--to minimize the clash. Why do you equate the two and are we going to use the words of the text or those you prefer?

Letter #310 Continues (Part f)

(The 5th point in BE's pamphlet, THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD? was: How can 2 Kings 8:26 ["Two and twenty years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign"] which says Ahaziah began to rule at age 22 be reconciled with 2 Chron. 22:2 ["Forty and two years old was Ahaziah when he began to reign"] which says he was 42? The following is TF's reply--Ed.)

This one is easy. II Chron. 22:2 is copied incorrectly from the original. Ahaziah started his reign when his father died at the age of forty (2 Chron. 21:20). Therefore Ahaziah was 22 (rather than 42) when he replaced his father. Even in the Bible, at birth children are younger than their parents.

It is easy to copy parts of the Bible incorrectly. Try it yourself with any passage chosen at random. If your experience is like mine, the words will not disappear or correct themselves. The amazing thing is the degree of corrective support or "parity checking" made possible by the biblical context.

Editor's Response to Letter #310 (Part f)

Unfortunately, TF, there is nothing easy about this one. First, how do you know it was copied incorrectly? This is the standard ploy that has been used by apologists for centuries. You have never seen the originals nor has anyone else in the modern era. This tactic is rather amusing as it is often employed when nothing else can be thought of. In his classic work, Alleged Bible Discrepancies, Haley used it profusely. When one group of writings say 2 Chron. 22:2 should be

42, how do you know it should say something else? How do you know 2 Kings 8:26 is copied correctly? Maybe it's in error and 2 Chron. is correct? Apparently you obtained your answer from one of the standard apologetic works and took no more account of the problem involved than most apologists. Second, there are many Hebraic texts supposedly accurately reproducing the original OT text. Surely you aren't saying the translators of the text into English based their translation on only one inaccurately copied text among many. If there were a copyist error, then many Hebrew texts would have to have precisely the same error, which would be incredible. Third, the fact that 22 would seem to be more in harmony with other parts of the text is hardly worthy of serious consideration since consistency is certainly not one of the Bible's hallmarks. Indeed, the entire history of this publication provides evidence to the contrary. (To Be Continued)

Letter #316 from DM of Pasadena, California

Dear Dennis. I suspect that we're mostly talking past one another, so I'll state my position again. I just don't see any "conspiracy" by the better translations of the Bible to eliminate legitimate discrepancies. I'm talking about the New English Bible, the New Oxford Annotated Bible, Today's English Version, the Jerusalem Bible, and certain others. In fact, the great majority of the deviations from the King James Bible are probably justified. Note what I'm not saying: I'm not saying that the effects of prejudice are wholly absent in such works. Nor am I talking about the history of the Bible, its origins, or how it has been used down through the ages. Neither am I talking about inferior translations. I am saying that the above translations are worthy of scholarly acclaim, that they are the work of high standards and cannot justly be characterized as vehicles for eliminating legitimate difficulties.

Any translation of the Bible represents a tremendous number of decisions. Manuscripts or portions thereof must be selected. Rare words must be interpreted, and nebulous expressions must be clarified. And, of course, many words and expressions will have no precise counterpart in the new language. I've tried to illustrate some of those obstacles in previous letters. In many of these decisions there is a legitimate range of opinion, and thus even good translations will differ on many points.

It is my judgment, with respect to those difficulties which I have studied, that in some Bibles they may be toned down while in others they may be highlighted. With respect to other difficulties the roles are often reversed. This is the type of random effect one expects to find in good translations....

If you wish to believe that there is a general movement underfoot to gradually smoothe away the Bible's difficulties, a movement to which the above translations are a party, then that is your privilege. I just don't see that in the evidence currently available to me -- and that includes your input on the matter.

Editor's Response to Letter #316

Dear DM. Apparently I'm not making my position very clear on this matter so I'll try again. I do not believe the King James is the most reliable version nor do I think there has been a steady drift away from the KJV for the sake of political expediency. I do, however, feel that translations are political documents reflecting the theological orientation of their creators and the era in which they are produced. The purpose for which a version is created has more to do with the underlying motives of its creators and the milieu in which it emerged than the discovery of new documents or manuscripts. As far as actual validity is concerned, I'd say the Revised Standard

Version of 1946/52 is the least political and most reliable version on the market, but it is by no means immune from tendentious interpretations.

Letter #317 from TD of Morgantown, West Virginia (Part a)

Dear Dennis. ...In my letter of last August, I criticized items (8), (10), (17), and (24) of the flyer "THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD?" Some of the others, I think, are also weak, and should be omitted or amended. Item 7 [Rom. 3:23 says, "All have sinned." All means all. Yet, Gen. 6:9 says, "Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations." Job 1:1 and 1:8 say Job was perfect. How could these men have been perfect if all have sinned?--Ed.] could be criticized on the grounds that the term "perfect" as applied to Noah and Job only refers to their well-integrated personalities, not to any sinlessness. I do not go along with this criticism, but it seems to me that there are better contradictions that could be used instead of (7).

Editor's Response to Letter #317 (Part a)

Dear TD. I realize you are trying to provide assistance to BE but your criticisms resemble those of many apologists and must be addressed as such. First, probably the most common excuse employed by biblicists is: "that's what it says, but that's not what it means." It doesn't take long for one to become rather perturbed with this hackneyed approach. Nearly every time I quote the Bible or a version of same they'll come back with this overdone retort. I can't help but reply, "Then, write your own version and send me a copy and we'll discuss it. Before we can begin to analyze the Bible we have to agree on the version to be used. Since you are dissatisfied with the version I quoted, send me one you have created or one that is available that you support. In the meantime, I'm not going to engage in a guessing game of trying to pin down not only the phantom originals but a current version that is eternally in flux. You and other apologists are going to have to 'get anchored' on one version or the other." As I said many issues ago, I'm not going to accept apologists having 15 or 20 different versions of every verse in the Bible which they can insert or extract as expediency dictates. I work on the theory that the text means what it says and it says what it means. The text says "perfect" and it's the same "perfect" that is applied to God in Deut. 32:4 and Psalm 18:30. If you wish to argue that this does not mean Noah was sinless, then I'll argue with equal force that Deut. 32 and Psalm 18 are not alleging God is morally perfect. Second, the word "perfect" in Gen. 6:9 comes from the Hebrew word "taw-meen" which means without blemish, without spot, undefiled, upright, and perfect. If that does not mean he is morally sinless, then what does? How much clearer do you want it to be? What would the text have to say to convince you that it means Noah was morally sinless? Third, the verse must mean moral sinlessness or perfection; otherwise, the incident with respect to Noah and the Flood has no significance and reeks with injustice. If Noah was not morally perfect, then he had no more right to be saved than anyone else on the planet. If he was a sinner like everyone else, then he should have drowned like everyone else. The difference between his morality and that of others would be more one of kind than of degree. Fourth, what is a "well-integrated" personality? That's a nebulous phrase that can be interpreted at will. What I strongly suggest to anyone who seeks to use this defense is that they write their own version of the Bible, translate the text in such a manner that it says precisely what they want said, and send me a copy. In your case you'll need to change Gen. 6:9 to "Noah was a just man with a well-integrated personality in his generations."

If my response to your objection sounds rather acerbic, it's because over the years I've grown to disrespect biblical apologetics in general and certain apologists in particular. Apologetic scholarship is not really pursuing truth and honesty but is actually seeking to justify at all costs a belief-system which they feel is the only hope for mankind. They are willing to ignore or rationalize thousands of problems in search for what they mistakenly believe is the higher good.

Although they'd never admit as much, they have surreptitiously adopted the time-honored maxim that the ends justifies the means. If you have to do some unscrupulous things in the short run for the good of all in the long run, then so be it. Unfortunately, as many of those who commit unlawful activities will admit, the problem with lying and distorting is that once you start down this road you have to create additional prevarications in order to be consistent with the original perversion. One is rarely sufficient. A chain reaction is set in motion that pulls the apologist down a slippery slope to an awaiting cliff. "Apologetics" is an appropriate description of biblical defenses, because if there is any book for which apologies need to be made it is the Bible. (To Be Continued)

EDITOR'S NOTE: (a) Several subscribers took exception to my final comment to TF on page 4 of Issue #78. In reference to the length of Hell's punishment I said, "How can an infinite series have a finite total? The number of finites within an infinite series is infinite, not finite." Apparently several people feel that the number of finites within an infinity can be finite and one even provided some mathematical calculations with a liberal sprinkling of calculus to prove as much. When I entered college decades ago, math was my major and calculus my nemesis. Perhaps I missed something by switching to philosophy, but after reading the explanations provided I still don't see how a restricted number of finite numbers can total an infinity. Perhaps I've erred; it's happened before. So I'll not pursue the issue.

(b) We'd like to express our appreciation to those who have successfully helped us appear in the media (radio, television, or print) by publishing their names, addresses, and the assistance rendered if they have no objection. It's entirely voluntary and no one will be entered unless we receive definite interest and permission.

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COMMENTARY

MESSIANIC PROPHECIES (Part Five of a Five-Part Series)--This commentary will conclude our comprehensive listing of the main OT prophecies that are applied to Jesus of Nazareth by Christian apologists. (73) ZECH. 2:10-11 ("Sin and rejoice, O daughter of Zion: for lo, I come, and I will dwell in the midst of thee, saith the Lord. And many nations shall be joined to the Lord in that day, and shall be my people: and I will dwell in the midst of thee, and thou shalt know that the Lord of hosts hath sent me unto thee"). (a) If this refers to Jesus as Christians claim, then how did he dwell in their midst? He was actually killed and passed away from them. If it refers to the future, then it's pure speculation. (b) Christians may argue that his spirit rests in the midst of Zion, but the divine presence has not been found in Jerusalem from the time of the exile. As Isaiah 52:5 says, "Now therefore, what have I to do here, says the Lord, for my people have been taken away for naught." (74) ZECH. 6:12 ("Thus speaketh the Lord of hosts, saying, Behold the man whose name is the BRANCH; and he shall grow up out of his place, and he shall build the temple of the Lord"). (a) Jesus never built the temple of the Lord. (b) When was Jesus ever called "The Branch"? (75) ZECH. 6:13 ("...and he shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both"). (a) Jesus never had much glory. (b) Jesus never sat or ruled on a throne. (c) Jesus was never a priest. (d) Who is "both"? Both means more than one. (76) ZECH. 9:9 ("...behold, thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass"). (a) According to some Hebraic scholars, "having salvation" should have been translated as "having been saved." (b) The RSV translated "having been saved" as "triumphant and victorious is he" which is also inapplicable. Jesus was neither saved nor victorious. (c) This

event could not refer to Jesus since it was to occur at the same time as the restoration of Israel and the establishment of peace and happiness. (d) Actually Zechariah is congratulating his countrymen who are returning from captivity in Babylon to Jerusalem. Zech 1:16 ("I am returned to Jerusalem with mercies") shows that Zechariah was discussing the entry of the Jews into Jerusalem, not the entry of Jesus nearly 700 years later. Zech 8:7-8 ("Behold, I will save my people from the east country, and from the west country; And I will bring them, and they shall dwell in the midst of Jerusalem....") also shows it was referring to the return of the Jews from captivity. (e) The verse is also inapplicable to Jesus because Luke 19:30 and Mark 11:2 say there was a colt but no ass is mentioned. (77) ZECH. 9:10 ("...and he shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even unto the ends of the earth"). (a) Jesus never had a dominion stretching from sea to sea or to the ends of the earth. (b) If Jesus had had a kingdom this would have violated his basic purpose and nature as set forth in Matt. 8:20 ("The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath nowhere to lay his head") and Matt. 20:28 ("Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto...."). (c) In Matt. 10:34 Jesus said that he came not to bring peace but a sword. (78) ZECH. 12:10 ("And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him,...."). (a) It would make no sense to have the House of David be responsible for Jesus' death when that is the house of which Jesus was a member. Would his own house kill him? (b) "As one mourneth for." Why would this say as? Jesus is a son of the House of David. The House of David would not mourn for Jesus as if he were an only son when he was, in fact, a son of the House of David. (c) The text has "Upon me whom they have...." while the RSV has "on him whom they...." If "me" is the correct term, how could they pierce the speaker who is Jehovah (God)? (d) This verse has nothing to do with Jesus. Zechariah is saying that God will make Judah and Jerusalem very powerful in the future, such that those nations who attack them will be destroyed. Then the people of Jerusalem will look with compassion and mourning on those whom they have pierced and killed. Interest in the life of one's fellow man will be deeply felt in the latter days. (79) ZECH. 12:11 ("In that day shall mourn, every family apart, the family of the house of David apart,...."). Yet, there was very little mourning for Jesus on the day he died. (80) ZECH. 13:2 ("And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord of hosts, that...I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land"). Jesus was a prophet, so according to this verse he will have to pass out of the land along with the unclean spirit. (81) ZECH. 13:3 ("And it shall come to pass that when any shall yet prophesy, then his father and his mother that begat him shall say unto him, Thou shalt not live; for thou speakest lies in the name of the Lord: and his father and his mother that begat him shall thrust him through when he prophesieth"). (a) If this verse applies to Jesus as some biblicists allege, it would mean Jesus: lied in the name of the Lord according to his parents, was killed by his parents, and died by being thrust through rather than by crucifixion. (b) The prophet spoken of in this verse says in verse 5 that he is a tiller of the soil; yet, Jesus was a carpenter. (82) ZECH. 13:4 ("And it shall come to pass in that day, that the prophets shall be ashamed every one of his vision, when he hath prophesied...."). If this applies to Jesus, then he must eventually be ashamed of his vision because he, too, is a prophet. (83) ZECH. 13:5 ("But he shall say, I am no prophet, I am an husbandman; for man taught me to keep cattle from my youth"). How could this apply to Jesus since he was a prophet and carpenter, not a cattleman. (84) ZECH. 13:6 ("And one shall say unto him, What are these wounds in thine hands? Then he shall answer, Those with which I was wounded in the house of my friends"). (a) There is no biblical record of Jesus making this statement. (b) Jesus was not wounded in the house of his friends. (c) Biblicists apply the crucial part of this verse ("...What are these wounds in thine hands?....") to Jesus on the cross but conveniently ignore the fact that the five prior verses apply to the same individual who couldn't be Jesus. (85) ZECH. 13:7 ("Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the Lord of hosts: smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered: and I will turn mine hand upon the

little ones"). (a) The command given to the sword to "smite" the shepherd who is my fellow merely signifies that those kings who oppress the Jews and in their delusion believe that they are doing God's work shall be punished. (b) "Smite the shepherd and the sheep shall be scattered" indicates that the rulers of the Gentiles shall be overthrown and out of their fall shall arise the deliverance of Israel. Many shepherds must be struck prior to Israel's complete deliverance since Jews are scattered everywhere.

That completes our entire list of OT messianic prophecies that allegedly refer to Jesus. For those who stayed with us this far, congratulations. You have demonstrated the kind of sticktuitiveness that is indicative of one who is dedicated to a cause. For those who remain unconvinced, I'd suggest measures having more to do with fostering one's objectivity than investigating the Bible further.

ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM--One of the most insidious biblical teachings is that the intellect is not to be trusted as the final arbiter of one's decisions. Faith in Jesus, theological insights, and spiritual gifts are to replace knowledge, disputation, and philosophy as the ultimate source of truth. In effect, faith is to replace proof, hope is to replace work, and trust is to replace evidence. People are to rely on forces and beings beyond their control rather than their own talents and abilities. This debilitating approach to life's challenges, which can only lead to self-effacement and low self-esteem, is exemplified in such verses as: HEB. 11:1 ("Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for the conviction (evidence--KJV) of things not seen"), ECCLE. 6:8 ("For what hath the wise more than the fool..."), 1 COR. 1:22-23 RSV ("For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles..."), 1 COR. 4:10 ("We are fool's for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ..."), 1 COR. 2:1-2 RSV ("I {Paul--Ed.} did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified"), 1 COR. 3:18-19 ("Let no one deceive himself. If any one among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God"), 1 COR. 1:19-21 RSV ("For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will thwart. Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom..."), 1 COR. 2:13-14 ("And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who possess the Spirit. The unspiritual man does not receive the gifts of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned"), 1 COR. 2:4 ("...and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom..."), ECCLE. 1:18 ("For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow"), 1 COR. 1:17 ("For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words..."), 1 COR. 4:4 ("For I know nothing by myself..."), 1 COR. 1:25-27 RSV ("For the foolishness of God is wiser than men....not many of you were wise according to worldly standards...but God chose what is foolishness in the world to shame the wise...."), 1 COR. 8:1-2 ("...knowledge puffs up, but love builds up. If any one imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know"), 1 COR. 2:6-7 RSV ("Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God..."), and COL. 2:8 RSV ("See to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ").

Central to any sensible society is the belief that truth is discovered through the interchange of ideas in an open forum. Yet, Christians are repeatedly admonished to avoid those of another persuasion and shun the exchange of ideas through dialogue. They are told to flee non-biblical

ideas because the latter are not only wrong and lead believers astray but possessed by those with less than honorable motives. Christian beliefs are not to be open to questions and doubts. Many verses expose these dogmatic sentiments: ROM. 16:17-18 RSV ("I appeal to you, brethren, to take note of those who created dissensions and difficulties, in opposition to the doctrine which you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by fair and flattering words they deceive the hearts of the simple-minded"), 2 TIM. 2:16-17 ("Avoid such godless chatter, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will eat its way like gangrene"), 1 TIM. 6:20 ("O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called...."), 2 TIM. 2:14 RSV ("Remind them of this, and charge them before the Lord to avoid disputing about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers"), TITUS 3:9-10 ("But avoid stupid controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels over the law, for they are unprofitable and futile. As for a man who is factious, after admonishing him once or twice, have nothing more to do with him...."), ROM. 14:1 RSV ("As for the man who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not for disputes over opinions"), 1 TIM. 6:3-5 RSV ("If any one teaches otherwise and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching which accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit, he knows nothing; he has a morbid craving for controversy and for disputes about words, which produce envy, dissensions, slander, base suspicions, and wrangling among men...."), COL. 2:4 ("I say this in order that no one may delude you with beguiling speech"), 2 TIM. 2:23-25 RSV ("Have nothing to do with stupid, senseless controversies, you know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to every one, an apt teacher, forbearing, correcting his opponents with gentleness"). How one corrects one's opponents with gentleness after one has been repeatedly told to avoid the opposition entirely is rather hard to fathom.

Imagine giving your followers the impression in 2 THESS. 3:2 ("And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith"), 1 JOHN 2:22 ("Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son"), and 2 JOHN 7 ("For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist") that all those who lack faith in Christianity in general and Jesus in particular are unreasonable and wicked! Who would be open to dialogue with anybody so portrayed? Additional relevant verses are TITUS 3:2, HEB. 13:9, and 2 JOHN 9-11.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #310 from TF of Pasadena, Maryland Continues from Last Month (Part g)

(TF also attacked the 6th point in BE's pamphlet, JESUS CHRIST IS THE ANSWER?, which says: How could Jesus be our model of sinless perfection when he denies his moral perfection in Matt. 19:17 ["And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is God"]. What follows is TF's reply--Ed.).

Jesus did not deny his moral perfection in Matt. 19:17.

Editor's Response to Letter #310 (Part g)

That's it! That's all you have to say, TF! I don't see how it can be any clearer. If there is only one who is good and that is God, then Jesus, along with everyone else, must be less than good. He must have some moral imperfection, no matter how small; otherwise he is as good as God. So, in fact, he is denying his moral perfection.

Letter #310 Continues (Part h)

(TF attacked the 18th point in BE's pamphlet, JESUS CHRIST IS THE ANSWER?, which says: In Mark 10:19 Jesus told a man to follow the commandments. Yet, one of those listed by Jesus was "defraud not" which isn't even an OT commandment. What follows is TF's reply--Ed.)

You are incorrect. Jewish tradition lists the total number of divine commandments at 613, of which ten are known best. "Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbor..." is found in Lev. 19:13.

Editor's Response to Letter #310 (Part h)

Are we going by the Bible and Jesus or Jewish tradition, TF? In Luke 18:18-22 a ruler asked Jesus what he had to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus told him to follow the commandments which included the usual references to adultery, stealing, killing, bearing false witness, and honoring thy parents. After the ruler said he had kept the short list provided, Jesus told him he still needed to do one thing more--sell all you have and distribute it to the poor--in order to have treasure in heaven. Jesus' list of commandments follows the usual list of 10, not the 613 you mentioned, in which case the reference to defrauding thy neighbor found in Lev. 19:13 is irrelevant.

Letter #310 Concludes (Part i)

(TF attacked the 2nd point in BE's pamphlet, JESUS CHRIST IS THE ANSWER?, which says: "Jesus said, whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire" [Matt. 5:22]. Yet, he repeatedly called people "fools" as Matt. 23:17, 19, Luke 11:40 and Luke 12:2 show. Shouldn't he be in danger of hell too?" What follows is TF's reply--Ed.)

"But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the councils: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool shall be in danger of hell fire" (Matt. 5:22, emphasis mine).

Read the context. The phrase "without a cause," in the first part of the verse is the failure that Jesus is condemning. We should condemn sin (in ourselves and in others). We should express anger (Prov. 20:2, Eph. 4:26) towards those who violate the rights of others. We should call the atheist a fool because God has already called him a fool (Psa. 14:1, 53:1).

Editor's Response to Letter #310 (Part i)

You ignored your own advice about context, TF. "Without a cause" applies to being angry, not to calling others fools. The verse prohibits being angry "without a cause," while saying Raca to one's brothers or calling others fools is prohibited, period. There is no qualifier. You have taken the phrase "without a cause" and applied it to everything in the verse. Secondly, as I mentioned approximately 10 issues ago, the phrase "without a cause" does not exist in 11 of the 14 versions I have in my inventory. You used the version which suits your purpose (the KJV) and ignored nearly all the others. I also recently mentioned that I not going to accept the apologetic attempt to have many different versions of each verse from which they can draw as expediency dictates. Thirdly, what does condemning sin have to do with the issue? You have "sin" on the brain when, in fact, the word is never mentioned. The verse is only condemning being angry, saying Raca, and calling others fools. You have made a broad generalization that is not warranted by the verse. You are not only "taking out-of-context," but expanding the text. Fourthly, the verse says we are not to call others "fools," period. Nothing is said about atheists, nor are they made an exception. Again, could you provide textual support for your theories? And lastly, bringing in

Psalm 14:1 and 53:1 contributes little other than exposing a contradiction: in the OT God, i.e. Jesus, calls some people fools while later condemning such activities in Matt. 5:22.

Letter #317 from TD of Morgantown, West Virginia Continues from Last Month (Part b)

...In regard to item 14 in the pamphlet THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD? ("Matt 27:9-10 quotes a prophecy made by Jeremy the prophet. Yet, no believer in the Bible has ever been able to show me where it lies in the book of Jeremiah"), the prophecy occurs at Zec. 11:12-13. It is an error, of course, but a relatively minor one. Perhaps something stronger could be used instead.

Editor's Response to Letter #317 (Part b)

Unfortunately, you are incorrect on two major points, TD. The prophecy does not occur in Zec. 11:12-13 either. Although similar in some ways, the facts differ in important respects. That which occurs in Matt 27 conflicts with that which occurs in Zechariah 11 as will be detailed later in a section entitled ACCOMMODATIONS. Secondly, there is nothing minor about this mistake. It is one of the most obvious, important, and easily disproven references to a non-existent OT prophecy that can be found. When one can easily prove apologists are clearly asserting black is white, you don't dismiss that as of minor importance.

Letter #317 Concludes (Part c)

...Item 17 ("Jesus told a man in Mark 8:34 that 'whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.' What cross? He hadn't died on the cross yet. There was nothing to take up. That man would have had no idea what he was talking about") is also weak because the Roman method of crucifying on a cross was widely known in ancient Palestine, and was probably that to which Jesus was referring.

Editor's Response to Letter #317 (Part c)

Maybe I'm wrong, TD, but I don't think you understand the problem. Most people know that Romans often executed people by crucifying them on a cross and Jesus was referring to crucifixion. But you have not addressed the issue. The cross to which Jesus was referring was the cross as a Christian symbol. He was referring to a specific cross, not crosses in general, and that was the cross on which he was going to be killed. But that cross couldn't possibly be a symbol until after he died on it. There was no Christian cross when he spoke to this man; the cross was not a Christian symbol until after the crucifixion. Consequently, for Jesus to tell a man to pick up a symbol which did not yet exist is absurd. The man would have had no idea what Jesus meant unless he knew the future. You can't pick up something that's yet to be.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #318 from Steven Overholt of the FRONTLINE, Box 154, San Juan Capistrano, California 92693

Dear Dennis. BIBLICAL ERRANCY is easily the most interesting and informative periodical on the Bible that I have ever encountered. I frequent major theological institutions in California as part of my independent research and cannot help noticing that most of their libraries seem determined not to carry your publication. Your readers may want to raise this issue whenever they encounter Christian fundamentalists seeking to challenge their sense of fairness.

I regret to report that BIBLICAL ERRANCY is not the only important publication being denied a hearing to Bible and divinity students. The same sort of censorship is being applied to the important New Testament history newsletter which I edit. Even though the background information we provide Bible students is uncannily relevant, very few Bible colleges see fit to allow their students--or even faculty--to include it among the reading material of their libraries....

Letter #319 from DES of Davenport, Iowa

Dear Dennis. Biblical Errancy (May 1989) arrived in the mail today and I was reading your note at the end in reference to suggestions (or bitches) about the quality of printing.

I have had the same problem with the minutes that I put out for the local ACLU chapter, of which I am the secretary. With my computer I have compacted the text with my word processor. A couple of members complained that the minutes were too short so I made up a sample with double spacing and normal pica 10 to the inch letters. The same text that I put on one sheet took two full sheets and a paragraph on a third sheet. When I made this demonstration, they (expletive deleted--Ed.) and moaned that the type was hard to read. At this point I told them to use a reading glass.

The point of all this is that you should stay with what you are doing. I think you are doing a fantastic job with BE and you are putting it out dirt cheap; so don't change a (expletive deleted--Ed.) thing.

Letter #320 from VEC of Hood River, Oregon

Dennis: A comment on "Editor's Note" at the end of Issue #77 (May 1989). Keep the format of BE as is. Just keep up this important work.

Letter #321 from JRC of Parlin, New Jersey

Dennis. Having only recently renewed my subscription after a year, I now need to catch up on your excellent periodical. I understand that you have published an index during the past year. If so, please send me one and bill me accordingly....

You and your staff are to be commended for a fantastic job on all-important issues such as these. Keep with it and if you have any radio or TV appearances scheduled in the near future, would you mention some dates and places? Your subscribers would love to follow such shows or debates. Maybe you could start listing them regularly in BE.

Editor's Response to Letter #321

Dear JRC. Your comments are only too kind. The only index we have at the present time is distributed free to everyone who requests a copy and is sent out with all sample issues. As far as radio and TV appearances are concerned, we try to inform our readers whenever possible. Unfortunately, publishing them ahead of time is risky because the schedules are often changed by the stations on a moment's notice.

COMMENTARY

PETER VERSUS THE OT (Part One of a Two-Part Series)--Nearly all of the NT verses in which Peter contradicted Jesus, Paul and himself were exposed in the commentary of Issue #44. This month's commentary and that to follow will reveal nearly all of the conflicts between the sayings of Peter and OT verses. What follows are the most prominent examples. (1) ACTS 10:34 ("Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, 'Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons'"). In effect, Peter said God does not play favorites. But, evidence to the contrary is overwhelming. God does have his chosen: DEUT. 14:2 ("For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God, and the Lord hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon the face of the earth"), DEUT. 7:6 ("...the Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth"), DEUT. 7:14 ("Thou shalt be blessed above all people...."), 1 CHRON. 17:22 ("For thy people Israel didst thou make thine own people for ever; and thou, Lord, becamest their God"), 1 SAM. 12:22 ("For the Lord will not forsake his people for his great name's sake: because it hath pleased the Lord to make you his people"), ISA. 51:16 ("...and say unto Zion, Thou art my people"), EX. 2:25 ("And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them"), EX. 11:7 ("...the Lord doth put a difference between the Egyptians and Israel"), AMOS 3:2 ("You only have I known of all the families of the earth...."), GEN. 4:4-5 ("And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect"), ISA. 65:9 ("And I will bring forth a seed out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor of my mountains; and mine elect shall inherit it...."), and PSALM 138:6 ("Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off"). Clearly, the biblical God plays favorites. (2) 2 PETER 3:10-11 ("...the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved....") versus ECCLE. 1:4 ("One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever"), PSALM 104:5 ("Who laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be removed for ever"), and DEUT. 4:40 ("...that thou mayest prolong thy days upon the earth, which the Lord thy God giveth thee, for ever"). (3) 1 PETER 3:18 ("For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that it might bring us to God....") versus DEUT. 24:16 ("The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin"). If God decreed that every man should be put to death for his own sins, then why would he accept the sacrifice of Jesus for the acts of others? (4) ACTS 1:24 ("And they [which includes Peter--Ed.] prayed, and said, 'Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen....'") versus DEUT. 8:2 ("And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness, to humble thee, and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments or no"), DEUT. 13:3 ("Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul"), GEN. 18:21 ("I [God--Ed.] will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know") and GEN. 22:12. Although Peter claims God knows the hearts of all, some OT verses show he does not. (5) In ACTS 3:21 Peter said, "...which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began"; yet, prophets did not exist when the world began, even in the Book of Genesis. (6) JER. 51:26 ("...thou [Babylon--Ed.] shalt be a desolate for ever, saith the Lord"), JER. 51:62 ("...that none shall remain in it [Babylon--Ed.], neither man nor beast, but that it shall be desolate

for ever"), JER. 51:29 ("...for every purpose of the Lord shall be performed against Babylon, to make the land of Babylon a desolation without an inhabitant"), JER. 51:64 ("...Thus shall Babylon sink, and shall not rise from the evil that I will bring upon her...."), and JER. 51:37 versus 1 PETER 5:13 ("The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you...."). Jeremiah repeatedly said Babylon was to be destroyed forever and never reinhabited; yet, Peter said there was a church and people at Babylon. (7) 1 PETER 1:25 ("But the word of the Lord endureth for ever") versus JONAH 3:10 ("When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God repented of the evil which he had said he would do to them; and he did not do it") and NUM. 14:30-34. Peter claims God's word endures forever; yet, God did not treat some people as he said he would. (8) 1 PETER 2:22 ("Who [Jesus--Ed.] did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth....") versus numerous false, misleading, and erroneous statements by Jesus that were discussed in the commentaries of Issues #24, #25, #27 and #28. (9) ACTS 2:22 ("Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know....") versus EX. 7:11-12 ("Then Pharaoh called the wise men and the sorcerers: now the magicians of Egypt, they also did in like manner with their enchantments. For they cast down every man his rod, and they became serpents....") and EX. 8:7 ("And the magicians did so with their enchantments, and brought up frogs upon the land of Egypt"). If the ability to do miracles proves one is approved of God as Peter alleged, then the Pharaoh's magicians must be approved of God also. (10) 2 PETER 2:4 ("For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment") versus JOB 1:6-7 ("Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them. And the Lord said unto Satan, Whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, From going to and fro in the earth, and from walking up and down in it"). Satan was one of the angels that sinned and was among those cast down into hell into the chains of darkness to be reserved unto judgment; yet, Job states he presented himself before God after walking back and forth over the earth. If he was to be kept restrained in the chains of darkness until the judgment, how could he have been walking back and forth on earth? (11) In ACTS 3:22 Peter made the following statement: "For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me...." Jesus was supposedly the prophet that was "like unto Moses." Yet, if Jesus was really like unto Moses, then he could not have been God incarnate, since Moses was not God incarnate nor did he ever claim to be such. Moreover, Jesus could not have been a prophet since he failed to meet the requirements outlined in DEUT. 18:22 ("When a prophet speaketh in the name of the Lord, if the thing follow not, nor come to pass, that is the thing which the Lord hath not spoken, but the prophet hath spoken it presumptuously...."). One is not a prophet if what he predicts fails to materialize and since much of what Jesus prophesied failed to come to pass (e.g., See Issue #28), he could not have been a true prophet. (12) 2 PETER 3:9 ("The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance") versus PROV. 16:4 NASB ("The Lord has made everything for its own purpose. Even the wicked for the day of evil"). Peter says the Lord wants all to come to repentance. Yet, he intentionally created wicked people. Why create something that is wicked if you want everything to come to repentance in order to be saved? Why create a problem you seek to abolish? (13) And 2 PETER 2:15 ("...and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor....") versus NUM. 22:5 ("He sent messengers therefore unto Balaam the son of Beor to Pethor...."). Unless the "son of Bosor" and the "son of Beor" are identical, a contradiction exists.

PRO-INTELLECTUALISM--Although the Bible is essentially anti-intellectual as was shown by many verses cited in last month's issue, oddly enough, a lesser but distinct element of pro-intellectualism is evident in a few biblical comments. The Bible occasionally reverses itself by urging believers to engage in dialogue and debate with the opposition. I've found these verses to

be useful when biblicists have refused to engage in a biblical exchange because of the anti-intellectual philosophy propounded by "God's Word." Because of those verses cited in last month's ANTI-INTELLECTUAL commentary, some believers avoid all contact or ideological interaction with freethought advocates. That's unfortunate because closed and indoctrinated minds are among those most difficult to penetrate. You can't influence someone who flatly rejects openness to any antibiblical ideas and mistakenly assumes everything in your inventory is erroneous. People such as these are as hard to persuade as those who have fallen into a purely metaphysical ideology entirely divorced from reason, logic, and proof. The former believe the Bible in spite of reason and proof, not because of them. They are all but impossible to reach and are often found in the back rooms of psychiatric hospitals. As the famous psychiatrist Carl Jung once said, "I have treated many hundreds of patients. Among those over 35, there has not been one whose problem in the last resort was not that of finding a religious outlook on life." Or, as Sigmund Freud said, "Religion is comparable to a childhood neurosis." The Bible supports Ingersoll's comments that, "When religion becomes scientific, it ceases to be religion and becomes science. Religion is not intellectual--it is emotional. It does not appeal to the reason. The founder of a religion has always said, 'Let him that hath ears to hear, hear!' No founder has said: 'Let him that hath brains to think, think!' (Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 8. p. 606) and "In the OT no one is told to reason with a heretic, and not one word is said about relying upon argument, upon education, or upon intellectual development--nothing except simple brute force" ("Some Mistakes of Moses," Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 2, p. 260). On pages 131-132 of Vol. 9 in *The Life and Works of Thomas Paine* Paine said, "As you can make no appeal to reason in support of an unreasonable religion, you then...bring yourselves off by telling people they must not believe in reason but in revelation." Voltaire said, "The truths of religion are never so well understood as by those who have lost the power of reason" and Havelock Ellis was probably as blunt as anyone when he said, "The whole religious complexion of the modern world is due to the absence from Jerusalem of a lunatic asylum."

The opposite of reason is faith, a concept biblicists readily admit lies at the core of Christianity and about which many notable individuals have made some poignant comments. H. L. Mencken said it's "an illogical belief in the occurrence of the improbable." On page 244 in *Science and Christian Tradition* Thomas Huxley said, "...the profound psychological truth, that men constantly feel certain about things for which they strongly hope, but have no evidence, in the legal or logical sense of the word; he calls this feeling 'faith.'" Ben Franklin said that "the way to see by Faith is to shut the Eye to Reason" and one writer defined faith as "belief without evidence in what is told by a preacher without knowledge." Ambrose Bierce probably encapsulated the concept as well as anyone when he defined faith as "belief without evidence in what is told by one who speaks without knowledge, of things without parallel."

Be that as it may, there are some biblical verses which all freethought advocates should have at their disposal for those occasions when biblicists in general and Christians in particular refuse to discuss the Bible's dilemmas. Prime examples are ISAIAH 1:18 ("Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord"), 2 COR. 10:5 ("We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle to the knowledge of God..."), 2 TIM. 4:2 ("...preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and teaching"), JAMES 3:17 ("But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason..."), ACTS 17:17 ("Therefore disputed Paul in the synagogue with the Jews and with the devout persons and in the market daily with them that met with him"), ACTS 19:9 ("...Paul departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school..."), and 2 TIM. 2:24-25 RSV ("And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but...correcting his opponents with gentleness"). In fact, I would even recommend memorizing JUDE 3 ("...ye should earnestly contend for the faith"), 1 PETER 3:15 ("Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you..."), and 1 THESS. 5:21 ("Prove all things; hold fast that which is good")

for those instances in which biblicists, especially those of a more fundamentalist variety, seek to flee to more comfortable terrain.

Other relevant verses which also tend to foster dialogue and debate are ACTS 18:4 ("And Paul reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks"), ACTS 18:19 ("And Paul...entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews"), ACTS 17:2 ("And Paul, as was his manner was, went in unto them, and three Sabbath days, reasoned with them out of the scriptures..."), 1 TIM. 6:12 ("Fight the good fight of faith..."), TITUS 1:9 ("...a bishop must hold firm to the sure word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to confute those who contradict it"), TITUS 1:13 ("...Therefore rebuke them sharply that they may be sound in the faith..."), 2 TIM. 1:7 ("...for God did not give us a spirit of timidity but a spirit of power and love and self-control"), ECCLE. 7:25 RSV, ACTS 15:39, 1 COR. 4:13 RSV, COL. 4:6, 2 TIM. 4:5, TITUS 2:15 RSV, and ACTS 24:25.

And don't forget to quote PROV. 15:10 NIV ("...he who hates correction will die"), PROV. 12:1 ("Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, But he who hates correction is stupid"), and PROV. 14:15 ("The simple believeth every word: but the prudent man looketh well to his going") to those who don't like being told they have been victimized.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #322 from PD of Mesick, Michigan

A biblicist I know is using as proof for the Resurrection the claim that the writers of the Gospels suffered terrible deaths for not renouncing their message. If their story was a jointly concocted lie, surely one of them, at least, would have renounced it to save his life. Since they were separated by great distances from each other, the other disciples would never have known about any member's defection from the cause. Sounds persuasive, but I suspect a shell game!

What historical evidence do you know of that tells about the tortuous deaths of Jesus' disciples? For that matter, what reliable information is there about any part of the life of any disciple?

Editor's Response to Letter #322

Dear PD. Biblicists constantly allege that the willingness of the apostles and other prominent adherents of Jesus to die for the cause substantiates Christianity because who would die for something they knew was a lie. Two major flaws are immediately obvious in this attitude. First, where is the evidence that the apostles and other prominent disciples of Jesus died for the cause. A lot is said about the martyred deaths of Paul and Peter, for example, but no proof is provided. Certainly the Bible is silent in this regard. In fact, the only NT believers that could even be considered martyrs for the cause are Stephen and John the Baptist. The Bible says nothing about the deaths of Peter, Paul, Mark, John, Matthew, James, etc. From whence Christians derive this mythology one can only speculate. Secondly, millions of people have perished for what they erroneously believed was a just cause. Hitler's troops died believing God was on their side. The fact that people are willing to die for a cause has nothing to do with its validity. True, most people would probably not die for what they knew was a lie, but many would be willing to die for what they erroneously thought was true.

Several years ago while participating in a seminar sponsored by the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, I challenged a group of members on this very point. They repeatedly referred to the martyrdom of Peter and Paul as if it was biblically-based. When pressed for chapter and verse, a silence, liberally sprinkled with consternation and disbelief, permeated the room. They couldn't

imagine anyone challenging a belief so long accepted by them without question. Despite a period of argumentation, they were unable to provide textual support for their position.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #323 from Paul Keller of Grand Forks, North Dakota

Dear Dennis....I spoke to another "Bible as Literature" class on May 25. One of the questions asked (and there were many thanks to your leaflets) in a sarcastic manner was, "What do atheists have to look forward to? My reply was, "What do Christians have to look forward to?" Either they will be burnt alive forever or they will spend an eternity in the company of an infinite torturer who could turn on them at any time." No humane person would want either alternative, even if they were themselves never tortured. They would rather be dead. The fact that this is the only life there is makes it more precious, not less. All the more important is to be in control of your own life, rather than living imprisoned in a maze of illusion and misdirection called religion.....

Letter #324 from GN of Phoenix, Arizona

Gentlemen: A friend of mine sent me "Jesus Christ is the Answer? and "The Bible Is God's Word?" I found both pamphlets extremely interesting. I, too, have found many mistakes and immoral passages in the Bible. Do you have a complete work of more inconsistencies?....

The following are a few things that I discovered when doing Bible research. (1) Abraham was asked by God to murder his innocent son, Isaac. Those hearing such a "voice" today would not consider the "voice" to be coming from God but from the Devil and persons such as Abraham would be put in the mental ward, not held up as examples of religious piety.... (2) 1 Thess. 4:15 says "WE who are ALIVE, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep." "We" meaning Paul and his listeners, who were to remain ALIVE until the coming of Jesus. Paul is gone, his listeners are gone, and Jesus didn't arrive. (3) Christians say that God does not change. How can it be that Yahweh of the OT commanded "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth," and yet Jesus negated this simple law of retribution with "but I say to you, turn the other cheek." How could Jesus contradict an earlier commandment of God?.... (4) Was it just for God to harden the heart of Pharaoh so that he could punish the entire community of Egypt even down to the lowest slave girl? What ego-maniac god has to "prove his power" by the suffering of the innocent? (5) Where did Pharaoh get the horses to pursue Israel when all the "livestock" was destroyed in one of the plagues?....

Letter #325 from DT of Queensland, Australia

Dear Dennis. Many thanks for sending me your June issue of Biblical Errancy. Sometime in the past I noticed advertisements for your periodical, but for one reason or another have never got around to writing to you. Firstly, I would like to congratulate you on your publication. As it is the only one of this kind in the States, I would be very interested to know how much involvement you have been able to attract from Bible believers and also from non-believers...

I was born into a very religious family who belonged to the Exclusive Brethren sect. You may be familiar with this sect; it is basically Christian, fundamentalist, Protestant, and very fanatical. In my late teens I separated from the sect and was ostracized by my family. After a year or two of flirting with Presbyterianism, I became an atheist--almost overnight. However, I have always retained an interest in the Bible and Bible criticism and have written a short book called "The Bible Examined and Found Wanting." I have also compiled a list of 1,000 contradictions in the

Bible. If you are interested, I will send you a copy of it.... I am sending you a copy of my book "The Bible Examined and Found Wanting" with another article or two which you should find interesting.....Keep up the good work and please let me know if there is anything I can do to help you. I hope to hear from you again before too long.

Editor's Response to Letter #325

Dear DT. We appreciate your compliments. As far as our readership is concerned we, too, would like to know how many proponents and opponents of the Bible are subscribers to BE. But there is really no effective way to tell since our readers are on a wide spectrum encompassing everyone from avid defenders to bitter critics.

Although your booklet, "The Bible Examined and Found Wanting" had a few miscitations and some inadequacies, I found it to be better than most writings of that nature. Although BE focuses on more than just biblical contradictions, I'd be interested in having a copy of the 1,000 contradictions you mentioned. Keep up the good work.

Letter #326 from DW of RoSharon, Texas

Dear Dennis. I must apologize for the delay in writing to thank you for the "Sample Copy" of BE that deals with the alleged Flood. I shared it with some of the Christians I know and they could not come up with answers to the simple questions you asked....

Letter #327 from HM of Lubbock, Texas

Dear Dennis.... Your work and your level of scholarship are absolutely invaluable.... P.S. I know the nature of your work requires a pretty serious image, but I really hope you are able to occasionally sit back, blow the foam off a cold one, and really make fun of them! They make it so eeeeesay! It's so therapeutic!

Editor's Response to Letter #327

Dear HM. You are probably right. I probably should belt out some belly-shakers now and then with intermittent satire, but that's never been my style as you've probably noticed. Our subject is as serious as a heart attack for millions and I've never felt people will think I'm taking it seriously if I try to influence and persuade with humor.

Another problem with humor is that it's usually based on a clash of opposites which, technically speaking, are often exaggerated or inaccurate. Humor usually sacrifices precision for effect. I guess I'm saying I've always chosen to be right rather than popular and that's probably why I'm neither rich nor famous. Everything that's prospering appears to be pandering to the LCD (the Lowest Common Denominator). Is it any wonder television and radio can rightfully be described as a vast desert with an occasional oasis!!

EDITOR'S NOTE: Because of some wonderful assistance by several friends of BE, I spoke on a San Antonio radio station on July 11, 1989. I only mention this appearance because it was a particularly flagrant example of the kind of reception I sometimes receive on-the-air. First, besides the obvious time limitations on my presentation imposed by multiple advertisements, the host was particularly one-sided and obnoxious. He began with a question about our March issue in an obvious attempt to put me on the defensive and sought to dwell on the point until I said "uncle." I shouldn't have to remind the host of any call-in program that BE is not on trial; the Bible is. The Bible is being scrutinized, not BE. The Bible is claiming infallibility, not BE. The

Bible is alleging divine inspiration; not BE. Secondly, the host seemed determined that I was not going to present my case with any degree of depth or breadth. In fact, I was rarely able to present more than a fact or two before he would either ask a question to throw me off, switch to another subject, engage a caller, or cut to a commercial. Thirdly, after I left the show I don't doubt that the remainder of the program, if it was open forum, was primarily devoted to a litany of callers teaming with the host to denounce me and everything I said, while fully cognizant of my inability to respond.

The main question in issues of this nature is whether radio talk show hosts want to know what is wrong with the Bible or merely engage a controversial speaker to hype their ratings on what would probably otherwise be a dull afternoon.

What should be done on a program of this kind is similar to that which occurs in a courtroom. Since the Bible is on trial, the prosecutor should be able to present his case without interruption for at least five to ten minutes. Then the defense attorneys can leap on anything said with fangs glaring. Unfortunately, as things now stand, many people are so incapable of hearing anything critical about the Bible that disorder often breaks out after a couple of initial comments and the program deteriorates from there.

Issue No. 82

Oct. 1989

COMMENTARY

PETER VERSUS THE OT (Part Two of a Two-Part Series)--Last month's commentary focused on the contradictions between the sayings of Peter and OT verses. This month's analysis will conclude that enumeration by listing instances in which Peter either misquoted or misinterpreted the OT. We'll begin with misquotations. (14) 1 PETER 2:6 ("Wherefore also it is contained in the Scripture, Behold I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: And he that believeth on him shall not be confounded") versus ISAIAH 28:16 ("...therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste"). Peter twisted Isaiah 28:16 in several respects: (a) Isaiah says, "he that believeth shall not make haste." It never uses the phrase "on him." (b) Isaiah says "make haste" not "be confounded." (c) Isaiah never implies the stone [which Christians think is Jesus] is "elect" or "precious." (d) And Isaiah never implies the stone is "chief" among many. (15) ACTS 1:20 ("For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein....") versus PSALM 69:25 ("Let their habitation be desolate; and let none dwell in their tents"). Psalm 69:25 says "their" habitation and "their" tents. At no time does it refer to one person or "his." The Psalm is actually an appeal by David to God for aid in David's struggle with his enemies. (16) ACTS 2:16-17 ("But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God....") versus JOEL 2:28 ("And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour...."). Joel says nothing about "the last days." (17) ACTS 1:20 ("For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his {Judas--Ed.} habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishopric let another take") versus PSALM 109:8 ("Let his days be few; and let another take his office"). (a) Peter is quoting Psalm 109:8 which says nothing about a bishopric. Office and bishopric are not necessarily the same. (b) While Peter is referring to his habitation being desolate, the Psalmist is referring to his days being few. They are not identical since one could have many days and still conclude with a desolate habitation. (c) The Psalmist, David, is referring to his enemies, not Judas. David is saying he hopes his enemies are punished. The context of Psalm 109:8 shows it is not a Davidic prophecy about Judas. (18) ACTS 2:18-20 ("And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit; and

they shall prophesy: And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke: The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come") versus JOEL 2:29-31 ("And also upon the servants and upon the handmaids in those days will I pour out my spirit. And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and the terrible day of the Lord come"). Peter misquoted Joel in several respects. (a) Joel says "the" servants and "the" handmaids rather than "my" servants and "my" handmaids and says nothing about them prophesying. (b) Joel says "the heavens," which is plural, rather than "heaven above." (c) Joel does not have "beneath" or "signs," and he has "pillars" instead of "vapour." (d) And Joel has "terrible day" rather than "notable day" which could hardly be a reference to the wonderful arrival of Jesus. (19) 1 PETER 2:22 ("Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth") versus ISAIAH 53:9 ("...because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth"). Peter misquoted Isaiah 53:9 which says "no violence," instead of "no sin." Sin and violence are not the same. Apparently Peter realized "he hath done no violence" could not be applied to Jesus because of the latter's treatment of the moneychangers at the temple.

And finally, we have instances in which Peter misinterpreted, either intentionally or otherwise, some OT verses. (20) ACTS 1:16 ("Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus"). David never said anything about Judas. Psalm 41:9 ("Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I (Jesus--Ed.) trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me"), which was discussed earlier, does not apply because the speaker in Psalm 41:9 said in Psalm 41:4, "I said, Lord, be merciful unto me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against thee." If Jesus is the speaker in Psalm 41:9 then he is also the sinner in Psalm 41:4. Yet, the Bible states in 1 John 3:5 ("...and in him is no sin...") and 1 Peter 2:22 ("Who did no sin...") that Jesus was sinless. (21) 1 PETER 2:8 ("And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient...") versus ISAIAH 8:14 ("And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to both houses of Israel..."). (a) Isaiah 8:13 ("Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread"), which precedes Isaiah 8:14, shows that the "he" in Isaiah 8:14 is referring to God not Jesus. (b) Moreover, Isaiah 8:14 says he is a rock of offence to both houses of Israel only, not to all those who are disobedient. (22) ACTS 2:27 ("Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption") versus PSALM 16:10 ("For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption"). Peter correctly quoted Psalm 16:10 but misapplied the statement. His interpretation of the Psalmist is incorrect for several reasons. (a) Holy One was translated from a Hebrew word meaning holy one or saints (plural), not Holy One (singular). The plural shows it refers to the pious generally. (b) "Corruption" comes from a Hebrew word meaning "grave" not corruption. Correctly translated it should have been "wilt not suffer thy saints to see destruction." (23) ACTS 2:30 ("...God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne") versus PSALM 132:11-12 ("The Lord hath sworn in truth unto David; he will not turn from it; Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne. If thy children will keep my covenant and my testimony that I shall teach them, their children shall also sit upon thy throne for evermore"). (a) The psalmist clearly shows that not one man only but any of David's descendants who keep God's covenant will sit upon David's throne. There is no hint whatsoever that only one man received the promise. (b) The psalmist does not mention Christ or Jesus. (24) Lastly, we have Peter's comments concerning the Suffering Jesus in 1 PETER 1:11 ("...the Spirit of Christ which was in them [the prophets--Ed.] did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow"), 1 PETER 2:21-24 ("...because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who when he was reviled, reviled not

again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed"), and ACTS 3:18 ("But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he [Jesus--Ed.] hath so fulfilled"). The OT speaks of a suffering servant which Peter interprets as a suffering messiah, i.e. Jesus, but for reasons mentioned in the 30th Issue, the suffering servant mentioned in the 53rd chapter of Isaiah has nothing to do with Jesus.

That completes our two-month exposure of instances in which Peter not only misquoted but misinterpreted the OT. When these infractions are viewed in conjunction with the exposure of Peter's character in Issue #5 and his conflicts with Jesus, Paul and himself found in Issue #44, the credibility of this major NT figure is irreparably damaged. As we discovered earlier with Paul, one can't trust someone who is so loose with the facts and cavalier with the truth.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #328 from Edward McCartney, P.O. Box 770024, Lakewood, Ohio 44107-0011

Dear Dennis Concerning Issue #79, page 1, point 65a, you said, "Jesus could not be that Branch because he was not a physical descendant of David. Joseph was not his physical father..."

You are correct in saying that Joseph was not his physical father. However, concerning Jesus about whom you said that he was not a physical descendant of David, need I remind you of my 9 page letter to you dated Nov. 28, 1988? Did you forget Romans 1:3 which says, "Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh."

Editor's Response to Letter #328

Dear Ed. Could you provide textual support to corroborate Rom. 1:3? I know of nothing in the Bible showing Jesus was the son of David according to the flesh. The genealogies in Matthew and Luke trace the ancestry of Jesus back to David through Joseph, but Joseph was not the physical father of Jesus. Therefore there can be no physical connection between Jesus and David. The chain was broken at Joseph because of the Virgin Birth.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #329 from GN of Phoenix, Arizona

Dear Dennis. Enclosed is my check for a subscription to your newsletter Biblical Errancy. I, too, am interested in exposing the errors and immorality of the Bible. I have obtained a vast amount of biblical knowledge but I lack the courage to debate the fundamentalist fanatics. I would like to help support your work and to contribute some of the things that I have learned over the years.

Your sample issue of Biblical Errancy had a commentary on the Flood. You mentioned the animal sacrifice at the end of the year. Biblical apologists will point to the fact that the clean animals were taken in by SEVENS. Whether that means seven animals or seven pairs I'm not sure. At any rate one of the clean animals would have been sacrificed. Surviving through the flood didn't do them a whole lot of good.

Another point, however, would have been that in our day and age many species are in danger of extinction.... There are many many more of these animals in existence than just one pair or seven pairs and yet they are in danger of being totally wiped off the face of the earth. Yet, we are to

believe that all these animals on the ark provided all the animals that are on the earth today even though they were not in a protected environment. I doubt that seven cows and seven sheep would have lasted long around the wolves, lions, tigers, etc. They would have been eaten up far sooner than they could have multiplied.

I certainly enjoyed the point about what the animals would have eaten since the earth was nothing but a muddy mess. How many seeds would have survived under water for a year? Would they have rotted? How did the dove get an olive leaf? Would not the olive leaf have rotted? What land vegetation could have survived a year of water?

....If I understand the Bible correctly, the window was not opened for 40 days. Whew, talk about oxygen!....What did they do with the...excrement for 40 days? What kind of disease would have manifested itself?....What about noise pollution? How would Noah and his family have slept with all those animals mooing, screaming, screeching, quacking, etc.? Where did the thousands of gallons of fresh water come from during those 40 days?....I also agree with your point about only 8 people taking care of all the animals on the ark. There isn't a zoo on earth with all the animals in it, let alone one being manned with only 8 people.....

Editor's Response to Letter #329

Dear GN. I'm sorry to hear you are afraid to debate fundamentalists. We need people who are willing to step into the fray. After all, how else are biblicists going to see the error of their ways. Certainly their clergymen aren't going to expose, much less dwell on, the Bible's inadequacies. If people such as ourselves don't provide the other side, who will? How are millions going to jettison a medieval mentality if we don't provide the other side? How will they advance? And if they don't, we are going to be fighting the church/state issues forever. Their positions on political and social issues are the obvious outcomes of a biblically-based philosophy. Unless you restructure the foundation, the superstructure will never change. Don't be afraid to engage in verbal combat. Sure, you'll lose some battles. I have. But do your research and learn from your mistakes. That's the key. You have to do your homework and you have to engage the other side.

I have had numerous contacts with a wide variety of freethinkers who employ, unfortunately, topics that interest them but are of little use in altering the minds of biblicists. Rather than using field-tested arguments, they resort to those that have been grown in greenhouses isolated and protected from the world of real combat. You have to expose your ideas to the opposition to perfect their effect, an activity shunned by many freethinkers. Not willing to take risks, they often float on ideas that need to be discarded or refined. Many of their concerns have no real value because they are of little or no interest to the other side. Stated bluntly, they don't turn biblicists on. So, even though their contentions may be factual, they aren't useful. Years ago, I learned that just because a point may be of concern to me doesn't mean it's going to be of interest to others. You can only discover where they are and what's effective by direct contact.

Secondly, you said clean beasts went into the ark by sevens and that would have made some available for sacrifice after they left the ark. Apparently you are referring to Gen. 7:2 which says, "Of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee by sevens, the male and his female: and of beasts that are not clean by two, the male and his female." True, apologists use this verse as an escape mechanism. However, biblicists conveniently ignore the fact that this verse flatly contradicts Gen. 7:8-9 which says, "Of clean beasts and of beasts that are not clean, and of fowls, and of every thing that creepeth upon the earth, There went in two and two unto Noah into the ark, the male and the female, as God had commanded Noah." This is a classic example of apologists using a verse that proves their point while ignoring one that doesn't.

Thirdly, you might note that Noah and his relatives were on the ark for more than 40 days.

Letter #330 from KB of Los Angeles, California

Dear Dennis....The only proper response to TF's "challenge" to "Prove that the Bible contains hundreds of problems and contradictions that can't be solved" is a stack of BE's and freethought publications, including Paine's *The Age of Reason*, and tell him not to bother you until he has shown conclusively that ALL of those problems and contradictions do not exist!

Letter #331 from REA of Norfolk, Virginia

Dear Mr. McKinsey: Don't you think it would be more appropriate for your publication to use the humanist terms BCE and ACE (or CE) instead of BC and AD.

Editor's Response to Letter #331

Dear REA. Not really. I capitalize words such as "God," "Devil," "Heaven," and "Hell," for example, because they are proper nouns, not out of any intended respect. Unlike some freethought advocates, I don't think that failure to capitalize is a sufficiently mature or effective manner in which to combat Christianity in general and the Bible in particular. It not only has little effect on the minds of readers but can be a positive hindrance to correct reading. "God" with a small "g" could lead one to believe that Christians believe in more than one God, a concept which could either include or exclude a supreme God.

A similar problem exists with respect to BCE (Before the Common Era) and ACE (After the Common Era). Most of the world uses the birth of the alleged Christian messiah as the point from which to date everything. That's an unfortunate fact of history based on aggression, suppression, proselytization, and co-optation by Christians. For the present and until the influence of religion diminishes considerably, we are stuck with a religious base from which to operate. At some time in the future a more rational standard will probably be chosen. Until then, more pressing problems are at hand.

If we are going to place struggles of this nature at the top of the agenda, then we will have to expunge a lot of religious influence in dating. Why restrict the conflict to Christianity? Tuesday is named after Tiu, a German god of war and the sky; Wednesday is named after Woden, a Teutonic god of art, culture, war and the dead; Thursday is named after Thor, a Norse god of thunder, war, and strength, and Friday is named after the goddess, Frig. Months fare no better. January is named after Janus, a Roman god; March is named after Mars, the Roman god of war; May is named after the goddess of increase, etc. There is no need to belabor the point; I think you get the idea. The question is how much importance are we going to attach to this and how much time are we going to spend to correct the situation. Is it worth the effort at this stage of the game. I think not. There are much more pressing and winnable battles that can be fought.

Moreover, the humanist switch to "Before the Common Era" and "After the Common Era" is of little value because one need consult any reputable dictionary, such as Webster's Collegiate, to see that the Common Era is the Christian Era. The definition of "Common Era" in my edition is: "Common Era same as Christian Era." And since the Christian Era begins with the birth of Christ, so does the Common Era. Humanists are dating everything from the same point as Christians but only applying another name. If they really expect to abolish the Christian domination of dating, then they must start with another event, not rename the same event. Jews, for instance, start dating events from their date of creation, which is 3761 BC according to

Christian dating. So, from the Jewish perspective we are in the year 5750. But how many Jews actually use that date on an everyday basis?

Letter #332 from Dan Barker of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, P.O. Box 750, Madison, Wisconsin 53701

(Dan is probably the most effective anti-religious spokesman on the national scene today. He has appeared on the Donahue, Jessy Raphael, and Morton Downey shows among others--Ed.).

Dear Dennis. I enjoyed your recent B.E. When I get some time I will write to you about my radio dialogue with Jim Buick, CEO of Zondervan, publishers of the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible. Zondervan's press office sent out press releases to hundreds of radio stations regarding our bible complaint (about having Bibles in the rooms of hotels and motels, I think--Ed.). I have done tons of phone hook-up radio shows opposite this guy Buick, who knows very little about the bible. Studying their NIV translation I conclude that it is quite dishonest. Buick didn't like me saying such things on the air, but I was able to support my criticisms. I pointed out that in the preface of the NIV, they admit that the translators are evangelicals -- "the translators were united in their commitment to the authority and infallibility of the Bible as God's Word in written form." This is hardly an objective criteria!

I asked Jim, suppose a group of 100 atheists were to produce a translation of the bible, claiming to be "committed to the unreliability and fallibility of the bible." Wouldn't he take our work with a grain of salt?

Anyway, when I have more time you will enjoy hearing some of our discussions. I think Zondervan's ploy backfired. They were hoping to use the gimmick to sell bibles -- instead, they gave the public an opportunity to hear bible criticism, perhaps for the first time. We have picked up some supporters from those shows....

Editor's Response to Letter #332

Dear Dan. It's always a pleasure to hear from you, especially because you are on the cutting edge. I'd certainly like to hear some of your discussions with Buick. Keep up the good work and let us know about the latest happenings in your area of concern.

Letter #333 from CB of Prescott, Arizona

Dear Dennis. I enjoy your newsletters very much as they are a source of education to me. I am not a student of "the" bible.

Editor's Response to Letter #333

Dear CB. The true rewards involved in writing this newsletter are the compliments we receive and the assistance we provide others. Without both, I'd probably reassess the entire endeavor. Rest assured, financial gain certainly isn't a factor.

Letter #334 from MS of Ames, Iowa

Dear Mr. McKinsey. People have always told me that there are contradictions in the Bible, but no one has been able to provide me with examples until now. I am told that you have all of the errors and contradictions in the Bible documented. I am very interested in getting hold of this information. I feel that all information, good or bad, pertaining to religion should be investigated

if I am to decide whether religion is true or false. You offer a very important part to this puzzle. Thank you for your time and I eagerly await your reply.

Editor's Response to Letter #334

Dear MS. We don't have all the contradictions and errors in the Bible, but I think we have all but cornered the market. Your willingness to give the other side a hearing is to be complimented. If only more biblicists were as openminded!

Letter #335 from RAM of Annapolis, Maryland

Dennis. On page 4, line 9 of Issue #79 you said, "You are engaging more in eisogesis than exegesis." Webster's Unabridged does not have "eisogesis"!....

Editor's Response to Letter #335

Dear RAM. You are correct. We have occasionally used the subjective word "eisogesis" (Reading into the text something that isn't there) instead of the objective word "exegesis" (Getting out of the text the meaning that is there). Being unable to find the word "eisogesis" in the dictionary, a couple of readers, including yourself, have questioned it's existence. Don't worry; the word was not my invention and is sometimes used in Christian circles. In order to find it in a dictionary, however, you must consult one of those big, thick tomes such as Webster's 3rd New International Dictionary, Unabridged, Copyright 1976 or the Random House Dictionary of the English Language, 2nd Edition, Unabridged, Copyright 1987.

Letter #336 from EST of Sanford, Maine

Dennis. I enjoy BE as always and am passing on to others what I learn from BE. I'm no debater; I just point out by chapter and verse the contradictions in the Bible and listen to the answers. Sometimes people convince themselves that they (and the Bible) are wrong while trying to defend it....Keep up the good work!

Letter #337 from RH of New York, New York

Hello Dennis....I look forward to BE every month. What a superb job you are doing! You are filling an important need. Best Wishes.

EDITOR'S NOTE: For some reason quite a few subscribers did not receive their July issue of BE. We've experienced this kind of problem before but not to such a degree. Hopefully it was accidental rather than intentional. We only mention the problem because other freethought publications have had similar difficulties. Unfortunately, biblicists not only read BE but deliver it as well, and one can't help but suspect foul play. Then, again, maybe it's only our imagination and the summer vacation postal replacements weren't up to snuff. Let's hope so.

Issue No. 83

Nov. 1989

COMMENTARY

JESUS, THE IMPERFECT BEACON (Part 5 of an Eight-Part Series)--In Issues 2, 3, and 9 BE opened with some major failings of Jesus that brought his role as mankind's beacon into serious

doubt. That was later followed in Issues 24, 25, 27, and 28 by a much more extensive list that obviated any possibility of his claim to perfection and the messiahship. Despite the fact that the latter issues, alone, contained 96 of his shortcomings, the number of biblical deficiencies that are available was by no means exhausted. This issue, and those to follow, were written to rectify that shortfall by listing all of the remaining examples that are in BE's notebooks. Issue 28 concluded with the 96th example and we will proceed from there. (97) MARK 2:25-26 ("And Jesus said unto them, Have ye never read what David did, when he had need, and was an hungered, he, and they that were with him? How he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and did eat the shewbread, which is not lawful to eat but for the priests, and gave also to them which were with him?") versus 1 SAM. 21:1, 6, 22:20 ("Then came David to Nob to Ahimelech the priest: and Ahimelech was afraid at the meeting of David, and said unto him, why art thou alone, and no man with thee?... So the priest gave him hallowed bread; for there was no bread there but the shewbread.... And one of the sons of Ahimelech the son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped, and fled after David"). The OT shows that Abithar did not give David the shewbread but was the son of the priest, Ahimelech, who did, and David came alone, not with others. (98) JOHN 5:28-29 ("...for the hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation"), Matt. 25:46 ("And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal"), Luke 20:37 ("Now that the dead are raised...."), and Dan. 12:2 ("And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to everlasting contempt") versus JOB 7:9 ("As the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away: so he that goeth down to the grave shall come up no more") and Eccle. 3:19-21 NIV ("Man's fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal....all come from dust, and to dust all return. Who knows if the spirit of man rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?"). Jesus' assertion that people will be resurrected is denied by the OT. (99) JOHN 7:38 ("He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, 'out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water'"). Contrary to Jesus' assertion, there is no such statement in the OT. Isa. 44:3 ("For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring...."), Isa. 55:1 ("Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters...."), Ezek. 47:1, Isa. 58:11, Zech. 13:1, Zech. 14:8, Prov. 18:4, and Isa. 12:3 just don't apply. (100) MARK 7:27 ("Jesus told her, First I should help my own family--the Jews. It isn't right to take the childrens food and throw it to the dogs"). Imagine! Jesus equated non-Jews with dogs. (101) MATT. 15:28 ("Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour"). Jesus cured the woman's daughter, not out of humaneness towards the child, but as a reward for the mother's faith. The 23rd verse ("But he answered her not a word") and the 25th verse ("Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me") show he didn't even answer her until she begged. (102) MARK 9:23 ("Jesus said unto him, If thou canst believe all things are possible to him that believeth"), John 14:12-14 ("He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do because I go unto my Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do.... If ye shall ask anything in my name I will do it") and Luke 17:6 ("And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamore tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you") versus MARK 9:29 ("And he said unto them, This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer and fasting"). First we are told only belief is needed to do anything; now it requires prayer and fasting. (103) MATT. 19:26 ("But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible: but with God all things are possible") and Mark 10:27 ("...for with God all things are possible") versus JUDGES 1:19 ("And the Lord was with Judah; and he drave out the inhabitants of the mountain; but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron"). If all things are possible with God and he was with Judah, then why couldn't Judah

drive out the inhabitants of the valley? (104) MATT. 26:56 ("But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled"). No quotation from the OT is provided nor is the name of the biblical author given. (105) MARK 13:32 ("But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father") versus JOHN 10:30 ("I and my Father are one"). If Jesus is one with God as he claims, then he is God's equal; yet, he doesn't know all as God does. (106) LUKE 24:17, 19 ("And Jesus said unto them, What manner of communications are these that ye have one another.... And Jesus said unto them, What things?"). Jesus is deceiving his listeners. Since he knows all, there is no reason to ask questions. (107) LUKE 5:22 ("But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, he answering said unto them, What reason ye in your hearts?") and Matt. 9:4 ("And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts?"). Is Jesus' knowledge of science so poor as to believe people think in their hearts? Perhaps it's allegorical, but not necessarily. (108) LUKE 9:56 ("For the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them") versus REV. 19:11-16 RSV ("Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! He who sat upon it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war.... He is clad in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, followed him on white horses. From his mouth issues a sharp sword with which to smite the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron;.... On his robe and on his thigh he has a name inscribed, King of Kings and Lord of lords"). (109) MATT. 21:22 ("And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer believing, ye shall receive") versus ISAIAH 1:15 ("And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yet, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear....") and Lam. 3:44 ("Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through"). (110) MARK 4:11-12 ("And Jesus said unto them, Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables: That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them"). Jesus intentionally wants people to not understand, not convert, and not be forgiven?? (111) MARK 11:2, Luke 19:30 ("And saith unto them, Go your way into the village over against you: And as soon as ye be entered into it, ye shall find a colt tied, whereon never man sat; loose him, and bring him") versus MATT. 21:2 ("Saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her; loose them, and bring them unto me"). Is it "loose him" or "loose them" and which is tied, a colt or an ass? (112) MATT. 9:18 ("While Jesus spake these things unto them, behold, there came a certain ruler, and worshipped him, saying, my daughter is even now dead: but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live"). Later, in the 24th and 25th verses Jesus said, "Give place: for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed him to scorn. But when the people were put forth, he went in, and took her by the hand, and the maid arose." If the ruler's daughter was dead, then, Jesus lied. If she was not dead, then he performed no miracle. (113) MATT. 12:40 ("...so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth"). Was Jesus actually put in the earth, especially the heart of the earth? (114) Lastly, we have LUKE 4:17-21 ("And there was delivered unto Jesus the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord; And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down.... And Jesus began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears") versus ISAIAH 61:1-2 ("The spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God to comfort all that mourn...."). Jesus' recitation of Isa. 61:1-2 is inaccurate. (a) Isaiah said nothing about healing the blind. (b) Isaiah says, "opening of the prison to them that bound," not "to set at liberty them that

are bruised." (c) The statement in Isaiah was made by Isaiah concerning himself, long before Jesus was born, and can't be twisted into proving Jesus was anointed. (d) Actually what Jesus is quoting is a statement by Isaiah that he had been appointed by God to tell the exiled, broken, downtrodden, afflicted, captive Jews that the day is coming when they shall be saved, eat the riches of the Gentiles, and have eternal joy. (e) Jesus did not finish reading all of Isaiah's comments. If he had read down to Isa. 61:8, he would not have said, "This day is this scripture fulfilled."

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #338 from CF of New York, New York (Part a)

Dennis McKinsey. Re: Issue #80, Letter #317, Response C. What Jesus (allegedly) said was, "...take up his cross....," a concept that was probably a common thought and colloquial expression in the days of Roman crucifixions and was similar to "millstone around the neck," "monkey on the back," and "ball and chain" etc. It may have meant that whoever followed him was in for hardship and for threats of crucifixion by Jews or Romans. Neither Jesus nor the people he spoke to needed to know that he would be crucified and the cross would be the symbol of a religion when he said it.

Editor's Response to Letter #338 (Part a)

CF. First, how can you assert that Jesus "allegedly said take up his cross"? There is nothing "allegedly" about it. The text clearly says, and I'm quoting Mark 8:34 verbatim, "whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me." Maybe, on the other hand, you mean to imply that "his cross" refers to the cross each person must bear rather than the Christian Cross in particular. If so, you are basing your argument on supposition and conjecture. Do you have any evidence that "taking up your cross" was a colloquial expression in Roman times? Your comment that "it may have meant" shows you are guessing. Second, would Jesus have urged people to take up any other cross than the very symbol of Christianity? In Matt. 10:38 ("And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me") and Luke 14:27 ("And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple") Jesus made strong statements to the effect that if you didn't take up the cross to which he referred, you didn't merit being saved by him. What cross can that be other than the cross of Christianity? Third, the verse immediately after Mark 8:34, which is Mark 8:35 ("For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it"), shows that the cross under discussion is a cross having to do with matters as serious as salvation and damnation. What cross can that be other than the Christian cross? Fourth, in Gal. 6:24 Paul said, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ...." For Paul there is only one cross, but your supposition implies there are others of comparable importance that should be taken up.

Letter #338 Concludes (Part b)

Since you never give-in or compromise or retract regarding your assertions, I've wondered if there is a conscious pragmatism at work to equal Biblicists/Apologetists' characteristic refusal to admit error and to avoid having rare errors on your part used against you in an attempt to discredit the preponderance of correct information you present. As long as there's no real proof that you were incorrect, it's probably better not to admit doubts and then to avoid the specific topic when possible. Right?

Editor's Response to Letter 338 (Part b)

No, wrong! Apparently you missed what I said in the Editor's Note on page 6 of Issue #79 so I'll repeat my earlier comment: "Perhaps I've erred: it's happened before. So I'll not pursue the issue." Those aren't the words of someone who never gives in or retracts statements. Secondly, could you provide instances in which I hid among statements for which "there's no real proof" that I'm incorrect or that I avoided topics because of my own doubts? You have impugned my integrity without providing a shred of evidence. Do you often indict people based on speculation and conjecture? A wise maxim to follow when dealing with topics of this nature is that "If you can't prove it, don't say it." To even imply without evidence that someone is less than forthright, as you did with your "I've wondered" comment, reflects adversely on your integrity. However, I would like to thank you for referring to "rare errors on my part."

Letter #339 from DT of Queensland, Australia (Part a)

(Several months ago DT sent us a copy of *The Bible Examined and Found Wanting*, a 41 page biblical critique of his own creation. After reading it I made the following comment on page 5 of Issue #81: "Although your booklet, 'The Bible Examined and Found Wanting' had a few miscitations and some inadequacies, I found it to be better than most writings of that nature. Although BE focuses on more than just biblical contradictions, I'd be interested in having a copy of the 1,000 contradictions you mentioned. Keep up the good work." DT quickly sent me a letter wanting to know where the problems were and left the impression he doubted their existence. I responded with a note attached to his copy of BE stating that there weren't very many and he need not be concerned. Most people are not going to be that critical. DT sent the following letter in reply.--ED.).

Dear Dennis. Many thanks for your note. In view of the fact that you are such a stickler for facts, as is evidenced even in the latest issue of *Biblical Errancy*, Issue No. 82, where you write "one can't trust someone who is so loose with the facts and cavalier with the truth," I am very surprised that after claiming that my book contained a number of miscitations, you now tell me they are not worth worrying about. I am not satisfied with this, however; and request that you either provide me with a list of the miscitations, or retract your previous assertion in the next issue of your magazine. Whether I send you my list of 1000 contradictions in the Bible depends on your response to my request.

Editor's Response to Letter #339 (Part a)

Dear DT. I thought I was quite complimentary toward your booklet. I clearly stated it was "better than most writings of that nature" and only had a "few miscitations and some inadequacies." I concluded my compliments by recommending that you "keep up the good work." The note which I sent you even suggested that you not worry about the mistakes contained therein since they weren't very numerous. And how am I rewarded? By receiving a challenging letter that is downright unpleasant. Your put-up or shut-up approach is certainly not conducive to cooperation between those exposing the Bible. I'm tempted to say, "Would you be willing to pay me \$100 for every error I find therein," but, instead, I'll simply enumerate the mistakes I found after a rather cursory reading. If I had gotten out my magnifying glass I probably would have found more. (1) On page 13 you state, "Isaiah 37:8 tells us of a case where the sun is actually supposed to have gone backwards!" That verse says nothing about the sun doing anything. (2) On page 40 you state, Eph. 2:12 says that one is saved by grace through faith given by God." It says nothing of the sort. (3) On page 27 you state, "But 2 Chron. 36:6 says that Jehoiakim reigned 11 years in Jerusalem." The verse says nothing about him reigning 11 years anywhere. (4) On page 30 you state, "Hebrews 1:2 and 9:26 say that Jesus had come 'at the end of the ages' to put away sin." One need only read these two verses to see that Hebrews 1:2, unlike Hebrews 9:26, says nothing about Jesus putting away sin. (5) On page 21 you state, "John 19:25 says that Jesus spoke to his

mother who was standing by the cross with Mary Magdalene." In truth, Jesus said nothing whatever in that verse. (6) And on page 16 you state, "Luke 1:26 says that the angel came to Mary" when a more accurate citation would have been verses 27 and 28. I also stated there were some inadequacies in your booklet. On page 32 you state, "Circumcision, which is an essential element of this covenant, with its neglect being punishable by death (Gen. 17:14)...." Your exegesis should exhibit greater precision because apologists criticize whenever possible and this instance will provide them a good opportunity. Gen. 17:14 RSV actually says, "Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant." Why do you assume "cut off" means killed, when apologists could easily claim it only means banishment or expulsion from the group? You read more into the verse than is warranted. The same kind of laxity is also evident on page 35. You say, "1 Sam. 18 says that king Saul had two daughters, Merab and Michal. Verse 19 says that Merab married Adriel the Meholathite, and 1 Sam. 25:44 says that Michal married Palt: the son of Laish. However, 2 Sam. 21:8 says that Michal married Adriel the Meholathite." True, 1 Sam. 18:19 says Merab married Adriel, but where does 1 Sam. 25:44 say that Michal married Palt and where does 2 Sam. 21:8 say that Michal married Adriel. First Sam. 25:44 ("Saul had given Michal his daughter, David's wife, to Phalti the son of Laish....") and 2 Sam. 21:8 ("...and the five sons of Michal the daughter of Saul, whom she brought up for Adriel....") say nothing about marriage. Remember, Lot gave his daughters away, too, and that had nothing to do with marriage. Why would Saul give his daughter, Michal, to Phalti for marriage when he knew she was already married to David? And although 2 Sam. 21:8 says Michal brought up her five sons for Adriel, it does not say they were married. Don't assume more than the verse warrants or insert unjustified interpretations. That's eisegesis, not exegesis.

Letter #339 Concludes (Part b)

(At the top of DT's letter was a big cross giving the letter a distinctively Christian aura. I not only asked DT why he would put a cross at the top of his letter if he was as opposed to the Bible as his writings implied, but also if he was merely a Christian opposing the Bible--ED.).

Regarding your query as to why I should have put a Cross at the top of my letter, and as to whether I am really just a Christian who is opposed to the Bible. I can see that you have a wonderful sense of humour. Seeing that you also have a Holy Bible at the head of your magazine, I was wondering the same about you. Actually, I am a pagan, and the Cross is the phallic symbol of my religion. Because I no longer regard the Bible as sacred, I am no more anti-Bible than I am anti-pornography. I actually enjoy studying the Bible now that it no longer has any power over me....Hoping to hear from you again soon.

Editor's Response to Letter #339 (Part b)

I was unaware that humor would emanate from my question, DT. You mean you see no difference between your heading with the Cross and mine with the Bible? Since my Bible is torn in half, one would hardly assume that it arose from one who holds the Book in awe. Moreover, the words "Biblical Errancy" are found inbetween and project precisely the opposite impression of that which the Book's proponents claim is contained therein. Your cross, on the other hand, is in the normal position, has a prominent place in your heading, is rather large, and is not upside down, tilted, broken, enflamed or otherwise demeaned. If that doesn't warrant the questions I posed, I don't know what does. You call yourself a "pagan," a term normally applied by Christians to their opponents. I would never call myself a "pagan," or its synonym "heathen," not only because Webster defines the latter as "unenlightened" or "uncivilized" but also because adoption of the opponent's terminology concedes half the struggle and is tactically unwise. When

you say "my religion," I assume you are still religious or accept some kind of religion. That makes my original question with reference to your cross on the letterhead all the more relevant.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #340 from BWF of Richmond, Indiana

Dear Dennis. Nice to get Issue #81 direct to my present address. Excellent as usual. Good to see your page 3 where you...show fundamentalist hardshells that their own scriptures urge them to argue and confute, not to pooh-pooh. I note the old bugaboo sp. Pharaoh creeping in again, Dennis, and some typos: p. 2--prophesied; p. 3--occurrence; p. 5--ostracized; and it may have been PD's fault, p. 4--Stephen, not Steven. Just nitpicking--needn't advert to this in your next BE, of course. Keller needed quote marks at the end of his quote on the top of page 5.

Editor's Response to Letter #340

Dear BWF. What can I say? I compared my spellings with Webster's and discovered you are correct on every point. I'm a stickler for accuracy and corrected my originals after hearing from you. Corrections of this nature keep me on my toes and aren't nitpicks. I could use a proof-reader with your talents. Come what may, I'm going to get "pharaoh" correct. It is a simple word to spell but I repeatedly type the "a" and "o" in reverse order.

Letter #341 from EB of Canton, Michigan

Dear Dennis. At last I can pass out a pamphlet that gets to the foundation of the problem--the Bible. Your pamphlet is a great "eye opener" at work. Since a lot of people take on faith that the Bible is a "good book," they really listen when I'm discussing the problems the pamphlet raises. I can tell they have never heard these questions raised in church. Please send 100 more of THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD. Keep up the good work!

Letter #342 from JF of Decatur, Illinois

Hello Dennis. You got a plug in the July issue of the newsletter of the Religion and Ethics Institute. I have enclosed a copy for you. I've also enclosed another item of possible interest. I'm surprised you aren't burned out! You keep fighting the fight and hanging tough. Keep up the good work.

(The other item of possible interest is the following letter to Dear Abby--Ed.). Dear Abby: A member of my family keeps telling me that it is written in the Bible that the Lord approves of giving a person intoxicating drink to drown his sorrow and lessen his pain. This person is a very heavy drinker, and I think he just made it up as an excuse for his own drinking. If there is such a passage in the Holy Bible, please tell me and I will apologize, because I called him a liar to his face. Thank you.--Can't Believe It.

(Abby answered with--Ed.). Dear Can't: You should apologize. Proverbs 31:6-7 says, "Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts. Let him drink, and forget his poverty, and remember his misery no more."

Letter #343 from MD of Sacramento, California

Dear Mr. McKinsey. I was very happy to have reached you by phone the other night and to have had a brief chat....I really hate to see superstition spread like it does, and having attended Sunday

School since the impressionable age of 2, I do love your statement in my sample issue that you're teaching "a kind of Sunday-School-In-Reverse." I do not look fondly on my days spent in church....I'm looking forward to reading your forthcoming issues of BE.

Issue No. 84

Dec. 1989

COMMENTARY

JESUS, THE IMPERFECT BEACON (Part 6 of an Eight-Part Series)--This month's commentary will continue the enumeration of Jesus' failings begun in last month's issue: (115) JOHN 5:37 ("And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape"). Yet, many verses show that God has been seen and heard on numerous occasions. Obvious examples are: Gen. 3:8-10 ("And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden.... And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him. Where art thou? And Adam said, I heard thy voice in the garden...."), Ex. 19:19 ("...Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice"), Deut. 4:36 ("Out of heaven he made thee to hear his voice, that he might instruct thee...."), Ex. 20:22, Deut. 4:12, 33, 5:23-26, and Job 38:1. (116) JOHN 18:36 ("Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my Kingdom were of this world....") versus ZECH. 9:10, Psalm 72:8 ("...and he shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth"), Zech. 14:9 ("And the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day there shall be one Lord, and his name one"), Luke 1:32-33 ("He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever: and of his Kingdom there shall be no end"), Dan. 7:14, 27, and Isa. 60:12. (117) MATT. 10:9-10 ("Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves....") versus MARK 6:8-9 ("And commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only; no scrip, no bread, no money in their purse"). Jesus can't seem to decide whether or not his followers should take staves on their journeys. (118) JOHN 5:46 ("For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me"). Moses never wrote of Jesus and numerous discussions of the Mosaic prophecies in earlier issues of BE prove as much. (119) MARK 12:26 ("And as touching the dead, that they rise: have ye not read in the book of Moses how in the bush God spake unto him, saying...."). It may be called the "Book of Moses" but the commentaries entitled Moses and the Pentateuch in Issues 19 and 20 clearly show Moses was not the author. (120) MATT. 22:19-21 ("Show me {Jesus--Ed.} the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny. And he saith unto them, Whose is this image and superscription? They say unto him, Caesar's. Then saith he unto them, Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesars....") versus MATT. 17:24-26 RSV ("When they came to Capernaum, the collectors of the half shekel tax went up to Peter and said, Does not your teacher pay the tax? Peter said, 'Yes' And when Peter came home, Jesus spoke to him first, saying, What do you think, Simon? From whom do kings of the earth take toll or tribute? From their sons or from others? And when Peter said, From others, Jesus said to him, Then the sons are free"). In other words, if you are not a foreigner but are one of the Kings sons, i.e. subjects, it is not really necessary to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's. (121) JOHN 3:18 ("He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God") versus MATT. 7:21 ("Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven...."). (122)

LUKE 14:8-10 NEB ("When you are asked by someone to a wedding-feast, do not sit down in the place of honour. It may be that some person more distinguished than yourself has been

invited; and the host will come and say to you, 'Give this man your seat.' Then you will look foolish as you begin to take the lowest place. No, when you receive an invitation, go and sit down in the lowest place...."). Jesus is teaching classism more than humility. (123) JOHN 4:24 ("God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth") versus GEN. 18:1-3 ("And the Lord appeared unto Abraham in the plains of Mamre: and Abraham sat in the tent door in the heat of the day; and he lift up his eyes and looked, and lo, three men stood by him; and when he saw them, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground, And said, My Lord..."). We are told God is spirit; yet, he appeared to Abraham in a purely physical form. (124) MATT. 5:34-36 ("But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head....") versus DEUT. 10:20 ("Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God; him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave, and swear by his name"), Deut. 6:13 ("Thou shalt fear the Lord God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name"), Num. 30:2 ("If a man vow unto the Lord, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth"), Isa. 45:23 ("I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear"), Isa. 65:16 ("...and he that sweareth in the earth shall swear by the God of truth...."), Jer. 4:2, and Psalm 63:11. Either we have a contradiction or Jesus has repealed that part of the old law which promotes swearing. (125) MATT. 11:27 ("...And no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him"). If this is true, then how could the prophets have known about God. Since they lived before Jesus and God could not have been revealed to them except through Jesus, they could not have known God or spoken to him. Moreover, since the authors of the gospels, as well as Peter and Paul, based their claims about Jesus on the prophecies of prophets who could not have known God, the entire structure collapses. (126) JOHN 8:7 ("Jesus lifted himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her"). If this principle were adopted as a general rule, mankind might as well abolish all courts and punishments. Following this approach would require the liberation of every one who is imprisoned, because we are all fallible. Moreover, if we can't punish anyone because we are not free from sin ourselves, then how can God justly punish man for sinning. After all, Lam. 3:38 ("Is it not from the Most High that good and evil come?") shows God is not immaculate either. (127) MARK 10:29-30 ("There is no man that hath left house...for my sake...But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses...and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life"). Jesus promised vast riches to those who would follow him. Yet, in verses such as Luke 14:33, 18:22, 12:33, 11:41, 3:11, 9:3, Matt. 19:21, and Matt. 6:19 he repeatedly admonished his followers to surrender all of their worldly possessions. (128) MARK 10:30 ("But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers...."). How one person can have "mothers," and have them retrospectively as Jesus promised, is rather hard to imagine also. (129) MICAH 7:18 ("...he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy") versus MATT. 25:46 ("And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal"), Matt. 3:12 ("...but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire"), and Matt. 18:8 ("...it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire"). Since one can spend an eternity in hell, obviously God can retain his anger forever. (130) JOHN 14:12-14 ("Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do.... If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it"), John 15:7 ("If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you"), John 15:16, 16:23 ("whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you"), and Matt. 21:22 ("And all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive") contend prayers will provide everything requested. Yet, millions of believers have prayed to Jesus millions of times

and met only failure. His promise of the universal efficacy of prayer has proven as miserable a sham as his promise of all power to those with faith. (131) LUKE 22:31-33 ("Simon, Simon [Peter--Ed.], behold, Satan demanded to have you that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail; and when you have turned again, strengthen your brethren. And Peter said to him, Lord I am ready to go with you to prison and to death") versus MATT. 26:69-70 ("Now Peter sat without in the palace; and a damsel came unto him, saying, Thou also wast with Jesus of Galilee. But he denied before them all saying, I know not what thou sayest"), Matt. 26:74 ("Then began he to curse and to swear, saying, I know not the man"), Matt. 14:31 ("And immediately Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught Peter, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, why didst thou doubt?"), Matt. 16:23 ("But Jesus turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men"). How can praying be useful when even the prayers of Jesus failed? Even though he prayed for Peter's faith to endure, Peter denied him in the end.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #344 from TF, Editor of Bible Answers Newsletter of Pasadena, Maryland (Part a)

(In Parts a through i of Letter #310 in Issues 77, 78, 79, and 80 TF and I clashed on some biblical assertions and he now seeks to resume the encounter--Ed.). In the December 1988 issue, I responded to some assertions made by Dennis McKinsey, editor of "Biblical Errancy." Speaking of "the billions of beings that die as fetuses, infants, mental deficient, etc.," McKinsey asserts, "For them to accept Jesus would be impossible...."

I answered, "Suppose each person has a conscious, competent, soul at conception? I don't advocate that doctrine, but I see that you haven't proved yours." Since McKinsey had made an assertion, he needed reasoning or evidence to support it. I merely pointed out that the consciousness or competence of a fetus is a possibility which is not subject to proof or disproof by empirical study. McKinsey must remain silent (open-minded) on the subject or take a dogmatic position. If he chooses dogma, he ought to be honest about it.

The (epistemological) problem is that we cannot presume that the currently available memories of children and adults are complete. It may be that people have clear, vivid, and very sophisticated experiences as fetuses, and that some fundamental value judgments occur even with a single cell, but that the resources for long-term memory are undeveloped. Such a doctrine has some very interesting arguments on its behalf. Furthermore, the epistemological method of Phenomenology allows for the possibility that a fetus experiences the essential intuitive recognition of interpersonal relations, the reality of God, sin, love, forgiveness, atonement, contract/covenant, etc.

McKinsey writes, "I am under no obligation to prove something does not exist which you claim does. The burden of proof lies on he (sic) who alleges; that's axiomatic. You are obligated to prove that an embryo is 'conscious and competent' at conception sufficient to make a...decision to accept Jesus."

Wrong again, McKinsey. You have asserted the existence of people who were not "conscious and competent" at conception. That assertion requires support. To assert the existence of some who were "conscious and competent" at conception would likewise call for support. I have not asserted either doctrine, because I am open-minded on that question. I asked you to consider the fact that your assumption might be false, since it cannot be proven. I asked you to "suppose" the hypothetical contrary doctrine merely as an aid to your understanding, and clearly stated that "I

don't advocate that doctrine." Now I challenge you again to support your assertion or admit that it is dogma.

Editor's Response to Letter #344 (Part a)

Dear TF. The first point I made to you during our initial exchange last May was that, "With all due respect, I think you would do well to consult notable apologists before engaging in apologetics. I'd suggest Josh McDowell and Gleason Archer for openers. Their grasp of the imbrolios our pamphlets expose is much more perceptive and their rationalizations are more relevant. Your explanations, on the other hand, are often without substance, disjointed, and not germane." Obviously, you ignored my advice as your current infatuation vividly demonstrates. If it wasn't for the fact that your publication may influence the unwary, I'd be inclined to ignore such an inane defense. If that is the best you can do, I'd say desperation has set in. First, if you don't believe "each person has a conscious, competent soul at conception," then why do you keep bringing it up? Why don't you admit you are surreptitiously trying to give a vacuous idea some degree of credibility? Second, do you have so much as a scintilla of scientific evidence that "some fundamental value judgments occur even with a single cell" or that a fetus "experiences the essential intuitive recognition of interpersonal relations, the reality of God, sin, love, forgiveness, atonement, contracts etc.?" Your assertion that my assumption...cannot be proven is false because competent neurologists can show that the brain and nervous system of a fetus is not capable of conceiving ideas such as God, sin, atonement, and covenant. One of your readers criticized you on the same point in the same issue of your periodical. On page 6 he said, "If you seriously believe that a human zygote might be fully conscious, then you must either be lost in some metaphysical muddle or out of touch with the science of biology. Science has demonstrated a relationship between consciousness and neural development. A zygote only has a blueprint for a mind -- not the real thing. You've demonstrated a profound failure to understand what is meant by 'scientific proof.'" Third, you say "the epistemological method of Phenomenology allows for the possibility that a fetus experiences...." which is typical of the epistemological metaphysical doubletalk I occasionally experienced in philosophy classes. Until you provide some concrete proof to validate your theoretical concoction, your answer remains senseless. A major problem, if not the major problem, with all people of a religious, metaphysical, superstitious orientation is that they assume any statement by anyone is true or has serious plausibility unless it can be disproven. Wrong! It's not to be accepted until it can be proven true. That's fundamental to rational thought and, yet, it's ignored by millions. The burden of proof rests with you my friend. Your comment that "I don't advocate that doctrine, but I see that you haven't proved yours" is fallacious because I have no doctrine to prove in this regard. But you do. As I've said so often, "The burden of proof lies on he who alleges." Otherwise, rational minds are required to disprove every ludicrous idea that ever came down the pike and they are to be accepted as true or seriously plausible until disproven. If I told you I physically fought the devil this morning, had lunch with a real angel on Mars, shook hands with Jesus one hour ago, and threw a rock to the moon, my assertions would all be true or seriously plausible under your line of reasoning until they were disproven. Evidence is not required. I need only assert as much. By the same token your claim that a fetus may have a consciousness of God, sin, etc. becomes a distinct possibility until I provide evidence to the contrary. If you are going to hold to that position, then I'm going to claim I threw a rock to the moon. Prove me wrong! I challenge you to prove I didn't throw a rock to the moon or wrestle the devil. If you ask me to repeat the deed, I'll either say it was a unique event or I don't like being tested. Sound familiar! Fourth, if there is any dogma involved, it's yours. You repeatedly talk about something for which no evidence is provided and then denounce others because they won't accept your imaginings until evidence is forthcoming. Dogma lies not in my refusal to accept the possibility of your hypothesis but in your adherence to an idea for which you feel no obligation to provide some corroboration. I have no problem with accepting your hypothesis, or any other for that matter, as long as some substantiation is

provided. But what you want is for me to accept the possibility without any support. According to you, I'm dogmatic when I refuse to accept your hypothesis without valid evidence, but, in truth, I'd be foolish if I accepted your hypothesis without some corroboration. You work on the assumption that any idea has credibility until disproven, which leaves your mind vulnerable to a world of unsubstantiated concepts of the most insane variety. The sky is the limit. You say that "McKinsey must remain silent (open-minded) on the subject or take a dogmatic position." On the contrary, I'm quite open-minded but I'm certainly not silent. And until evidence is produced from your side, silence is something you might want to consider. Fifth, you claim "such a doctrine has some very interesting arguments on its behalf." Can you name one? Sixth, you claimed that I "have asserted the existence of people who were not 'conscious and competent' at conception" without providing support. Apparently, you are having trouble reading, TF. I said that you are obligated to prove that an embryo is "conscious and competent" at conception..., "not merely assert there is the possibility. I never said it wasn't; I said you are required to prove it was, since you are the one who concocted the idea. Lastly, even if your incredible hypothesis were valid, you haven't solved the original problem. Even if fetuses and infants could comprehend abstract concepts such as God, sin and the atonement, they would have two additional hurdles to surmount. Prior to their death they would have to hear or read the Bible in some way in order to know about Jesus, and they would have to accept Jesus as their savior according to the dictates of John 14:6. Both are too ridiculous to discuss.

Letter #344 Continues (Part b)

McKinsey continues, "...you say that John 14:6 ('I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me') does not say that anyone goes to hell or that anyone goes to heaven. But it most assuredly does. If you aren't saved, where else can you go except to hell? If being saved means attaining heaven, then being lost means condemnation to hell."

McKinsey's first error is his assumption that "No man cometh unto the Father, but by me" must refer to admission into heaven (rather than submission to the Father as a result of Christ's transforming power in the individual).

The second error was his assumption that the verse said that some would go to hell or that some would go to heaven. Even if we accept the verse as saying, in effect, "Believers are going to heaven, unbelievers to hell, and there is no third alternative," there is no existential quantifier in the statement. One possible outcome is that nobody has true faith. Another possible outcome is that everybody will have true faith. The third possible outcome is that some go to heaven and some to hell. I simply pointed out that the verse, by itself, does not rule out the first or the second of the three possible outcomes. My wording was clear enough: John 14:6 "does not say that anyone goes to hell or that anyone goes to heaven."

Editor's Response to the Letter #344 (Part b)

Again, your commentary is vacuous, TF. First, you say that, "McKinsey's first error is his assumption...." You are trying to make a distinction without a biblically-based difference. The ultimate goal of all Christians is to be with God in heaven. Being with God is equivalent to being in heaven, for how can one be with God and not be in heaven. If you are not with God ultimately, where else can you be but in hell. If you go to the Father by accepting Jesus, you automatically enter heaven. They are synonymous. You are trying to say you can accept Jesus as your savior and go to the Father as a result without entering heaven. This would not only be non-biblical but pointless. Why go to the Father through Jesus, if heaven is not attained thereby? Moreover, where and what is this third place you feel people can ultimately attain, and could you provide textual support for your belief? Second, you say, "One possible outcome is that nobody

has true faith. Another possible outcome is that everybody will have true faith. The third possible outcome is that some go to heaven and some to hell. I simply pointed out that the verse, by itself, does not rule out the first or the second of the three possible outcomes." Now you are not only being petty but deceptive. I never said it did. You'd do a lot better if you spent less time trying to devise deceitful defenses and more time trying to honestly confront your difficulties, TF. I never said your first, second, or third possibilities were ruled out. Each is nothing but an obvious possibility based on John 14:6. In fact, what else could occur. According to John 14:6 all will be saved, none will be saved or a split decision will occur. How does that conflict with my assertion that according to John 14:6 you must accept Jesus as your savior in order to attain heaven or face damnation? Third, your "existential quantifier" comment is little more than an attempt to appear profound when profundity is noticeably absent from most of your writings. Again, in all seriousness, I'd suggest you consult notable apologists. (To Be Continued Next Month)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #345 from DEM of Pasadena, California

(After reading the earlier exchange between TF and myself, one of BE's subscribers sent TF the following letter--Ed.).

Dear Mr. TF. ...many of your replies to Dennis McKinsey (as well as to myself) are wholly misguided and inappropriate. Mere possibility is no badge of respectability in the world of inductive reasoning. It may be that the earth is under the control of a band of green spiders living in San Diego, but that hypothesis will impress no one of sound mind and rudimentary reasoning ability. It lacks supportive evidence and a believable mechanism, and a great mountain of evidence suggests otherwise. Needless to say, the flat-earth "theories" and the hollow-earth "theories" are in the same bucket. Philosophically speaking, none of these ideas can be disproven with absolute certainty, but that fact does not confer the slightest respectability on any of them.

TF, under the paradigm which you seem to be functioning, at least to some degree, we ought to take the Green Spider conspiracy seriously! After all, can anyone really disprove that "theory"? We have to consider the possibility that it might be true! Or do we?

Mr. McKinsey is quite correct in dismissing the cells-for-Jesus scenario. The word "impossible" is often understood to mean "very, very unlikely." The flat-earth "theories," the Green Spider conspiracy, and the zygotes-for-Jesus idea can safely be dropped into the same trash bin. None of these ideas currently generate enough voltage to be taken seriously. If any of them ever show signs of coming to life, then we can always pluck them out of the trash. But, until then, that's exactly where they belong.

It is neither dogmatic nor closed-minded to reject a claim which is totally devoid of evidential support; rejection should not be confused with denial, the latter being a positive claim which requires evidence.

The burden of proof is on the shoulders of those who allege. All the critic has to do is ask, "Where's the beef?" The critic is not obliged to entertain a claim which lacks evidence, which has no discernible mechanism, and which runs contrary to established findings. Effective thinking requires that such claims be rejected as baseless, as unworthy of consideration. The alternative is to spend time worrying about the Green Spider conspiracy!

In your joust with Dennis McKinsey you did score a clean point in the mathematical arena (a point to be discussed next month--ED). But, even there it looks like you won the battle only to

lose the war. Surely, the mere fact of being in hell must be considered as a form of punishment. If nothing else, one is deprived of being in heaven. Since one day in hell (without flames) would presumably be like any other day in hell (without flames) we must assign a constant punishment value--however small--to the mere fact of being in hell for a day. As the days go by without limit the accumulated punishment exceeds all bounds. That is, an infinite punishment is awarded even with the "flames" turn off! Thus, it appears that McKinsey is right after all, at least in spirit if not in mathematical detail!

EDITOR'S NOTE: Appearances on the media are undoubtedly one of our most effective methods by which to spread the word. Can anybody get into our hands a copy of TALK SHOW "SELECTS" [Sold for \$185 by Broadcast Interview Source, 2233 Wisconsin Ave. Washington, D.C. 20007-4104 Phone 202-333-4904], RADIO INTERVIEW GUIDE [Sold for \$165 by Newsclip, 213 West Institute Place, Suite 201, Chicago, Illinois 60610 Phone 312-644-1720], or NATIONAL RADIO PUBLICITY OUTLETS [Sold for \$149 by Public Relations Plus, Inc., P.O. Drawer 1197, New Milford, Conn. 06776 Phone 203-354-9361]? Probably suspecting duplication on our part, the publishers will not loan them to us for preview; we can't find them in any library, and money is an object

COMMENTARY

JESUS, THE IMPERFECT BEACON (Part 7 of an Eight-Part Series)--This month's commentary will continue the listing of Jesus' shortcomings that was brought to new heights in last month's commentary: (132) JOHN 10:27-28 ("My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand") and John 18:9 ("That the saying might be fulfilled, which he spake, Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none") versus JOHN 17:12 ("While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled"), Matt. 26:56 ("But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled. Then all the disciples forsook him and fled"), and John 13:21, 25-27. Jesus said none of his sheep would be plucked out of his hand; yet, we are later told that he not only lost the son of perdition but all his disciples forsook him and fled. (133) DEUT. 10:17 ("For the Lord your God is God of gods, and Lord of lords, a great God, mighty and terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh reward") and 2 Chron. 19:7 ("...for there is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts"). The OT says God does not play favorites, yet Jesus' comments in Matt. 10:5-6 ("...Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not; But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel"), Matt. 15:24 ("...I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel"), and John 4:22 ("...we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews") show he does. (134) First CHRON. 28:9 ("...for the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts; if thou seek him, he will be found of thee...") and Matt. 7:8 versus JOHN 7:34 ("Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me: and where I am, thither ye cannot come"). Chronicles says the Lord can be found whenever you seek him, but Jesus said he would be sought and not found. (135) LUKE 10:30-34 ("And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him. And went to him, and bound up his wounds...and took care of him"). Jesus says a priest and a Levite passed up the man who was aided by a Samaritan--a member of a tribe that had been enemies of the Jews for centuries. Priests, Levites, and the Israelites are three classes of Jews called to the Torah. Yet, Jesus relates a story in which two of the groups ignore an injured man. This is teaching brotherhood?? How could intentionally downgrading Jewish priests and Levites while complimenting their enemies create camaraderie? (136) MARK 14:62 ("And Jesus said, ...ye shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven") versus DAN. 7:13 ("I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days (God--ED), and they brought him near before him"). Jesus misquoted and misrepresented Daniel. Daniel 7:13 is referring to a vision of the night, not an actual event. Even more important, Daniel 7:13 says one "like" the Son of man; it does not say he "is" the son of man. (137) LUKE 19:27 ("...mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me"). This statement comes from a ruler who is referring to some rebellious servants. By relating this incident Jesus is implicitly condoning executions which is contrary to the spirit of Luke 23:34 ("Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do"). (138) JOHN 10:8 ("All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them"). Since "all" would encompass the prophets who came before Jesus, the conclusion is inescapable. (139) MALACHI 4:5-6 ("Behold, I will

send you Elijah the prophet [whom Jesus said was John the Baptist--ED.] before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers...."). (a) If John the Baptist is Elijah as Jesus said in Matt. 17:11-13, then John's preaching should have brought fathers and children together, which didn't occur? (b) John the Baptist was a contemporary of Jesus. If he had attempted to bring fathers and children together, he would have been in direct opposition to Jesus who said, "Suppose that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: For from thenceforth there shall be fire in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother...." (140) LUKE 11:29 ("And when the people were gathered together, he began to say, This is an evil generation: they seek a sign; and there shall no sign be given it, but the sign of Jonas the prophet"), Matt. 12:39 ("But he answered and said unto them, an evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign, and there shall no sign be given to it, but the...."), and Mark 8:12 ("And he sighed deeply in his spirit, and saith, Why doth this generation seek after a sign? Verily I say unto you, There shall no sign be given unto this generation") versus JOHN 20:30 ("And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book....") and Mark 16:20 ("And they went forth, and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following"). Jesus said NO sign but one would be given to his generation; yet, he gave them many signs. (141) MATT. 6:5-6 ("And when thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret....") versus 1 KINGS 8:22-23 ("And Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven: And he said, Lord God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven above...."). Jesus said one should pray in secret; yet, Solomon, one of God's favorites, did the opposite. (142) JOHN 3:18 ("...because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God") versus GEN. 6:2 ("That the sons of God saw the daughters of men....") and Gen. 6:4 ("...when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men...."). Contrary to the Book of John, the Book of Genesis says God had several sons. One could say the word "begotten" creates the difference, but its meaning is vague. (143) MATT. 24:27-34 ("For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.... Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other...when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled"). Although Jesus strongly stated this prophecy would be fulfilled in the lifetime of his generation, nearly 2,000 years have passed and its yet to be fulfilled. Although formerly used to frighten people into compliance, this prophecy now exposes a gigantic falsehood. The Son of man has not come as predicted. It is more specific than most predictions and so provides a good test of the reality of Christ's pretenses. Generation after generation has passed away and the prophet of Nazareth stands convicted as a imposter. Apologetic attempts to apply the word "generation" to the Jewish people, specifically, are futile.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #344 from TF of Pasadena, Maryland Continues from Last Month (Part c)

In the December issue, I said, "God never took away anything that Adam (or you) had a right to possess." In response, McKinsey said, "I beg to differ. When I'm denied something which I would have received except for another's misbehavior, that's losing something I had a right to possess. I did nothing to lose it and would have received it but for another's bad deeds. That's injustice."

Wrong again, McKinsey. Gifts are completely undeserved. If I freely give a gold bar to each person I meet, and choose to stop as a result of being mugged by one of the recipients, I have not done you an injustice. You cannot complain that I have deprived you of something that you had a "right" to receive. My gold is my own. My purposes are my own.

Editor's Response to Letter #344 (Part c)

How many errors can one make in such a short paragraph, TF! First, Christians of the "faith alone" variety, which includes much of protestantism and nearly all of fundamentalism, need to jettison forever the idea that salvation is a "gift" given without strings attached. IT IS NOT A GIFT. Let me repeat that, again, because we receive letters and constantly read fundamentalist literature to the contrary. SALVATION IS NOT A FREE GIFT, FREELY GIVEN. Quite the contrary, it must be earned. How is it earned? It is earned by accepting Jesus as one's savior according to John 14:6 and other verses. If you don't accept Jesus, you are doomed and that's that. You must act; you must obtain your own salvation by taking an affirmative, positive act. Salvation is not freely bestowed as a gift from God but something that's earned. You did what is required and if you hadn't you would have been doomed. In fact, since you did what is required, you not only earned but can't be denied salvation. So let's dispense with all of this talk about free gifts, freely given by a magnanimous God. Second, you say, "If I freely give a gold bar to each person I meet, and choose to stop as a result of being mugged by one of the recipients, I have not done you an injustice." But, of course you have!. If I had five life preservers to throw to 5 drowning people and refused to throw out the remaining four because the first person rejected his, am I being just? Years ago I taught school. Are you saying I would have been just if I had punished the entire class because one student threw a paper wad? Adam ate the forbidden fruit, it's his problem not ours and he alone should pay the penalty. Even the Bible asserts you don't punish the children for the sins of their fathers (Deut. 24:16). Yet, you would have us believe that billions are being justly denied a heaven on earth because of the sins of one. Third, if salvation is a free gift bestowed without any strings attached, as you and your compatriots assert, then God alone chooses who will be saved and its entirely out of our hands. In effect, salvation is based on God's whim and he plays favorites; for what other criteria can there be when nothing is required on our part. If we do nothing; he does it all. That's predestination. Injustice reigns supreme under your scenario. God's whim, entirely independent of human behavior, morality, or deeds, determines who is saved and who isn't. God's discretion alone is the sole determinant. Yet, the Bible says God is no respecter of persons; he doesn't play favorites. If it's purely a gift as you say, then the recipient is chosen on a purely arbitrary basis and that's the essence of favoritism and injustice. That's Salvation by Whim which was discussed many commentaries ago. Fourth, you say that God can freely bestow or withdraw it at any time of his choosing. But that's not the issue. We are talking about what originally occurred as a result of Adam's act and that involves punishment, not a gift. We are talking about a "gift" that involves punishment if it is not received, which is not true of most presents. We are being punished for what Adam did; that's the point in dispute. I didn't eat the forbidden fruit, did you? We are not going to race ahead to discuss how mankind extracts itself from the predicament Adam created. Christians love to talk about how Jesus provided an escape mechanism but rarely want to discuss the injustice associated with how we got into the mess in the first place. We are not talking about how Jesus provided a means to extrapolate ourselves from the problem after the event but how we got into the problem initially.

Letter #344 Continues (Part d)

In his June issue, McKinsey says, "You say 'those who are perfect are complete...are exemplary in their "relative" moral development.' What does that mean? If it means they are perfect, then they are morally perfect, period, and that contradicts Rom. 3:23.... If Noah was not morally perfect, then he had no more right to be saved on the Ark than anyone else.... If Jesus, alone, was perfect and sinless, then Noah and Job were morally imperfect and Gen. 6:9 and Job 1:1 are false. You can't have it both ways."

The Bible is quite clear McKinsey. Rom. 3:23 tells us, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." Since God himself is not included in the "all" who have sinned, Jesus is not included either. Jesus was and is sinless. Everyone else has "come short of the glory of God." King James English does not simply mean "absolutely flawless" when it says "perfect" (or "just," "righteous," etc.). Yet Jesus was specifically described as being without sin.

You are correct that Noah, as a sinner, "had no more right to be saved on the Ark than anyone else." Creatures have no claim of "rights" to be demanded of God. God has the right to give relatively greater rewards and honor to those who are relatively more righteous, if he so chooses. If he chooses to save the most righteous man (and his family) from a devastating flood, he clearly has the right to call that relatively righteous man "perfect."

Noah, Job, and Jesus were "perfect." Jesus alone was both perfect and sinless. I can "have it both ways" because these are not mutually contradictory propositions. The "sinful" and the "perfect" are in overlapping classes. In fact, if it were not for the absolute sinlessness of Jesus Christ, "perfect" would be simply a subset of "sinful," when classifying human beings.

Editor's Response to Letter #344 (Part d)

The dictionary defines "doublespeak" as "obscure or ambiguous language, especially if meant to deceive." The term is often applicable to your explanations and this instance is a prime example, TF. First, elementary logic tells you that everything is either A or not A; everything is either perfect or not perfect. Gen. 6:9 says Noah was "perfect." Webster defines "perfect" as "without defect," "in a condition of complete excellence," "faultless," "completely correct or accurate," "pure," and "complete in all respects." If Noah was without defect and pure, then he was sinless, just like Jesus, and that's that. Why do you keep disputing the obvious? Second, could you provide evidence that the "King James English does not simply mean 'absolutely flawless' when it says 'perfect'...?" Or are you just pulling it out of thin air? Third, modern versions, such as the ASV, which don't use King James English, also use "perfect" in Gen. 6:9. Are you saying the creators of the ASV, for example, can't translate, that they don't know the best word to choose and you know Hebrew better than they? How much Hebrew have you had? They chose the word "perfect" and know its dictionary definition as well as anyone. Fourth, as I've said before, it's the same "perfect" that is applied to God in Deut. 32:4 ("He is the Rock, his work is perfect") and Psalm 18:30 ("As for God, his way is perfect"). Both come from the same Hebrew word. Using your logic, I could argue that those verses are not saying God is morally perfect either. Fifth, you say that "God has the right to give relatively greater rewards and honor to those who are relatively more righteous, if he so chooses." There is nothing "relative" about this issue. You either drowned during the Flood or you didn't. Death is absolute, not relative. There is no inbetween, no degree of relativity. Noah didn't drown, so there must be a qualitative difference between his morality and that of all others. Since the behaviors differed in quality, justice could not have prevailed unless the treatments dispensed by God differed in quality also. The behavior of everyone except Noah was less than morally perfect; therefore, for God to have been just, Noah must have exhibited moral behavior that was different in quality from that of everyone

else, i.e., it must have been perfect. Sixth, you say that God "clearly has the right to call that relatively righteous man 'perfect.'" Let's go back to my original point. Noah was either perfect or he wasn't. You admit he wasn't; so that settles the matter. Gen. 6:9 is false. Again you're trying to make a distinction where none exists. Perfect is equivalent to sinless. You, on the other hand, are trying to create a distinction by saying Noah was perfect but sinful which makes no sense. (a) If he was perfect he had to be sinless; otherwise, he wasn't perfect. (b) If he was a sinner, how could he have been perfect? If Noah was sinful then he obviously wasn't perfect. If he was perfect, then he was sinless too. In essence, all you are saying is that God has a right to call a man morally perfect who isn't; you admit he isn't. Or, to be even more candid, all you are saying is that God has a right to call black white if he so chooses. That's an argument born out of desperation, not logic, TF. And lastly, you say that "Noah, Job, and Jesus were 'perfect.' Jesus alone was both perfect and sinless. I can 'have it both ways' because these are not mutually contradictory propositions." Of course they are mutually contradictory and you can't have it both ways. You said that "if it were not for the absolute sinlessness of Jesus Christ, 'perfect' would be simply a subset of 'sinful.'" How could moral perfection ever be a subset of "sinful?" Most apologists at least try to put a veneer of rationality on their meanderings.

Letter #344 Concludes (Part e)

On the question of the duration and intensity of a sinner's experience in hell, I pointed out that the duration could be infinite and yet the total penalty could still be finite: "It is easy to define an infinite series which has a finite total. Nevertheless, hell is clearly something to avoid."

McKinsey responded, "I'm not even sure that you understand simple math. How can an infinite series have a finite total?...."

The answer can be given in terms of simple math, McKinsey. A person might pay half of his penalty in the first minute, half of the remaining penalty in the second minute, half of the remaining penalty in the third minute, etc. When one minute had passed, he would have one half of the total still remaining. When two minutes had passed, he would have one fourth of the total to go. Then one eighth, one sixteenth, etc. ad infinitum.

In his July issue, McKinsey had the following "EDITOR'S NOTE": "Several subscribers took exception to my final comment to TF... In reference to the length of Hell's punishment I said, 'How can an infinite series have a finite total? The number of finites within an infinite series is infinite, not finite.' Apparently several people feel that the number of finites within an infinity (sic) can be finite (sic)... When I entered college decades ago, math was my major and calculus my nemesis. Perhaps I missed something by switching to philosophy, but after reading the explanations provided I still don't see how a restricted number of finite numbers can total an infinity. Perhaps I've erred; it's happened before. So I'll not pursue the issue."

Well, McKinsey, I have a degree in math, and have seen no evidence that you finished the introductory courses in either math or philosophy. Competence in either field would prevent you from thinking that the (clearly false) claim that "a restricted number of finite numbers can total an infinity" is logically equivalent to the (true) claim that "an infinite series can have a finite total."

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #344 (Part e)

Because of the large number of letters generated by my editorial note and the subtle misguidance of your critique, TF, I've decided to pursue this issue after all. My original question was: How can an infinite series have a finite total?" Perhaps I should have been more technical and asked:

How can an infinite series of whole numbers have a finite total. I would have thought that it would have been obvious we were dealing with whole numbers. Instead, I was met by a group of letters with an authoritative aura and decided not to defend my original statement. But after reviewing the issue with a more critical eye, I see I was correct to start with. Why? Because we aren't dealing with an infinite series of fractions whose sum is approaching the number one. We are dealing with sins and evil deeds that cause punishment in Hell. And they come in whole numbers, not fractions. The number of your sins totals one, two, three, four, etc., not one-eighth, one-fourth or one-sixteenth of a sin. You either sinned or you didn't. Consequently, your comment that "a person might pay half of his penalty in the first minute, half of the remaining penalty in the second minute...." is wholly deceptive. It is deceptive not only because of the reasons stated but also because you switched the punishment from the infinity of Hell to the number ONE which certainly is not infinite. In effect, you changed the penalty from infinity to finite and you changed the composition from sins to fractions of sins.

If you are going to play this juvenile game of Zeno's paradox, then I'm going to say that there is no punishment in Hell whatsoever, either eternally or otherwise. The reasoning in this regard is quite simple. Before a person can serve "half of his penalty in the first minute" which you mentioned, he must first serve one-fourth of the penalty. And before he can serve one-fourth, he must first serve one-eighth. And before he can serve one-eighth, he must serve one-sixteenth. So, in effect, we are involved in an infinite regression back toward zero. How, then, can a person even start serving his penalty?

Second, if you had been more forthright you would have conceded that my original question in issue #78 ("How can an infinite series have a finite total?") was changed to the more correct formulation ("I still don't see how a restricted number of finite numbers can total an infinity?") in the Editor's Note of Issue #79. The altered wording makes all the difference. In simple terms, my original question was: How can an infinity, i.e. an infinite series, have a finite total; while the later corrected alteration was: How can a finite series of numbers total an infinity? Notice! The latter alteration specifically referred to a "restricted number." In fact, if you will note carefully the change is implicit in the second part of my original statement ("The number of finites within an infinite series is infinite, not finite") in Issue #78. My only imprecision in this entire matter, which I quickly corrected, was in asking, "How can an infinite series have a finite total" rather than, "How can a finite series of whole numbers have an infinite total." While answering a letter to your publication, TF, you made the following comment regarding militant atheists. "Their emotional reaction against God is too intense to allow calm, careful analysis of the evidence and reasoning." Interestingly enough, that's an apt description of the attitude you display when confronted with criticisms of the Bible.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #346 from TF of Webster, Wisconsin

Dear Mr. McKinsey... I am a former Fundamentalist who "studied his way out of Christianity" while in a Christian college training to be a minister. Today I am a Deist. Like you, I have studied the Bible and read books by McDowell, Morris, Archer, Arndt, and Haley on one side and Wheless, Remsburg, and Paine on the other. Until I encountered your newsletter, I thought I was the only person in the world who thought the way I did. I had met a few people who disbelieved in the Bible, but most of them had never even read the book, and none of them was capable of answering any of the simplest arguments of your typical apologist. As you probably know, I have collected every single back issue of BE and intend to keep subscribing to it as long as you keep publishing it. You have a friend and ally here in Wisconsin. Keep up the good work.

Editor's Response to Letter #346

Dear TF. Your comment with respect to critics of the Bible is all too true. In fact, the tendency of biblical critics to avoid rather than oppose has been one of the greatest weaknesses of the freethought movement. Is it any wonder that religious nonsense is so prominent on the media and rational analyses of same are all but nonexistent!

EDITOR'S NOTE In last's month's editorial note we requested assistance with respect to three books listing radio talk shows in the United States. Unfortunately, no one has contacted us by either phone or letter in regard to any of the three.

Issue No. 86

Feb. 1990

COMMENTARY

JESUS, THE IMPERFECT BEACON (Part 8 of an Eight-Part Series)--This month's commentary is the final installment on an exhaustive study of Jesus' inadequacies. Those who have read all of BE's comments on Jesus are to be complimented for demonstrating the kind of self-discipline and dedication that gives rise to winners. (144) JOHN 5:25 ("I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live...."). Another false prophecy by Jesus! "And now is" shows that this was to occur at that time. Three verses later, John 5:28 ("Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice....") refutes a common apologetic defense by showing that "the dead" refers to those who were physically dead in graves, not spiritually dead. (145) JOHN 10:33-36 ("The Jews answered him, saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because thou, being a man, makest thyself God. Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, 'ye are gods'? If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken; say ye of him, whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world, Thou blasphemest; because I said, I am the Son of God?"). Psalm 82:1, which Jesus is relating, shows God made this statement while in the divine council holding judgment in the midst of the Gods (RSV). He called them gods because they were gods, not because they had received the word of God. If these beings had actually become gods by having the word of God come to them, then any divinely inspired prophet of the OT could claim to be God. If Jesus could claim to be God by merely receiving the word of God, then many others could follow suit. (146) LUKE 24:46 ("And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day...."). Where is it written in the OT that Jesus, Christ, or the Messiah was to rise on the 3rd day? Hosea 6:2 ("After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight") does not apply for several reasons. (a) The prior verse, Hosea 6:1 ("Come, let us return unto the Lord: for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up") uses the word "us," several times and shows it is referring to several beings. (b) The first verse also refers to tearing and smiting. When did the Lord tear and smite Jesus? (c) The second verse says, "after two days will he revive us." Nowhere does the NT say Jesus was revived after two days. (d) And verse 3 says, "let us press on to know the Lord." How could Jesus learn anything additional about the Lord when he allegedly is the Lord? (147) JOHN 5:16-18 ("And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done those things on the sabbath day. But Jesus answered them, 'My Father worketh hitherto, and I work'. Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he had not only broken the sabbath....") versus EX. 20:8 ("Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: But the 7th day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work...."). Jesus admitted that he worked

on the sabbath contrary to OT law and his only defense was that God did so, too. (148) MATT. 4:10 ("Then Jesus saith unto him, "Get thee hence Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve"). Jesus took this statement from Deut. 6:13 which says, "Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name." Nowhere does Deut. 6:13 say thou shalt serve God only. (149) MATT. 10:8 ("Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils....") and Matt. 17:18 ("And Jesus rebuked the devil; and he departed out of him: and the child was cured from that very hour"). By believing in devils, fostering belief in them, and casting them out in order to cure illness, Jesus undoubtedly retarded the development of effective methods by which to deal with infirmities. (150) JOHN 20:17 ("Jesus saith unto Mary Magdalene, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father...."). Mary Magdalene was the one true disciple of Jesus. In the darkness of the Crucifixion she lingered near and was the first at the sepulchre. Defeat, disaster, and disgrace, could not conquer her love. Yet, when she met the risen Christ, he said: "Touch me not." This was the reward given for her total devotion. (151) MATT. 19:17-19 ("...but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He saith unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honor thy father and thy mother: and, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself"). Jesus omitted 5 of the 10 commandments. Possibly he doesn't know the entire 10 or he doesn't consider 5 of them to be commandment material. In any event, he created one of his own ("Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself") out of whole cloth. (152) MATT. 16:18 ("Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom"), Matt. 10:23 ("Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come"), Mark 9:1 ("Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power"), Mark 13:30, and Luke 9:27 versus MARK 13:32 ("But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father"). Jesus repeatedly put a definite time limitation on the moment of his reappearance. Yet, in Mark 13:32 he said he did not know when it would occur. (153) MATT. 12:11 ("...What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out?"). How could Jesus be telling the truth? All people know that Jews are not permitted to raise any animals on the sabbath, from a pit or otherwise. (154) LUKE 9:59-60 ("And Jesus said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God"). Even if interpreted allegorically, Jesus would not allow a man to attend the funeral of his own father who was about to be buried. He demanded the totally unnecessary sacrifice of foregoing the highly important privilege of joining friends and relatives in according a man's father the last honors. The message conveyed is that following Jesus has precedence over everything. (155) LUKE 9:61-62 ("And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God"). Jesus is denying a person the privilege of bidding farewell to his parents and other relatives before he starts out on a tour intended to further the spreading of the Kingdom of God. Again, the message is that following Jesus is to supercede everything, no matter how insensitive. (156) And finally, in several instances Jesus clearly said that the Old Law was to be upheld: MATT. 5:17-19 ("Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am come not to destroy, but to fulfill. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven...."), Matt. 23:1-3 ("Then spake Jesus to the multitude, and to his disciples, Saying, The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do...."), and Luke 16:17 ("...And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail"). Yet, he violated and ignored so many Old Laws that they can only be cited rather than written out. In Matt. 15:11 and Mark 7:15, 18-19 he

denied the OT dietary laws; in Matt. 15:2-3, 20 and Luke 11:37-38 he denied the OT laws requiring the washing of hands; in Matt. 12:1-6, 8, 10-13, Luke 13:10-16, John 5:8-11, and Mark 2:23-28 he ignored the restrictions as to what can be done on the sabbath. And in Matt. 9:14-15, Mark 2:18-20, and John 8:4-11 he denied the OT law requiring fasting. Jesus also stiffened the Old Law in some instances. In Matt. 5:32 ("...and whosoever shall marry her that is divorced committeth adultery") he forbid a divorced woman to remarry which repeals the OT law found in Deut. 24:1-2 that allows a divorced woman to remarry. In Matt. 5:39 ("...but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also") he abolished the OT requirement in Ex. 21:23-24 of an eye for an eye. In Matt. 5:34-35 ("But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool....") Jesus prohibited swearing oaths which the Old Law allowed in Deut. 6:13 ("Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name"). The most egregious aspect in all this, aside from the fact that Jesus broke his own maxim, lies in the fact that he repeatedly ignored Deut. 4:2 ("Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish aught from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you") which clearly prohibits additions or subtractions being made to the Old Law.

As far as the shortcomings, errors, and mistakes of Jesus are concerned, that completes our lengthy presentation and all but exhausts our notebooks. Nearly 200 examples of instances in which Jesus failed to fulfill the expectations of his followers are more than sufficient to persuade all but the irrational and indoctrinated that he could not be the savior of mankind. Indeed, one would be hardpressed to find another biblical figure, including Paul, who so belies his billing. The Bible says Jesus was not only sinless (1 John 3:5, 2 Cor. 5:21, Heb. 4:15, 9:28, 7:26), truthful (1 Peter 2:22, Isa. 53:9, Eph. 4:21, John 1:14, 8:40), and pure (1 John 3:3, 1 Peter 1:19) but the Messiah (Matt. 16:6, John 4:26, 4:42, 6:69, 11:27, 12:47, Mark 8:29) as well. Few assertions are more in opposition to the facts. More than enough biblical evidence is available to disprove these beliefs beyond any reasonable doubt. The amount of biblical proof available can only be described as overwhelming.

BAPTISM--Although the role of baptism in the attainment of salvation is of little concern to those outside Christianity, it's of great importance to those within. As the apologists Morris and Clark said, "There is no doubt that the doctrine of baptism is one of the most divisive elements among the various sects and denominations in Christendom and, in fact, one of the chief factors in the establishment of the different denominations in the first place. For example, Baptists and many similar groups believe baptism consists solely of the full immersion of one who has already been saved through personal faith in Christ. (With the name "baptists" one would think they would be the ones who contend that baptism is obligatory; but the opposite is true--Ed.). A number of other denominations, such as the various groups that developed from the ministry of Alexander Campbell and others in the early nineteenth century, believe that such immersion is itself a prerequisite to salvation" (The Bible Has the Answer, page 173). From BE's perspective, the importance of baptism, whether by water, fire, the Holy Ghost, the Spirit, repentance or otherwise, lies in the fact that the biblical text is contradictory with respect to whether or not it is required. Consequently, even if one wanted to comply with whatever the Bible enjoined, no definite direction could be provided. Verses such as John 3:5 ("Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God"), John 3:3 ("I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God"), John 3:7 ("Ye must be born again"), Mark 16:16 ("He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned"), Acts 2:38 ("...Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost"), 1 Peter 3:21 ("The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us"), Acts 11:16 ("For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost"), Gal. 3:27, Eph. 4:4-5, and Titus 3:5 either say or imply that a baptismal rebirth is mandatory. Additional corroboration is provided by

the Great Commission of Matt 28:19 ("Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost").

On the other hand, we have Paul's comment in 1 Cor. 1:17 ("For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel....") which strongly implies baptism is not required and directly opposes the Great Commission. Moreover, if baptism is an absolute requirement for salvation, why would Paul say, "I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius," and why did Jesus baptize no one according to John 4:2 ("although Jesus Himself was not baptizing, but His disciples were"). Other verses could be used by both sides in this debate, but that would only muddy the waters further. The fact remains that the biblical position on baptism, as with many other major topics, is inconsistent and leads to no definitive resolution of the conflict.

In addition, verses conflict with respect to which name is to be involved in the baptism. In which name is one to be baptized? According to the Great Commission of Matt. 28:19, one should be baptized "in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost." On the other hand, Acts 2:38 ("baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ"), Acts 8:16 ("...only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus"), Acts 19:5 ("When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus"), and Acts 10:48 ("And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord"), say that one should be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ, the Lord Jesus, or the Lord, respectively. So, in which name are people to be baptized?

The metaphysical nature of baptism accounts for the fact that it has not been discussed until now. BE generally relegates topics of a nebulous or non-demonstrable composition to the back-burner because pinning down its proponents is like nailing jello to the wall. The strategy of its adherents ebbs and flows according to the winds of adversity and the dictates of expediency.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #347 from GN of Phoenix, Arizona (Part a)

Dear Dennis. I received the 20 issues of B.E. that I ordered and have devoured them already. I consider myself a Bible critic, but I must say your issues taught me a lot. I only discovered what I believe to be one error on your part, and it may have been a slip. The only reason I would be so bold as to mention it is not to criticize, as I consider you to be a scholar. I want your credibility to be impeccable because fundamentalists are nit-pickers. The error, at least I think it is an error, is in issue #6 where it states that Joseph was from "the house of David, while Mary appears to have been from the house of Judah since her cousin Elizabeth was a daughter of Aaron, i.e., from the house of Judah." I think you will find that David was of the line of Judah, which is the line that the Messiah was supposed to come from, and Mary (if it can be construed as Mary's line which I can't see to be true) is from the line of Aaron. Thus, Mary's line is from the house of LEVI which has nothing to do with the line of the Messiah.

Editor's Response to Letter #347 (Part a)

Dear GN. We extend a sincere thanks for your compliments and acknowledge the accuracy of your criticism. While going over my notes nearly a year ago I caught the same mistake. A correction should probably have been mentioned in BE. On page 2 of Issue #6 I said, "Mary appears to have been from the house of Judah since her cousin Elizabeth (Luke 1:36) was a daughter of Aaron, i.e. from the house of Judah (Luke 1:5). I should have said that, "Mary appears to have been from the house of Levi since her cousin Elizabeth was the daughter of Aaron, i.e., from the house of Levi." This correction strengthens my prior argument, of course, since David is in the messianic line while the house of Levi is not. If Mary had been from the

house of Judah as I stated in Issue #6, Luke's genealogy could have been that of Mary and the common apologetic defense could be valid. Joseph would be descended from the house of David (Matt. 1); Mary could be descended from Judah (Luke 3), and both would be in the messianic lineage.

Letter #347 Continues (Part b)

I think another thing you will find interesting is that if you will count the generations in Matthew and the generations in Luke, you will see they are not the same in number. If one genealogy is of Joseph and the other of Mary it would mean that one of them was several hundred years older than the other one. If both are of Joseph, then we have a tremendous difficulty with the actual age of Joseph and where he came from. I agree with you. They are supposed to be the genealogy of Joseph, as it clearly says so, and yet they are in contradiction to one another.

I never tire of looking for ammunition against the fundamentalists. I was a Jehovah's Witness for 20 years and they ruined a major part of my life. I'm still separated from my daughter and three grandchildren because they cannot speak to an "apostate" such as myself....

Do you have plans of publishing your newsletter into a book? It is very much needed. I find your comments to be the best I've found in print. I would love to find someone who would be willing to publish a Bible with B.E.'s comments in the footnotes. I was horrified by the comments of (name omitted--Ed.). I think that the agnostic and the atheist had better get biblically educated or we don't stand a chance against the militant fundamentalist movement that is fast taking over the government of the United States. I've been asked to speak at our local atheist group. I'm not sure what I would say, but one of the members thought that my knowledge of biblical errors would be very interesting to his group. I guess all atheists don't think alike either, as this group certainly doesn't sound like the (name omitted again-Ed.) kind. Keep up the good work. Your knowledge of the Bible is fantastic.

Editor's Response to Letter #347 (Part b)

As of now we have undertaken no program to put BE into a book; however, that could very well become a future undertaking. In reality, anyone who has read all 86 issues of BE has, in effect, read a book. We hope your speech will be a resounding success and offer you all the contents of BE as a resource. We'd appreciate knowing the outcome.

Letter #348 from Dan Barker of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, P.O. Box 750, Madison, Wisconsin 53701

Dear Dennis....it is our unwritten practice to capitalize "Bible" when it is a specific bible, like the King James Bible, NIV Bible, etc., just as we do with word "dictionary." We say Webster's Dictionary, but generically we say "look it up in the dictionary." The word "Christian," of course, is a different matter. It is originally a title/name, so we would also capitalize the adjective as well as the noun. "He is a Christian," and "Is that what you call a Christian act?" (Hope you don't mind me rewriting the latter a little, Dan--Ed.). But we don't normally capitalize the adjective "biblical," so we feel that the generic "bible" should be left alone. It is not a title or name--it just means "book," which we would not capitalize either. The reason believers capitalize Bible is for reverence. It is like calling a priest "Father." He is not my father, but if he can get me to call him that he is halfway home to credibility and respect. (I usually call them "Mister)." It's not that I would never respect a priest, but he should have to earn the respect before I will automatically assign it.

It is not freethinkers who are guilty of un-capitalizing the word "bible." It is believers who are guilty of capitalizing it. Just like when they capitalize the pronouns of deity: The Lord, He is great.

Anyway, this is no matter to fight about. We have FFRF members who agree with you that we should stay with "Bible." Let's just say that this is a matter of Personal Style.

When people say, "The Bible says..." I want to ask, "Which bible?" There are so many versions in so many languages. Even the "originals" boast of varying versions in Greek and Hebrew. However, if we have established that we are referring, for example, to the Revised Standard Version, then we can capitalize the word "Bible," since it is a specific title of a published (and possibly copyrighted) book.

Editor's Response to Letter #348

Dear Dan. Your comments are well-taken. First, let me say that I can't conceive of a situation in which I would ever call a priest "father." You are correct. He isn't my father and use of the term provides an aura of respect that must be earned. Moreover, it is patently patronizing and self-demeaning. Second, I agree with your comments concerning the word "biblical." It shouldn't be capitalized and I only do so in the subcaption of BE to emphasize the subject under discussion. It is capitalized purely for dramatic effect and is not meant to be grammatically accurate. Third, but I do have a bit of a problem with the word "bible." Let me first say that I certainly don't capitalize it out of any respect. That's the furthest thing from my mind. But, as I mentioned before, I do capitalize proper nouns and that's the only reason I capitalize "bible." Proper nouns are defined in my English Handbook as "the name of a particular person, place, or thing" and the narrative goes on to say "that it should be capitalized." God, Heaven, Hell, Lord, Devil, and Satan are proper nouns because they are the names of particular persons and places, be they mythical or otherwise, and for that reason, alone, I capitalize them. The question then becomes whether or not one should capitalize the word "bible." Is the word "bible" generic like the words "almanac," "dictionary," "thesaurus," or is it a proper noun. I'm having some difficulty with your phrase, "which bible." I have worked on the principle that there is only one bible but many versions. And because there are many versions, it's difficult to know what it says. I can understand one asking, "which version" but "which bible" is another matter. "Dictionary" is not a title but a generic term because there is no one book claiming to be "the dictionary" or an accurate copy of "the original dictionary." One dictionary is considered to be as valid as another even though they are drastically different. As is true with the word "dictionary," you feel the word "bible" is not a title or a name. I have never thought of it that way. Perhaps you are correct. If so, I stand corrected.

I'd be interested in knowing, however, what you would do with such words as "the pope," "the trinity," "the atonement," "the resurrection," "the crucifixion," "the ascension," "the koran," "the catholic church," "hell," "heaven," "satan," "the devil," "jesus," "paul," "mohammed," "luther," "calvin," and so on ad infinitum. They are all proper nouns. As you probably know, some freethinkers refuse to capitalize any of them because they are religious in nature. Yet, Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, the Tooth Fairy, and Little Red Riding Hood are as mythical as most religious concepts and are capitalized. My question then becomes: How are we going to avoid the appearance of being prejudiced and answer our critics when they say, "You capitalized this proper noun; why didn't you capitalize that one? Is it because of your anti-religious bias?"

In any event, I agree with you; capitalization of nouns is not worth creating dissension among friends and personal style will probably prevail.

Letter #349 from PK of Grand Forks, North Dakota

Hi Dennis. Your analysis of letter #344 Part e, the "How can an infinite series of whole numbers have a finite total?" question was excellent! I'm a math major and I loved the part about Zeno's paradox! That was an excellent move too. I've studied these paradoxes too....

Letter #350 in Freethought News and Views of Freethought Forum in San Antonio, Texas

(We would like to thank the Freethought Forum for putting the following advertisement in their newsletter gratis--ED.).

Biblical Errancy should be the "Bible" for those who are interested in debunking the Bible. This monthly consists of six jam-packed pages of biblical criticism and debate with actual believers. For this latter feature alone (in which the editor addresses the counter-arguments of literal Bible believers), the periodical is worth the paltry \$9.00 subscription rate....

IMPORTANT NOTE: We are not only tired of watching religious nonsense dominate radio and TV stations but weary from requesting media appearances which are rarely granted or repeated. Consequently, we have decided to start creating our own programs for public access television. However, before investing the requisite funds, we'd like to have the names of everyone who would be willing to donate their time to circulate tapes, schedule and play them on a regular basis on their local public access channel, and pay postage. If enough people contact us to say they are willing to donate their services for an extended period, this could be our next major project. For your aid we have a list of every public access channel in the U.S., especially those in your area. Incidentally, we now have an answering machine for those wish to call at any time.

Issue No. 87

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COMMENTARY

Throughout the history of this publication we have often quoted many well-known individuals to buttress points made in BE. And, although many quotations have been provided, our reservoir has by no means been exhausted. For that reason we have decided to periodically digress from our normal format and provide a topical arrangement of the most poignant comments we have gleaned from years of extensive research. So many piercing comments have been culled that we would be remiss if the best available were not listed. What follows are those in our repertoire which have never appeared in BE but certainly should be presented to all concerned. Topics will be discussed alphabetically and will occasionally refer not only to material outside the Bible but humorous observations by shrewd satirists. Although the following quotations are cited, that does not necessarily mean we concur with every detail of that which is presented.

QUOTATIONS

(Part 1)

ADAM--"Adam blamed Eve, Eve blamed the serpent and the serpent didn't have a leg to stand on." Anonymous

AGNOSTIC--"I am an agnostic; I do not pretend to know what many ignorant men are sure of."
Clarence Darrow

ATONEMENT--This doctrine is the consummation of two outrages--forgiving one crime and committing another." Heresies and Heretics, Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 1, p. 235

BIBLE--"The real oppressor, enslaver, and corrupter of the people is the Bible." Some Mistakes of Moses, Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 2, p. 43

"Theology is not what we know about God, but what we do not know about Nature. In order to increase our respect for the Bible, it became necessary for the priests to exalt and extol that book, and at the same time to decry and belittle the reasoning powers of man. The whole power of the pulpit has been used for hundreds of years to destroy the confidence of man in himself--to induce him to distrust his own powers of thought, to believe that he was wholly unable to decide any question for himself, and that all human virtue consists in faith and obedience. The church has said, 'Believe and obey!' If you reason you will become an unbeliever, and unbelievers will be lost. If you disobey, you will do so through vain pride and curiosity, and will, like Adam and Eve, be thrust from Paradise forever! For my part, I care nothing for what the church says, except in so far as it accords with my reason; and the Bible is nothing to me, only in so far as it agrees with what I think or know." Ibid., Vol. 2, p. 53

"It is said that from Mount Sinai God gave, amid thunderings and lightnings, ten commandments for the guidance of mankind; and yet among them is not found--"THOU SHALT BELIEVE THE BIBLE" Ibid., p. 120.

"It has lost power in the proportion that man has gained knowledge." Ibid., p. 242.

"The OT describes the hell of the past, and the New the hell of the future." Some Reasons Why, Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 2, p. 334.

"The inspired Bible has been and is the greatest curse of Christendom, and will so remain as long as it is held to be inspired." Superstition, Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 4, p. 335.

"...but the Bible is such a book of lies and contradictions there is no knowing which part to believe or whether any...." The Age of Reason, T. Paine, p. 104.

"...and this manner of speaking of the Almighty, as one would speak of a man, is consistent with nothing but the stupidity of the Bible." Ibid., p. 134.

"...the Bible and the Testament are impositions upon the world;...the fall of man, the account of Jesus Christ being the Son of God, and of his dying to appease the wrath of God, and of salvation by that strange means, are all fabulous inventions, dishonorable to the wisdom and power of the Almighty;...." Ibid., p. 167.

"Whenever we read the obscene stories, the voluptuous debaucheries, the cruel and torturous executions, the unrelenting vindictiveness, with which more than half the Bible is filled, it would be more consistent that we called it the word of a demon, than the Word of God. It is a history of wickedness, that has served to corrupt and brutalize mankind...." Ibid., p. 34.

"But when I see throughout the greatest part of this book, the Bible, scarcely anything but a history of the grossest vices, and a collection of the most paltry and contemptible tales, I cannot dishonor my Creator by calling it by his name." Ibid., p. 38.

"They will now find that I have furnished myself with a Bible and Testament; and I can say also that I have found them to be much worse books than I had conceived. If I have erred in any

thing, in the former part of the Age of Reason, it has been by speaking better of some parts than they deserved." Ibid., p. 88.

"Great objects inspire great thoughts; great munificence excites great gratitude; but the grovelling tales and doctrines of the Bible...are fit only to excite contempt.... the stupid Bible of the church, that teaches man nothing...." Ibid., p. 192.

"...the stupid texts of the Bible...from which, be the talents of the preacher what they may, only stupid sermons can be preached." Ibid., p. 194.

"I...am satisfied that the Bible is fabulous." *The Life and Works of Thomas Paine*, Vol. 8, p. 328.

"For my own part, my belief in the perfection of the Deity will not permit me to believe that a book so manifestly obscure, disorderly, and contradictory can be His work." Ibid., p. 330

"The obscene and vulgar stories in the Bible are as repugnant to our ideas of the purity of a Divine Being, as the horrid cruelties and murders it ascribes to Him are repugnant to our ideas of His justice." Ibid., Vol. 9, p. 84.

"That God cannot lie, is no advantage to your argument, because it is no proof that priests can not, or that the Bible does not." Ibid., p. 134.

"...therefore we say that a lying Spirit has been in the mouth of the writers of the books of the Bible." Ibid., p. 158.

"One would think that a system loaded with such gross and vulgar absurdities as Scripture religion is could never have obtained credit; yet we have seen what priestcraft and fanaticism can do, and credulity believe." Ibid., p. 200.

"On the other hand, the Bible contains much that is relevant today, like Noah taking 40 days to find a place to park." Curtis McDougall

"If we found in any other book pretending to give a system of religion, the falsehoods, falsifications, contradictions, and absurdities, which are to be met with in almost every page of the Old and New Testament, all the priests of the present day, who supposed themselves capable, would triumphantly show their skill in criticism, and cry it down as a most glaring imposition. But since the books in question belong to their own trade and profession, they, or at least many of them, seek to stifle every inquiry into them and abuse those who have the honesty and the courage to do it." Ibid., p. 271-272.

"...we must be compelled to hold this doctrine to be false, and the old and new law called the Old and the New Testament, to be impositions, fables and forgeries." Ibid., p. 282.

"Compare all this ribaldry, blasphemously called the Word of God, with the Almighty power that created the universe, and whose eternal wisdom directs and governs all its mighty movements, and we shall be at a loss to find a name sufficiently contemptible for it." Ibid., p. 285.

"Nonsense ought to be treated as nonsense wherever it be found, and had this been done in the rational manner it ought to have been done, instead of intimating and mincing the matter as has been too much the case, the nonsense and false doctrine of the Bible, with all the aid that priestcraft can give, could never have stood their ground against the divine reason that God has given to man." Ibid., p. 312.

"As to the book called the Bible, it is blasphemy to call it the word of God. It is a book of lies and contradictions, and a history of bad times and bad men. There are but a few good characters in the whole book." Ibid., p. 296.

"...the indiscriminate judgments upon men, women, and children, with which this lying book, the Bible, is crowded...." Age of Reason, Paine, p. 150.

"The NT, compared with the Old, is like a farce of one act...." Ibid., p. 153.

"It is not a God, just and good, but a devil, under the name of God, that the Bible describes." Theological Works of Paine, p. 163.

"The best cure for admiring the Bible is to read it." Anonymous

"The hardest thing to believe about the Bible is that there were only two jackasses in the ark." Anonymous

"When I think of all the harm the Bible has done, I despair of ever writing anything to equal it." Oscar Wilde

"The dogma of the infallibility of the Bible is no more self-evident than is that of the infallibility of the popes. Thomas Huxley

"The Christian Bible is a drug store. It's contents remain the same but the medical practice changes. For 1,800 years these changes were slight--scarcely noticeable.... The dull and ignorant physician day and night, and all the days and all the nights, drenched his patient with vast and hideous doses of the most repulsive drugs to be found in the store's stock.... He kept him religion sick for eighteen centuries, and allowed him not a well day during all that time." Mark Twain and the Three R's, Ed. by Maxwell Geismar, p. 107.

And lastly, "Historical investigations have revealed to us the origin and growth of the Bible. We know that by this name we designate a collection of writings as radically unlike in origin, character and contents, as if the Nibelungen Lied, Mirabeau's speeches, Heine's love poems and a manual of zoology had been printed and mixed up promiscuously, and then bound into one volume. We find collected in this book the superstitious beliefs of the ancient inhabitants of Palestine, with indistinct echoes of Indian and Persian fables, mistaken imitations of Egyptian theories, and customs, historical chronicles as dry as they are unreliable, and miscellaneous poems, amatory, human and Jewish-national which are rarely distinguished by beauties of the highest order, but frequently by superfluity of expression, coarseness, bad taste, and genuine Oriental sensuality. As a literary monument the Bible is of much later origin than the Vedas; as a work of literary value it is surpassed by everything written in the last two thousand years by authors even of the second rank, and to compare it seriously with the productions of Homer, Sophocles, Dante, Shakespeare or Goethe would require a fanaticized mind that had entirely lost its power of judgment. Its conception of the universe is childish, and its morality revolting, as revealed in the malicious vengeance attributed to God in the OT and in the New, the parable of the laborers of the eleventh hour and the episodes of Mary Magdalene and the woman taken in adultery." Max Nordau

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #351 from PK of Grand Forks, North Dakota

Dear Dennis. In Issue #82 you responded to letter #331 and said that "God" with a small "g" could lead one to believe that Christians believe in more than one God, a concept which could either include or exclude a supreme God. A "god" or "God" is a supernatural being. Christians believe in a trinity, Satan, angels, devils, demons, witches, warlocks, etc., all of which are supernatural beings. Some brands of Christianity teach that everyone has a guardian angel. That would add tens of billions of Gods to the list. There is no question that Christianity is polytheistic. A blend of older polytheisms evolved into Christianity. Only the names have been changed to protect the guilty. Christians do not capitalize the "gods" of other religions, "supreme" or not. I suggest that the most fair thing to do is to not capitalize any of them. It is also the most accurate.

Editor's Response to Letter #351

Dear PK. I don't see how belief in angels, devils, demons, witches, and Satan would "add billions of Gods to the list." Perhaps I just missed your point. Are you saying all of these beings are gods? We agree that Christianity is polytheistic, but that arises primarily because of belief in the Trinity rather than a belief in a multitude of supernatural beings.

If you do not wish to capitalize words such as god, devil, satan, etc., I have no objection. You have many compatriots in this regard who have a poignant argument. By capitalizing a word, you not only give it a degree of respectability that might be unwarranted but give the implicit impression that the word has some degree of credibility. I, however, have always believed that one should capitalize proper nouns not only because it is grammatically correct but also because it fosters easier reading. At least it does for me. But I'm not going to go out of my way to criticize those who contend god, heaven, hell, and satan, for example, should not be capitalized.

Letter #352 from Kenneth Bonnell, Box 65706, Los Angeles, California 90065 (Part a)

Dear Dennis. You will probably be flacked about Item 115 in Issue #84. [BE stated that John 5:37's contention that "Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape" is shown to be false by many biblical verses--ED.]. John 5:37 is in the context of a long discourse addressed to "the Jews who sought to kill him" (5:18-19) because he did work on the Sabbath. It is not one of those "no one has seen God" (John 1:18) statements that appear elsewhere....

Editor's Response to Letter #352 (Part a)

Dear Ken. I understand your concern and took note of that fact when that issue was written. But, how do you know his comments were only intended for the people being directly addressed at that time? This kind of problem is very common throughout the Bible because of nonexistent biblical guidelines. If I followed your train of thought, I could say that the Sermon on the Mount or the Sermon on the Plain only applied to the people being addressed at that time. Many commandments, rules, moralisms, and statutes are laid down in the Bible. How do you know when they apply only to the person or people being addressed as opposed to mankind in general? When Jesus said "Ye" in John 5:37 I felt this applied to all of humanity since most of his comprehensive statements beginning with "Ye" apply to mankind in general. If I erred, then large parts of the Bible become nebulous and open to interpretation as expediency dictates. When rules, laws, and moral precepts are laid down, how do you know to whom they are directed?

Letter #352 Continues (Part b)

[In Item 117 of the same issue we stated that in Matt 10:9-10 Jesus told his followers not to take many things for their journey, including staffs, while the parallel account in Mark 6:8-9 says they were to take nothing on their journey except a staff. I said "Jesus can't seem to decide whether or not his followers should take staffs on their journeys--ED].

Your evaluation in item 117 is wrong in attributing the inconsistency between parallel passages of Mark 6:8-9 and Matthew 10:9-10 to a fault in Jesus. It is the fault rather of the writer of Matthew who grew sloppy in his adapting of Mark to tell his own story. Not just no staff, but also no shoes/sandals!....Luke's parallel (9:3) shows dependence on both Matthew, first, and then on Mark, for he deprives the disciples also of staff, bag, bread, and money, with no mention of shoes/sandals, but not two tunics. Luke's omission of shoes/sandals probably indicates he recognized the contradiction between his two sources!

Editor's Response to Letter #352 (Part b)

Your analysis shows why BE avoids lower or textual criticism, Ken. First, you are making the common assumption that Matthew and Luke took their material from Mark. How do you know that Mark was the original source? That's never been proven. It's a common speculation that is disputed by some scholars. Second, how do you know the writer of Matthew erred? Perhaps the writer of Matthew was correct and the writer of Mark erred? If they wrote independently and neither copied from the other, that is quite possible. Third, how do you know that Luke used Matthew and Mark as sources? As I said many issues ago, when you start debating history and how the Canon evolved historically, you invariably come down to a matter of which sources you want to believe. Neither of us was there, so we have to take some one's word for what occurred. The question then becomes, whose word are you going to take.

Letter #352 Concludes (Part c)

[In item 119 of the same issue BE quoted Mark 12:26 and criticised Jesus for referring to the Book of Moses. BE said, "It may be called the 'Book of Moses' but the commentaries entitled Moses and the Pentateuch in Issues 19 and 20 clearly show Moses was not the author--ED].

Jesus can be faulted for accepting uncritically the tradition that Moses had written the Pentateuch, but it seems to have been generally accepted among both Jews and Christians up until the last couple of centuries and is still accepted by fundamentalists even now. He wasn't into scriptural criticism!....

Those compilations of radio talk show opportunities seem awfully damn expensive. I'll keep an eye open.

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #352 (Part c)

Now Ken! Remember, Jesus is God and God knows everything! He knows Moses did not write the Torah. Yet, he clearly called it the "Book of Moses." Even though it was accepted as the book of Moses by Christians and Jews, as well as fundamentalists today, the fact remains that he knows better. Since when does God follow something he knows is false because it is "generally accepted" by human beings? He does not have to be "into scriptural criticism" to know that he is making a false statement.

Even though we may disagree occasionally, Ken, you have always been a loyal reader of BE and I'm confident you will try to assist me in finding the books I requested several months ago.

Letter #353 from Ed McCartney, P.O. Box 770024, Lakewood, Ohio 44107-0011 (Part a)

Dear Dennis. A while ago I sent you a letter dated July 23, 1989 A.D. I see that some of that appeared as letter #328 in BE issue number 82 on page 3. [In letter #328 in Issue #82 Ed said, "You are correct in saying that Joseph was not Jesus' physical father. However,...did you forget Romans 1:3 which says, 'Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh'"--ED.] There were some inaccuracies in your reprint of what I said compared to what I wrote. Did you notice the punctuation in my letter after I wrote "...Romans 1:3..."? My sentence ended with a question mark (?). Please look now at your publication. If you are going to edit something you ought to show it for what it is. In your publication it appears as though what follows "...Romans 1:3..." has been attributed to me. The punctuation at the end of the third verse of Romans chapter one is not a period. Now please notice your publication.

Other than your errors I appreciate what was accurately printed of my letter.

Editor's Response to Letter #353 (Part a)

Dear Ed. You say there are "inaccuracies" and "errors" in my publication while listing only one, allegedly. Please be specific and don't engage in unsupported generalizations. Second, your assertion that Rom. 1:3 was unjustifiably attributed to you is inaccurate. One need only read your comments on page 3 of Issue 82 to see that you are using Rom. 1:3 as a defense. You are employing the same kind of tactic that is so prominent in apologetic literature. Third, if you will read Rom. 1:3 in the KJV, you will notice it does not end either in a period or a question mark but a semicolon.

Letter #353 Concludes (Part b)

'...need I remind you of my nine page letter to you dated Nov. 28, 1988'? Did you receive that letter? If not, you may request a copy from me. If you did, did you read it?

Editor's Response to Letter #353 (Part b)

Yes, I read your letter, Ed, and it was not put in BE for several reasons. First, unfortunately, your explanations tend to ramble. You use 30 words to say what can be said in 10. Second, readers do not want to read a lot of petty details that tend to repeat and overlap. Third, your sentences often require too much grammatical and syntactical alteration for the sake of coherency and if I engage in such activities I'll open myself up to the kind of criticism you made in (Part a). Fourth, your writing just doesn't flow smoothly enough to retain the reader's attention. I often feel like I am translating more than reading. You asked if I read your 9-page letter. I'd be interested in asking you the same question. Did you proofread it? Incidentally, anytime you cite a biblical verse you should quote the verse verbatim. We have always done so fully cognizant of the fact that most people are simply not going to look them up and it's unrealistic to expect otherwise. An obvious example is your insertion of Prov. 20:12 at the bottom of your current letter.

If my answer seems rather direct, it's because you implied I avoided your letter because I had no response. In truth, it's because our readership would have fallen asleep or yawned too much. A good standard to follow for those wishing to have their letters published is that the latter should be brief, non-repetitive, coherent, poignant, and substantiated. In all modesty, I must say that our general adherence to this policy accounts for the fact that there is more useful information packed into 6 pages of BE than is 16 pages of others. But we cooperate with nearly all.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #354 from RB of Grand Junction, Colorado

Dear Dennis. Here's my check for a 2-year renewal to BE, the finest, most scholarly publication of its kind I know about. A couple of questions: (1) How large is BE's circulation? (2) Are most of your readers, as I suspect, nonbelievers such as I? It might be interesting to find out by including a simple survey form in a forthcoming issue asking readers to classify themselves as atheist, Christian, uncommitted, etc., and return the form to you for tally and report (as if you didn't have enough to do). Just a thought. Keep up the excellent (and hard) work.

Editor's Response to Letter #354

Dear RB. The circulation of BE is in the hundreds and I would say, off hand, that most of BE's readers lie in the arena of those who critically examine the Bible. I'm not sure what category that would put them in and many would probably have difficulty classifying themselves. BE's readers are on such a wide spectrum that labels are almost useless. Those calling themselves Christian/humanists are anti-Christian to many, while those calling themselves Christian/fundamentalists are non-Christian bigots to others. How's that for a political answer!

Letter #355 from JM of San Diego, California

Dear Dennis. I just received your shipment of the pamphlets and back issues of BE I ordered. They are all excellent, especially the "tracts." Just the right size, too!....I look forward to promoting your pamphlets as part of my college freethought group's literature. I wish you well in your continuing efforts. Yours for sanity.

Issue No. 88

April 1990

COMMENTARY

This month's commentary will continue the alphabetical listing of pertinent quotations from prominent individuals begun in the prior issue.

QUOTATIONS

(Part 2)

BLASPHEMY--"Blasphemy is an epithet bestowed by superstition upon common sense."
Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 5, p. 49.

"There is this strange thing about the history of theology--nobody has ever been charged with blasphemy who thought God bad. For instance, it never would have excited any theologian if a man had insisted that God would finally damn everybody. Nearly all heresy has consisted in making God better than the majority in the churches thought him to be." Ibid., Vol. 7, p. 468-69.

"The book called the Bible has been voted by men, and decreed by human laws to be the word of God; and the disbelief of this is called blasphemy." The Theological Works of Thomas Paine.
166.

"...if the prosecution cannot prove the Bible to be the word of God, the charge of blasphemy is visionary and groundless." Ibid., p. 184.

CALVINISM--Calvin founded a little theocracy, modeled after the Old Testament, and succeeded in erecting the most detestable government that ever existed, except the one from which it was copied." Heretics and Heresies, Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 1, p. 226.

"In other words, Calvin was as near like the God of the OT as his health permitted." Ibid., p. 227.

Calvinism is the belief "(1) That there are three Gods (2) That good works, or the love of our neighbor are nothing (3) That faith is every thing, and the more incomprehensible the proposition, the more merit in its faith (4) That reason in religion is of unlawful use (5) That God, from the beginning, elected certain individuals to be saved, and certain others to be damned; and that no crimes of the former can damn them; no virtues of the latter save." The Theological Works of Thomas Paine. IX.

CANON'S FORMATION--"The Bible has been received by the protestants on the authority of the church of Rome, and on no other authority. It is she that has said it is the word of God." Ibid., p. 364.

"None of those books have the appearance of being written by the persons whose names they bear, neither do we know who the authors were. They come to us on no other authority than the church of Rome, which the Protestant Priests...call the Whore of Babylon." Ibid., p. 365.

"...the bishop who has answered me has been obliged to acknowledge the fact, that the Books that compose the NT, were voted by yeas and nays to be the word of God, as you now vote a law, by the Popish councils of Nicea and Laodocia, about 1,450 years ago." Ibid. p. 325.

"I admit that books were voted in and out, and that the Bible was finally formed in accordance with a vote...." Interviews, Ingersoll's Works, Vol 5, p. 300.

CATHOLICISM--"At the bottom of the ladder is Catholicism, and at the top is Science." Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 1, p. 203

"But the Roman Catholic Church is the enemy of intellectual liberty. It is the enemy of investigation. It is the enemy of free schools. That church always has been, always will be, the enemy of freedom. It works in the dark. When in the minority it is humility itself--when in power it is the impersonation of arrogance. In weakness it crawls--in power it stands erect, and compels its victims to fall upon their faces. The most dangerous institution in this world, so far as the intellectual liberty of man is concerned, is the Roman Catholic Church." Ibid., Vol. 8, p. 441

"That church teaches us that we can make God happy by being miserable ourselves;...." Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 492

"It may be said that Luther and Comte endeavored to reform the Catholic Church. Both were mistaken, because the only reformation of which that church is capable is destruction. It is a mass of superstition." Ibid., Vol. 11, p. 277

"...if all the bones of all the victims of the Catholic Church could be gathered together, a monument higher than all the pyramids would rise...." Ibid. Vol. 1, p. 497

"Thousands of volumes could not contain the crimes of the Catholic Church. They could not contain even the names of her victims." Ibid. p. 497

"You will notice that in all disputes between Christians since the birth of the Church, Rome has always favored the doctrine which most completely subjugated the human mind and annihilated reason." Voltaire

CHRISTIANITY--"Of all the systems of religion that ever were invented, there is none more derogatory to the Almighty, more unedifying to man, more repugnant to reason, and more contradictory in itself, than this thing called Christianity. Too absurd for belief, too impossible to convince, and too inconsistent for practice,... As an engine of power, it serves the purpose of despotism; and as a means of wealth, the avarice of priests;...." Age of Reason, Thomas Paine, p. 190.

"The Christian religion is derogatory to the Creator in all its articles. It puts the Creator in an inferior point of view, and places the Christian Devil above him." The Theological Works of T. Paine, p. 330

"But there are times when men have serious thoughts, and it is at such times, when they begin to think, that they begin to doubt the truth of the Christian religion; and well they may, for it is too fanciful and too full of conjecture, inconsistency, improbability and irrationality to afford consolation to the thoughtful man. His reason revolts against his creed." The Life and Works of T. Paine, Vol. 9, p. 109.

"It is impossible to reason upon things not comprehensible by reason; and therefore, if you keep to your text, which priests seldom do,...you must admit a religion to which reason can apply, and this certainly is not the Christian religion. There is not an article in the Christian religion that is cognizable by reason." Ibid., p. 131-132

"Christianity has made the rape of the human body a crime, but not the rape of the human mind."
Anonymous

"Christianity cannot live in peace with any other form of faith. If that religion be true, there is but one savior, one inspired book, and but one little narrow grassgrown path that leads to heaven. Such a religion is necessarily uncompromising, unreasoning, aggressive and insolent." Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 2, p. VII

"My objection to Christianity is that it is infinitely cruel, infinitely selfish, and I might add infinitely absurd." Ibid., Vol. 7, p. 201

"The memory of my own suffering has prevented me from ever shadowing one young soul with the superstition of the Christian religion." Elizabeth Cady Stanton

"Two great European narcotics, alcohol and Christianity" Nietzsche

"The Christian faith from the beginning, is sacrifice: the sacrifice of all freedom, all pride, all self-confidence of spirit; it is at the same time subjection, self-derision, and self-mutilation...."
Nietzsche

CHRISTIANS--"Christians believe they are thinking when they are only rearranging their prejudices" Anonymous

"There are ten church members by inheritance for every one by conviction." Anonymous

"A Christian is a man who feels repentance on Sunday for what he did on Saturday and is going to do on Monday." Thomas Ybarra

CHURCH--"Take from the church the miraculous, the supernatural, the incomprehensible, the unreasonable, the impossible, the unknowable, and the absurd, and nothing but a vacuum remains." Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 1, p. 285

"What church is an asylum for a persecuted truth?" Ibid., p. 320

"Lighthouses are more helpful than churches." Ben Franklin

"The observances of the church concerning feasts and fasts are tolerably well kept, since the rich keep the feasts and the poor the fasts." Sidney Smith

CHURCH FATHERS--"Nothing can exceed the credulity of the early fathers, unless it may be their ignorance. They believed everything that was miraculous. They believed everything except the truth.... They revelled in the mishapen and the repulsive. They did not think it wrong to swear falsely in a good cause. They interpolated, forged, and changed the records to suit themselves, for the sake of Christ. They quoted from persons who never wrote. They misrepresented those who had written, and their evidence is absolutely worthless. They were ignorant, credulous, mendacious, fanatical, pious, unreasonable, bigoted, hypocritical, and for the most part insane." Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 5, p. 273

"The great religious historian, Eusebius, ingenuously remarks that in his history he carefully omitted whatever tended to discredit the church, and that he piously magnified all that conduced to her glory." Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 293

CHURCH/STATE--"Give the church a place in the Constitution, let her touch once more the sword of power, and the priceless fruit of all ages will turn to ashes on the lips of men." Ibid., p. 203

"The pious denounce the secular schools as godless. They should be. The sciences are all secular, all godless." Ibid., Vol. 2, p. 477

"Nothing could be more dangerous to the existence of this Republic than to introduce religion into politics." Ibid., Vol. 5, p. 305

"Let there be no property untaxed. When you fail to tax any species of property, you increase the tax of other people owning the rest. To that extent, you unite church and state. You compel the Infidel to support the Catholic. I do not want to support the Catholic Church." Ibid., Vol. 12, p. 243

"The government of the United States is not in any sense founded upon the Christian religion." John Adams

"I do not believe than any type of religion should ever be introduced into the public schools of the United States." Thomas Edison

"By the efforts of these infidels, the name of God was left out of the Constitution of the United States. They knew that if an infinite being was put in, no room would be left for the people. They

knew that if any church was made the mistress of the state, that mistress, like all others, would corrupt, weaken and destroy." Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 3, p. 382

"But I am mistaken in speaking of a Christian republic; the terms are mutually exclusive. Christianity preaches only servitude and dependence. Its spirit is so favorable to tyranny that it always profits by such a regime. True Christians are made to be slaves, and they know it and do not mind: this short life counts for too little in their eyes." Rousseau

"The day that this country ceases to be free for irreligion it will cease to be free for religion--except for the sect that can win political power." Supreme Court Justice, Robert Jackson

"The moment the colonies began to deny the rights of the king they suspected the power of the priest. In digging down to find an excuse for fighting George the Third, they unwittingly undermined the church." Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 3, p. 381

"All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit." The Age of Reason by T. Paine, p. 22

"All religions are founded on the fears of the many and the craftiness of the few." Anonymous

"Every national church or religion has established itself by pretending some special mission from God,...as if the way to God was not open to every man alike." Ibid., p. 23

"We ought therefore to suspect that a great mass of information respecting the Bible, and the introduction of it into the world, has been suppressed by the united tyranny of Church and State, for the purpose of keeping people in ignorance, and which ought to be known." The Life and Works of Thomas Paine, Vol. 9, p. 143-144

"Leave the matter of religion to the family altar, the church, and the private school, supported entirely by private contributions. Keep the church and state forever separate." Ulysses S. Grant

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #356 from TF of Webster, Wisconsin (Part a)

Dear Mr. McKinsey. I wish to comment on your comparison in Issue 83 of Mark 2:25-26 and 1 Sam. 21:1,6; 22:20 in which you state, "The OT shows that Abiathar did not give David the shewbread but it was the son of the priest, Ahimelech, who did, and David came alone, not with others." Firstly, although 1 Sam. 21:1,6 does indicate Ahimelech gave David the shewbread, Mark 2:25-26 does not contradict this by stating that it was Abiathar, nor does it implicate anybody else. It merely states that David "...went into the house of God...and did eat the shewbread..."

Editor's Response to Letter #356 (Part a)

Dear TF. One need only read the narrative from 1 Sam. 21:1 through 21:6 to see that only one priest is mentioned, and that priest is Ahimelech. Nowhere does the narrative imply, much less state, that Abiathar was a priest, high or otherwise, as Mark says. Second, verses 21:1 and 21:2 show David approaching and talking with "Ahimelech the priest." Verses 4 and 5 show David talking with that same priest and verse 6 shows that priest giving David the shewbread. So it was Ahimelech who fed David, not Abiathar. Third, perhaps you wish to say that Mark 2:25-26 only

states that David went into the house of Abiathar the high priest but was fed by Ahimelech, i.e., he was not fed by Abiathar? But Mark 2:26 NASB says, "...and he gave it also to those who were with him." Why are you applying the pronoun "he" to Ahimelech rather than Abiathar, since Abiathar is mentioned in verse 26 while Ahimelech is not?

Letter #356 Continues (Part b)

Secondly, although Mark 2:25-26 does indicate that there were traveling companions with David, it does not state that they approached the high priest with David. This does not contradict the OT writer who also indicates that there were men traveling with David (1 Sam. 21:4-5; 22:6), since he explains that David "directed the young men to a certain place" (1 Sam. 21:2) while he approached the high priest alone (1 Sam. 21:1).

Editor's Response to Letter #356 (Part b)

You might want to reread Mark 2:25-26, TF. It says, "Have you never read what David did...and they that were with him? How he went into the house of God...and did eat the shewbread..." By using the word "and," the text shows that whatever David did those that were with him did also. The OT, on the other hand, says that David came alone which contradicts Mark 2:25-26.

Letter #356 Continues (Part c)

Thirdly, 1 Sam. 21:1,6; 22:20 does not state that the son of the priest gave David the shewbread, nor that Abiathar was the father of Ahimelech. The OT writer indicates that Ahimelech was the high priest (1 Sam. 21:1), he gave David the shewbread (1 Sam. 21:6), and his son was Abiathar (1 Sam. 22:20).

Editor's Response to Letter #356 (Part c)

On this point you are correct, TF. I should have said, "it was the father of the priest, Ahimelech, who did" since Ahimelech was Abiathar's father, not his son.

Letter #356 Concludes (Part d)

It should be noted that a valid contradiction does exist between these passages. The "infallible" writer of Mark is obviously confused as to whether it was Ahimelech or Abiathar who was high priest when David ate the shewbread. His transposition of these two men is understandable in light of the fact that the "infallible" OT writers were equally as confused on this matter. They could not agree if Ahimelech was the father and Abiathar was the son (1 Sam. 22:20; 23:6, 30:7) or if, conversely, Abiathar was the father and Ahimelech was the son (2 Sam. 8:17; 1 Chron. 18:16; 24:6). Incidentally, at one point they even misspelled Ahimelech as Abimelech (1 Chron. 18:16). So please don't feel too bad about your misspelled words which were innumerable by BWF (Letter #340), since apparently the biblical God who inspired these "infallible" writers also has occasional trouble with spelling.

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #356 (Part d)

We are in agreement, TF. Biblical translators and copyists certainly weren't models of perfection.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #357 from FT of Canton, Illinois

Dear Mr. McKinsey. Your November issue of Biblical Errancy arrived yesterday....I noticed that you referred to John 7:38 ("He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water") as a "scripture quotation" that no one has ever been able to find in the OT. Being a new subscriber, I don't know what other examples like this you may have pointed out in back issues. I'm sure you must be familiar with Matthew 2:23 where it was alleged that Joseph took his family to Nazareth in Galilee in order to fulfill what had been "spoken through the prophets," that Jesus "should be called a Nazarene." Of course, there is no such statement in the Old Testament; it never even mentions Nazareth or Nazarenes. One of my favorite non-existent quotations is Luke 24:46 where Jesus said it had been written that "the Christ should suffer, and rise again from the dead the third day. The Apostle Paul also said in 1 Cor. 15:4 that the scriptures had predicted the Messiah's resurrection on "the third day." Inerrancy believers have tried to twist the story of the "suffering servant of Yahweh" in Isaiah 53 into a prophecy of Jesus' crucifixion, but of course they are hard pressed to find prophecies of his resurrection, since a Hebrew concept of even an afterlife didn't develop until late in its history. By all means, there is nothing in the Old Testament that can be construed into a prophecy as specific as Jesus' claim that it had been predicted he would be raised on the third day. I have found these references a quick way to silence an inerrancy believer who tries to defend his belief with, "What about the amazing prophecy fulfillments?"

Another passage that will back them into a corner is Acts 13:29 where Paul in his speech in Antioch of Pisidia said of those who crucified Jesus, "And when they had fulfilled all things that were written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a tomb." But if all things that were written of him had been fulfilled when they took him down from the tree (cross), then nothing that happened after that could have been something that had been written of him. His resurrection, of course, allegedly occurred after he had been taken down from the tree. Hence, his resurrection could not have been written about. I look forward to receiving future issues of Biblical Errancy....

Letter #358 from Dan Barker of the FFRF, P.O. Box 750, Madison, Wisconsin 53701

Dear Dennis. Happy December! I thought you would enjoy seeing this revealing bit of bias on the part of Jim White, President of Alpha and Omega Ministries with whom you have corresponded in BE. On page 7 in the October 1989 issue of his publication he says, "...we must never interpret Scripture so as to make the Word contradictory to itself." Imagine! Here is a bald-faced admission that the possibility of errancy is rejected a priori. We rationalists are constantly accused of a built-in bias against revelation, against the supernatural, etc. Yet who is it that has the closed mind? A truly open-minded person would be open to both possibilities: inerrancy and errancy.

Suppose I were to write: "We must never interpret Scripture so as to make it agree with itself." Wouldn't the fundamentalists howl?

I debated John Warwick Montgomery (a prominent Christian apologetic author--ED.) on Birmingham radio this month. He was mean. Rather than sticking to the point, he kept trying to attack me. "Do you have a doctorate in history, like I do?" And so on. He does the old hat trick of interpreting literally where it pleases him, and interpreting metaphorically where it pleases, without any real criteria for telling the difference. I pointed out that we may as well interpret the WHOLE THING metaphorically, for that matter, including the concept of "God." The radio talkshow was on a Christian station, so most of the phone calls were hostile to my position. Still, I think the show went a long way towards educating the general public. I got a couple of letters from freethinking listeners. (One fellow stood in a phone booth for 70 minutes waiting to get on the show, but somehow they never got around to him.)

Letter #359 from CWT of Van Nuys, California

Dear Dennis. I just received 25 back issues and just couldn't stop reading them. It's really amazing how apologists can continue to claim the inerrancy of the Bible in spite of the overwhelming evidence which contradicts their claim. I want to order more back copies but I must tell you how I found out about your publication.

Like many of your followers, I, too, was convinced that the Christian god was real. However, there were always questions which my logic and reason could not simply dismiss with "blind faith." I began to seriously doubt the authenticity of the Bible so I started to read various books on the subject of religion. It seemed the more I read, the harder it was to believe in the Bible. I had to admit that I was mainly seeking books which dealt with disproving the Bible. One reason for this was the books I usually found in libraries that were pro-Christianity were generally under the rationale of "we are right because the Bible says we are right." I felt I needed to get a good apologetic book in order to give the other side a fair hearing. I went to a Christian bookstore called The Living Room. I purchased three of their better apologetic books. One of the books, Answers to Tough Questions, was the biggest insult to logic and reason I ever read. However, in one of the books was a little flyer of yours representing a page marker. I originally thought your letter would deal with attempting to prove the accuracy of the Bible, seeing as I obtained it in a Christian bookstore. I sent away for the sample copy in order to see if your logic was any better than what I had read. When I received your sample letter, I was pleasantly surprised to find such a logical, rational, detailed attack on the Bible. How ironic that I would find out about your letter from the Christian world!....

Editor's Response to Letter #359

Dear CWT. I always enjoy hearing stories of this nature and whoever placed the marker in the book deserves our gratitude. That's the kind of commitment we love to see in BE's supporters. Because that person placed one of our leaflets in a Christian book, your attitude toward the Bible has been correctly and materially effected.

Issue No. 89

May 1990

COMMENTARY

Before returning to the Bible, per se, one more listing of relevant quotations is in order. We'll provide additional observations from notable figures later.

QUOTATIONS

(Part 3)

CLERGY--"Priests should first prove facts, and deduce doctrines from them afterwards. But instead of this they assume everything and prove nothing." *The Life and Works of Thomas Paine*, Vol. 9, p. 86

"As priestcraft was always the enemy of knowledge, because priestcraft supports itself by keeping people in delusion and ignorance,...." *Ibid.*, p. 106

"Nothing can be more contrary to religion and the clergy than reason and common sense."
Voltaire

"A clergyman is a man who undertakes the management of our spiritual affairs as a method of bettering his temporal ones." Anonymous

"Most of the clergy are, or seem to be, utterly incapable of discussing anything in a fair and catholic spirit. They appeal, not to reason, but to prejudice; not to facts, but to passages of Scripture. They can conceive of no goodness, of no spiritual exaltation beyond the horizon of their creed." *Ingersoll's Works*, Vol. 1, p. 259

"I found that the clergy did not understand their own book." *Ibid.*, p. 459

"It is from the influence of this vice, hypocrisy, that we see so many church-and-meeting-going professors and pretenders to religion so full of trick and deceit in their dealings, and so loose in the performance of their engagements that they are not to be trusted further than the laws of the country will bind them. Morality has no hold on their minds, no restraint on their actions." *The Life and Works of Thomas Paine*, Vol. 9, p. 207

"There is no opinion so absurd that a preacher would not express it." Anonymous

"Some clergymen are so heavenly-minded that they are of no earthly use." Anonymous

"These orthodox ministers do not add to the sum of knowledge. They produce nothing. They live upon alms. They hate laughter and joy. They officiate at weddings, sprinkle water upon babes, and utter meaningless words and barren promises above the dead. They laugh at the agony of unbelievers, mock at their tears, and of their sorrows make a jest. There are some notable exceptions.... The congregations will finally get tired of hearing about the patriarchs and saints, the miracles and wonders, and will insist upon knowing something about the men and women of our day, and the accomplishments and discoveries of our time. They will finally insist upon knowing how to escape the evils of this world instead of the next." *Ingersoll's Works*, Vol. 2, p. 23

"A tack points heavenward when it causes the most mischief. It has many human imitations."
Texas Siftings

"I abuse the priests, indeed, who have so much abused the pure and holy doctrines of their master, and who have laid me under no obligation of reticence as to the tricks of their trade. ...the artificial structures they have erected, to make them the instruments of wealth, power, and preeminence to themselves...." Jefferson's Works by H.A. Washington, Vol. 6, p. 412-413

COMMUNION--"A man who believes that he eats his God we do not call mad; yet, a man who says he is Jesus Christ, we call mad." Helvetius

CONTRADICTIONS--"The case, however, is that the Bible will not bear examination in any part of it, which it would do if it was the Word of God. Those who most believe it are those who know least about it, and priests always take care to keep the inconsistent and contradictory parts out of sight." The Theological Works of T. Paine, p. 340

"For my own part, my belief in the perfection of the Deity will not permit me to believe, that a book so manifestly obscure, disorderly, and contradictory, can be his work. I can write a better book myself." Ibid., p. 180

"Is it not a species of blasphemy to call the NT revealed religion, when we see in it such contradictions and absurdities." Ibid., p. 249

"There is not in all the pulpits ingenuity enough to harmonize these ignorant and stupid contradictions." Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 4, p. 276

"These contradictions are gross and palpable and demonstrate that the NT is not inspired, and that many of its statements must be false." Ibid., p. 276

CREATION--"...these two chapters (Gen. 1 and 2--ED.), instead of containing, as has been believed, one continuous account of the creation, written by Moses, contain two different and contradictory stories of a creation, made by two different persons, and written in two different styles of expression." The Theological Works of T. Paine, p. 171-172

"That there are two stories is as visible to the eye, when attended to, as that there are two chapters, and that they have been written by different persons, nobody knows by whom. If this then is the strange condition the beginning of the Bible is in, it leads to a just suspicion, that the other parts are no better, and consequently, it becomes every man's duty to examine the case." Ibid., p. 174

"If the Bible is mistaken in telling us where we came from, how can we trust it to tell us where we are going?" Anonymous

CRUCIFIXION--"Why then do you talk of reason, or refer to it, since your religion has nothing to do with reason, nor reason with that? You tell people...that they must have faith! Faith in what? You ought to know that before the mind can have faith in anything, it must either know it as a fact, or see cause to believe it on the probability of that kind of evidence that is cognizable by reason. But your religion is not within either of these cases; for, in the first place, you cannot support it by reason, not only because it is not cognizable by reason, but because it is contrary to reason. What reason can there be in supposing or believing that God put Himself to death to satisfy Himself...." The Life and Works of T. Paine, Vol. 9, p. 132.

"Suppose, however, that God did give this law to the Jews, and did tell them that whenever a man preached a heresy, or proposed to worship any other God that they should kill him; and suppose that afterward this same God took upon himself flesh, and came to this very chosen people and taught a different religion, and that thereupon the Jews crucified him; I ask you, did he not reap exactly what he had sown? What right would this God have to complain of a crucifixion suffered in accordance with his own command?" Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 2, p. 259

DEVIL--"If the Bible is true the Devil exists. There is no escape from this. If the Devil does not exist the Bible is not true. There is no escape from this." Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 4, p. 399

"To deny the existence of these evil spirits, to deny the existence of the Devil, is to deny the truth of the NT. To deny the existence of these imps of darkness is to contradict the words of Jesus Christ.... If we give up the belief in devils, we must give up the inspiration of the Old and New Testament. We must give up the divinity of Christ. To deny the existence of evil spirits is to utterly destroy the foundation of Christianity.... If all the accounts in the NT of casting out devils are false, what part of the Blessed Book is true?.... If the Devil does not exist, the Christian creeds all crumble,...." Ibid., Vol. 4, p. 313 "...why should this Devil, in another world, torment sinners, who are his friends, to please God, his enemy?" Ibid., p. 399-400

"In nearly all the theologies, mythologies and religions, the devils have been much more humane and merciful than the gods. No devil ever gave one of his generals an order to kill children and to rip open the bodies of pregnant women." Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 17-18

"There is nothing in this planet's history, biblical or otherwise, or knowledge from any source, that remotely alludes to the possibility that the poor devil ever stole a pin or killed a living soul. In fact, he never killed a fly, or hurt a single individual, man or beast. He never lost his temper, told a lie, or even cursed a teeny little curse. Who in all history can lay claim to such a pious and noble existence." Anonymous

EVIL--"...Karl Barth has called the fall of man an impossible possibility.... Barth's clever statement of impossible possibility is not the remark of a stupid man.... Barth uses startling language to underline the rational difficulty, in explaining the fall.... It is not my intent to be the devil's advocate or to lend assistance to those who reject Christianity.... I am not trying to give the skeptic more ammunition than he may already have. I am trying to make it clear that the problem is a severe one and one for which I have no adequate solution. I do not know how evil could originate with a good God. I am baffled by it, and it remains a troublesome mystery to me.... I cannot solve the dilemma of evil...." Reason to Believe, by Apologist R.C. Sproul, p. 125-126

EZEKIEL--"With Voltaire, I say that any one who admires Ezekiel should be compelled to dine with him." Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 3, p. 482

FAITH--"Nothing is so firmly believed as that which is least known." Montaigne

"How many things served us yesterday for articles of faith, which today are fables for us!" Montaigne

"It is certain because it is impossible." Anonymous

FALL--"...there is not a book, chapter, or verse of the Bible, from the time Moses is said to have written the book of Genesis, to the book of Malachi, the last book in the Bible, including a space

of more than a thousand years, in which there is any mention made of this thing, nor is it so much as alluded to." The Theological Works of T. Paine, p. 277

FLOOD--"Volumes might be written upon the infinite absurdity of this most incredible, wicked and foolish of all fables contained in that repository of the impossible, called the Bible. To me it is a matter of amazement, that it ever was for a moment believed by any intelligent human being. Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 2, p. 155

FUNDAMENTALIST--"A fundamentalist seems to know everything about religion, and nothing about anything else." Anonymous

GOD--"It is impossible for me to conceive of a character more utterly detestable than that of the Hebrew god." Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 2, p. 237

"It is impossible to conceive of a more thoroughly despicable, hateful, and arrogant being, than the Jewish god." Ibid., p. 239

"These people's God has shown them by a million acts that he respects none of the Bible's statutes. He breaks every one of them himself, adultery and all." Mark Twain and the Three R's by Maxwell Geismar, p. 124

"The Beatitudes and the chapters from Numbers and Deuteronomy ought always to be read from the pulpit together; then the congregation would get an all-round view of Our Father in Heaven. Yet not in a single instance have I ever known a clergyman to do this." Ibid., p. 153

"If you want to see man at his worst, observe what he does to his fellow men in the name of God." Anonymous

"Those who have loved God most have loved men least." Ingersoll

"The idea that writers of the OT had of a God was boisterous, contemptible, and vulgar. They make Him the Mars of the Jews, the fighting God of Israel, the conjuring God of their priests and prophets. They tell us as many fables of Him as the Greeks told of Hercules." The Life and Works of Thomas Paine, Vol. 9, p. 201

"In fact there are many things God cannot do. Reason tells us He cannot be God and not be God at the same time and in the same relationship. God cannot make a square circle or a two-sided triangle. Triangles by definition have three sides." Reason to Believe by Apologist R.C. Sproul, p. 122

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #360 from SL of Kansas City, Kansas

I saw your address and wanted to tell you that you are dead wrong about the Bible. You obviously haven't read the Bible and are unaware of the teachings and TRUTHS held within. I have not seen your literature, but if you want me to be more specific in my criticism, send something to me.

Editor's Response to Letter #360

This letter doesn't really merit a response, SL. The only true statement you made is that "I have not seen your literature." That's abundantly evident and I have probably read the Bible more than you. This is the kind of mentality that is so widespread in the superstitious community. Is it any wonder that millions find religion so repugnant? Yes, I would like for you to be more specific and would be willing to send any materials you wish to purchase.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #361 from Terry Fisk, Vice-President of For Accountability in Religion (FAIR), 5105 Indianola Ave., Minneapolis, Minnesota 55424

Dear Mr. McKinsey. FAIR is a non-profit organization which contends that Americans have the constitutional right to believe or not to believe whatever they choose, but no religion has the right to deliberately deceive its members or the general public.

In recent years, the Fundamentalists have been very successful in persuading people to believe that the Bible is inerrant. It is unfortunate that people have not been able to make rational, informed decisions in this matter, and this is because Fundamentalists have withheld from them the fact that the Bible contains numerous contradictions and errors.

FAIR wishes to compliment you on the fine job you are doing of exposing the errancy of the Bible, and we would like to work together with you, since we share this common goal.

Editor's Response to Letter #361

Dear Terry. We are always open to offers of assistance and your's is most welcome. However, our policy has always been that until we see some of your literature or learn more about your activities, entry of your letter into BE can't be interpreted as an endorsement. There are too many individuals, organizations, and publications running around that are in a world of their own. We have learned from past experience, unfortunately, that fundamentalists don't have a corner on unreality. Just because someone has rejected Christianity in general and the Bible in particular does not mean they haven't adopted something equally ridiculous.

Letter #362 from FG of East Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Dear Dennis. Enclosed is my renewal for Biblical Errancy. James White (the founder and president of Alpha and Omega Ministries), whose motto is "Love demands truth, truth demands love," is still calling you an atheist in his catalogue although you've never said so. I'm sure a lawyer could help you sue him to oblivion. He deserves it. In the interest of sanity you should consider it.

P.S. White's motto is ironic because he understands neither truth nor love. What he has is medieval intolerance and fanaticism.

Editor's Response to Letter #362

Dear FG. Lawsuits are not my style and contribute little to an intelligent dialogue. James is one of those misguided individuals who has a good mind but, unfortunately, has been indoctrinated from birth. The Christians got to him first; that's the real tragedy that I see played out so often, even among my own acquaintances. Good minds gone awry because of childhood inculcations that are hard to expunge, even by those seeking to do so themselves. All of which proves that getting there first is 90% of the battle. People rarely use conscious processes to abandon what

they have been taught from childhood. Most individuals just don't think that critically or deeply but merely accept what they have been told. Let me control all aspects of a person's environment from birth to death and I will make the most intelligent mind believe that people can rise from the dead, sticks can turn into snakes, donkeys can talk, and the sun can stand still. I contact several people on a regular basis who have reasonably good minds that can usually sort through the kinds of problems we all encounter on a daily basis. But when it comes to religion in general and the Bible in particular, they are wholly unable to critically examine even their most rudimentary beliefs. Yes, it's truly tragic!

Letter #363 from RA of Norfolk, Virginia

Dear Dennis. About the word "pagan" in Letter #339 and your response to it in the November, 1989 issue of BE. In my teaching of the Greek and Roman writers and other creative artists before the Christian era (and even with Milton), I stress to my students that the word "pagan" has no pejorative connotations. This "neutrality" for the word is especially important in handling Greek and Roman myth.... I do not use pagan as synonymous with heathen and infidel, though of course religionists often do. I am always amused that commentators on Dante usually refer to Vergil as a "righteous pagan" as though it were an oxymoron.

Editor's Response to Letter #363

Dear RA. Although what you say is technically true, I'm still inclined to believe that it would be tactically unwise to allow words such as pagan, infidel, unbeliever, heretic, nonbeliever, skeptic, and heathen to be applied to yourself without correction. Religionists are the unbelievers, the nonbelievers, the skeptics, because they do not believe in science and rationality but in faith, hope, and superstition. Having turned their backs on reason and proof, they are the heretics and infidels. They have displayed little fidelity to reason, logic, evidence and common sense. For most people, words such as "heathen" and "pagan" apply to those of a lower order of education and advancement. In effect, they apply words to their opponents that rightfully adhere to themselves.

Letter #364 from Anonymous of Florida

Dear Dennis. Your August, 1989 issue #80 brings to light an interesting situation. You quoted, on page 4, Luke 18:22, which says that a Christian, to be saved, must distribute all his wealth to the poor and become poor himself. Likewise, later on in Luke 18:25 is the familiar statement that it would be easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

These quotes make it very obvious that Christianity is a socialist religion. To be a good Christian, and not be a hypocrite, a Christian must believe in socialism or communism. Yet many Christians in non-red countries, such as the USA, are right-wing in their political and economic beliefs! The Moral Majority, for example has always supported the most right-wing of Republicans, including Reagan!

If you show these conservative Christians that they're following an ultra-liberal God and a socialist religion, that may make them realize that Christianity isn't the true religion after all. They may realize that atheism, not Christianity, is the right way for them to go. There is no way for the majority of Christians to reconcile their political and economic beliefs with their Christian religion, without double-think and hypocrisy. Maybe Jesus did return a second time after all -- as Karl Marx.

Letter #365 from JCP of Meriden, Conn.

Dear Dennis. I enjoy your little newsletter very much. You are doing what no one has done since Ingersoll.

Letter #366 from Dan Barker of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, P. O. Box 750, Madison, Wisconsin 53701

Dear Dennis. ...I am going to be on Sally Jessy Raphael again. The taping is Tuesday. I thought about you, but the topic is the psychology of deconversion, and she doesn't want anything intellectual. (I suppose that is a sort of backward compliment to me? I thought I was intellectual.)

I do know that the producer is considering doing a show in the future on atheist/agnostic families raising children in a world dominated by religion. Does that topic relate to you at all? I remember you have at least one child--does he have any difficulties at school or with friends regarding religion?

I think BE is just great. I hope it can be arranged for all your work to be preserved properly.

P.S. Our next annual convention will be in October in Ann Arbor, Michigan. We have not made all the plans, but I am thinking about doing something on the bible, maybe a panel like the last time you were here. In any event, you might want to consider setting up a B.E. table again.

Editor's Response to Letter #366

Dear Dan. It's always a pleasure to hear from you. So Sally doesn't want anything intellectual! I guess you realize you have only confirmed a sad fact of life. Talk shows are geared to the Lowest Common Denominator and maximum ratings. You have no doubt hit upon a major cause for our limited exposure in the media. People don't want to hear the truth; they want to hear what makes them feel good. They don't want to think or be informed; they want to be entertained. They don't want their beliefs questioned; they want them confirmed. A crucial aspect of this publication is that it doesn't tell people what they want to hear; it tells them what they ought to hear.

As far as my children are concerned, I did have a conflict with my son's day-care center. They were having all the children say grace at lunch. When I heard him quoting the words in our car, I talked to the manager the next day. She consulted with her superiors in another city and the practice was dropped several days later.

Ann Arbor is much closer to us and I'd be glad to set up a table or appear on a panel again. Thanks for the invitation and your compliment of BE!

EDITOR'S NOTE: We have occasionally been accused of being overzealous and vituperative in our criticisms of the Bible. By now it's apparent to all concerned that our comments are considerably more restrained than those of men such as Paine, Ingersoll, and Voltaire. And you thought BE was rough!! We're just pussy cats.

For the first time in the history of BE we will offer audio tapes for sale if there is enough demand. So, would you please let us know if you'd be interested in buying them. Don't send money, yet. We will send out a list of what is available when the time is ripe. They will include speeches by myself as well as my appearances and debates on the radio. Tapes will be approximately an hour long each and cost \$5 each. We will pay the postage. Unless stated

otherwise, tapes will not be edited; so you will hear exactly what the radio audience heard, including the commercials which might consume 10 minutes or more. They'd be good to send to others, since many people don't read much any more. The audio/visual medium has become the prime method by which to spread our ideas.

Issue No. 90

June 1990

COMMENTARY

CHRONOLOGICAL CONTRADICTIONS--One of the more interesting variety of contradictions is highlighted in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. When first introduced to the Bible years ago, we were immediately struck not only by the terribly repetitious nature of the gospels but the number of obvious contradictions with respect to their sequence of events. In *The Life of Jesus* the biblical scholar, Marcello Craveri, provided a thoroughly researched exposition of these inconsistencies by using a chart entitled *Correlation of the Gospels*. Although the number available are considerably in excess of what can be published in BE, the following examples are particularly flagrant and easily verified. (1) In Matthew 4:5-8 the Devil took Jesus to the pinnacle and then to the mountain, while in Luke 4:5-9 he took him to the mountain and then the pinnacle. (2) In Matt. 21:12-19 Jesus cleansed the temple and later cursed the fig tree, while in Mark 11:13-15 he cursed the fig tree and later cleansed the temple. (3) In Matt. 8:28-32 Jesus caused devils to enter swine and later called Levi (Matt. 9:9), while in Luke 5:27-28 Jesus called Levi and later caused devils to enter swine (Luke 8:26-33). (4) In Mark 1:12-13 Jesus was tempted in the wilderness and later John was arrested (Mark 6:17-18), while in Luke 3:19-20 John was arrested and later Jesus was tempted in the wilderness (Luke 4:1-13). (5) In Mark 2:13-17 Matthew was called by Jesus and later the tempest was calmed (Mark 4:35-40), while in Matt. 8:18, 23-27 the tempest was calmed and later Matthew was called (Matt. 9:9-17). (6) In Matt. 8:1-4 Jesus cleansed the leper and later healed Peter's mother-in-law (Matt. 8:14-15), while in Mark 1:29-31 Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law and later cleansed the leper (Mark 1:40-44). (7) In Matt. 8:28-32 Jesus caused devils to enter swine and later appointed the 12 apostles (Matt. 10:1-4), while in Mark 3:13-19 Jesus appointed the 12 apostles and later caused the devils to enter the swine (Mark 5:1-13). (8) In Luke 3:19-20 John the Baptist was arrested and later Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law (Luke 4:38-39), while in Mark 1:29-31 Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law and later John was arrested (Mark 6:17-18). (9) In Luke 3:19-20 John was arrested and later the storm was calmed (Luke 8:22-25), while in Mark 4:35-40 the storm was calmed and later John the Baptist was arrested (Mark 6:17-18). (10) In Luke 5:27-32 Levi (Matthew) was called and later the storm was calmed (Luke 8:22-25), while in Matt. 8:18-27 the storm was calmed and later Levi was called (Matt. 9:9-17). (11) In Matt. 8:14-15 Jesus cured Simon's mother-in-law and later John the Baptist was arrested (Matt. 14:3-5), while in Luke 3:19-20 John was arrested and later Jesus cured Simon's mother-in-law (Luke 4:38-39). (12) In Luke 21:1-11 Jesus entered Jerusalem and later purified the Temple (Luke 21:12-16), while in John 2:13-25 and 3:1-12 he purified the Temple and later entered Jerusalem (John 12:12-16). (13) In Matt. 8:28-32 Jesus caused devils to enter swine and later paid tribute to John the Baptist (Matt. 11:11-14), while in Luke 7:24-28 Jesus paid tribute to John the Baptist and later caused devils to enter swine (Luke 8:26-33). (14) In Luke 22:14-21 Jesus said after supper that the hand of his betrayer was with him on the table, while in Matt. 26:21 and Mark 14:18 Jesus made this statement during supper. (15) And lastly, in Matt. 8:23-27 Jesus calmed the storm and later appointed the 12 apostles (Matt. 10:1-4), while in Mark 3:13-19 Jesus appointed the 12 apostles and later calmed the storm (Mark 4:35-41). Although only 15 examples of chronological contradictions were given, literally scores are available. Their very existence accounts for the fact that no one has ever been able to write one long continuous narrative

encompassing all four gospels. It can't be done without taking liberties with the text by adding and subtracting as expediency dictates in direct defiance of Rev. 22. The common defense that these events occurred more than once is without merit since many of them are unique.

IMMINENCE--One of the most important commitments made by Jesus during his earthly ministry was his promise to return during the lifetime of his contemporaries. That pledge was clearly enunciated in Point 152 on page 2 of our 86th Issue and is further corroborated by Luke 21:31-32 ("So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled"). Paul, himself, showed in 1 Thess. 4:15 ("For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep") that he was among those who awaited the imminent return of Christ. Yet, as the history of that era clearly shows, all was for nought. No messiah appeared. To explain the obviously inaccurate nature of the predictions referred to earlier, many of the Bible's current defenders rationalize the situation by alleging his return was to actually occur at some indeterminate time in the future. But they conveniently ignore the fact that a sizable number of verses clearly show the return of the messiah was imminent. Even if not in the era of Paul and the Apostles, it was certainly just around the corner. Matt. 4:17 ("Repent; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"), Matt. 10:7 ("The kingdom of heaven is at hand"), Mark 1:15 ("The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand"), 1 Cor. 7:29 ("But this I say, brethren, the time is short"), Heb. 10:37 ("For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry"), James 5:8 ("Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh"), 1 Peter 4:7 ("But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer"), Rev. 1:1 ("The Revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave to him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass"), Rev. 3:11, 22:7 ("Behold, I come quickly"), Rev. 22:12 ("Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give to every man according as his work shall be"), and Rev. 22:20 ("Surely I come quickly") make that point crystal clear. The NT repeatedly says the messiah was to return in a very short time. Yet, mankind has waited for nearly 2,000 years and nothing has occurred. By no stretch of the imagination can that be considered "coming quickly." The most common apologetic defense to this rather embarrassing disappointment is a quick resort to 2 Peter 3:8 ("But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day"). Of course, they subtly ignore the fact that the promise was made to mankind and would only have made sense to them if it were made in terms they understood. If verses are to be interpreted in "God's terms," then most of the Bible's chronology becomes incomprehensible and open to allegorical imaginings. If every statement in which the word "day" appears can be interpreted as 1,000 years and every "1,000 years" can be interpreted as one day, chaos is a foregone conclusion. One can't help but note that biblicists constantly resort to allegorical interpretations when no other exit is available. The major difference between a fundamentalist and a religious liberal with respect to the Bible is the degree to which allegory is employed. It's used by all and only expediency and politics determine the degree of utilization. It is, indeed, unfortunate that millions of people still cling to the forlorn hope that somehow a messiah will arise to extract them from their predicament. How many years (2,000, 10,000, 100,000) will it take for them to finally say, "We can only conclude that we are the victims of a cruel hoax"?

MIRACLES--Biblicists rely upon miracles, such as the Resurrection, to prove the Bible in general and Jesus in particular are God's instruments on earth. The ability to do miracles lends divinity not only to the Book but certain individuals. But they conveniently avoid mentioning the fact that miracles are not to be used to prove anything of that nature for two major reasons. First, the Bible repeatedly says that false christs, false prophets and Satan, himself, can perform miracles. This is clearly shown by Matt. 24:23-24 ("Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall

shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect"), 2 Thess. 2:8-9 NIV ("And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders...."), Rev. 13:11, 13-14 RSV ("Then I saw another beast which rose out of the earth.... It works great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in the sight of men; and by the signs which it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast, it deceives those who dwell on earth...."), Rev. 16:14 ("For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles...."), and Rev. 19:20 ("And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast...."). So, if a miracle were to occur (sic), one would have no way to test the credentials of the perpetrator. In fact, the Bible warns believers to be wary of precisely those who can perform miracles. In Deut. 13:1-3 ("If there arise among you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and giveth thee a sign or a wonder, And the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spake unto thee, saying, Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them; Thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams: for the Lord your God proveth you, to know whether ye love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul") believers may be tested by being introduced to someone who performs miracles, while expounding heretical doctrines such as beliefs in other gods. Second, many biblical figures performed miracles. In Ex. 7:10-11 Aaron cast down his rod before the Pharaoh and his servants and it became a serpent. But the Pharaoh called his wise men, the sorcerers and the magicians of Egypt, and they did likewise with their enchantments. Although Aaron covered Egypt with frogs (Ex. 8:6-7) and turned the Nile River into blood (Ex. 7:21-22), the magicians again followed suit. Joshua successfully ordered the sun and moon to stand still (Joshua 10:12-13); Stephen performed miracles (Acts 6:8); the apostles performed miracles (Acts 5:12); Isaiah brought the shadow of the sun 10 degrees backward (2 Kings 20:11); Peter healed a lame man (Acts 3:6-7), cured the sick (Acts 5:15-16 RSV) and raised Tabitha from the dead (Acts 9:36-37, 40-41), and Paul raised Eutychus from the dead (Acts 20:9-10). In essence, since many people performed miracles on a routine basis, the ability to do miraculous acts certainly could not be used to substantiate the credentials of anyone, let alone a messiah.

EXCLUSIVISM--Christianity in general and the Bible in particular clearly state that there is only one door to salvation and that door is Jesus Christ. Jesus, and Jesus alone, provides the only path to heaven. He, himself, implied as much in John 10:9 ("I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved") and John 10:7 ("I am the door of the sheep"). Because exclusivity is such a crucial aspect in Christian theology and accounts for so much intolerance being directed toward those denying the divinity of Jesus, one should be fully cognizant of those verses upon which Christians rely to substantiate their supposition. Undoubtedly the most important are: JOHN 14:6 ("I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me"), JOHN 3:36 ("He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him"), JOHN 3:18 ("He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already"), ACTS 16:30-31 ("What must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house"), JOHN 8:24 ("...ye shall die in your sins: for if you believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins"), ACTS 4:12 ("Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved"), 1 JOHN 5:12 ("He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life"), and 1 COR. 3:11 ("For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ"). JOHN 6:28-29 ("What shall we do, that we might work the works of God? Jesus answered.... This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent"). With verses like these is it any wonder that Christianity is intolerant, close-minded, and discriminatory. When you have the only answer, you certainly aren't going to be inclined to listen to those in disagreement.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #367 from CT of Van Nuys, California

Dear Mr. McKinsey. I just received your sample letter and was both surprised and delighted. My surprise came because your flyer was in a book I purchased at a Christian bookstore. In fact, I thought your letter was an apologetic letter. Like you, I find it hard to believe some of the arguments Christians use to justify the Bible and their faith....I am delighted to see a publication devoted to confronting the ridiculous Christian claims for faith....

Editor's Response to Letter #367

Dear CT. Your comments are most appreciated and I am quite delighted. Delighted to see that one of my supporters was putting our pamphlets in the "literature" of the opposition. Incidentally, I find it hard to believe not just "some of the arguments Christians use to justify the Bible" but nearly all of them.

Letter #368 from SHF of York, Pennsylvania

Dear Dennis. This is primarily to let you know that I subscribe to every free-thought publication that I know exists--but yours is the only one that arrives regularly and on time! All the others are late or published erratically. One thing I would like to see in B.E. is some criticism of the Bible based on rational and/or scientific facts in addition to or instead of the Bible contradictions alone. Many Bible pounders don't recognize these errors and contradictions. How about some modern 20th century criticisms?

Editor's Response to Letter #368

Dear SHF. Others have made the same observation with respect to our punctuality; you are by no means alone. In large measure, our nearly flawless record in meeting deadlines can be attributed to my wife's efficiency and precision. She is a senior accountant who's contribution to the nuts and bolts daily operation of this undertaking is of crucial importance. The amount of paperwork and record keeping involved in issuing a periodical on a regular basis is more than I originally envisioned. It's certainly beyond what I would want to do on my own.

As far as 20th century criticisms are concerned, I think that if you were to go on the radio to confront biblicists with your approach, you would discover that we are quite up-to-date. You might want to try your technique and see what happens. Your tactic of bringing facts to the Bible to disprove the Bible was addressed many issues ago in a speech we gave before the American Rationalist Convention.

Letter #369 from GD of Portland, Oregon

Dear Mr. McKinsey. Regarding your recent request for interested parties to assist in the distribution of tapes for your proposed video project, I would be more than glad to help out. I was involved in the production of a local atheist show, The Tom and Lanny Show. I was the sound man.... Portland Cable Access was thrilled to have us, since they were inundated with various religious shows and welcomed anything different.... I'd be more than willing to run the tapes over. With any luck I can get it on the Public Access Network, which interconnects all the local cable systems, although there's probably a waiting list for a decent time. There's a lot of work involved in producing one of these shows. I hope you know what you're letting yourself in for! Anyway, let me know what you decide and keep up the good work. P.S. If you get the

chance, can you give me any information about the Freethought Forum you mentioned last February?

Editor's Response to Letter 369

Dear GD. Thanks for volunteering and we will put your name on our list. Others have volunteered, also, but we still need more if the project is going to get-off-the-ground. We mainly need people who will take the tapes to their local public access channel on a regular basis. We'll do the rest. We are used to work; that's no problem. But we have to have people who are willing to make arrangements with their local public access stations. That we can't do and assistance is mandatory. As far as the Freethought Forum is concerned, we don't know any more than what was published in the February issue.

Letter #370 from SO of Tallahassee, Florida

Dear Dennis. As it is now six or seven years that I have been enjoying Biblical Errancy, it occurred to me that there might be considerable interest in holding a national convention or conference of some sort through which the readers of BE could get to know one another and relate experiences, exchange ideas, and plan strategies. The tone of many of the letters you publish suggests a degree of enthusiasm among your readers such that attendance at a convention would be seriously considered by many. Such a meeting might serve as a springboard for those of us who are interested in spreading the ideas of BE to a wider audience but lack some of the practical experience that you and others have. By coordinating our efforts we might have a greater impact on society at large than by acting solely as individual messengers. In a future issue of BE you might canvass the readership as to their interest in holding such a convention. If the interest seems to be there, things could then move to the planning stage.

Editor's Response to Letter #370

Dear SO. You have come up with a good suggestion that we have been considering for some time. At the present time, however, we are still trying to create a series of programs for public access cablevision. That's our current concern. As soon as we have a sufficient number of volunteers willing to play and circulate our programs in their areas [more volunteers are still needed], we can move on to other ambitious projects. But for now, we are preoccupied with getting the message out. We don't want to spread ourselves too thin. Conducting a survey at this stage of the game would be premature.

Letter #371 from JW of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Dear Dennis. I want to take this opportunity to tell you what an influence you have been in a way not relating to the Bible. From reading your monthly missives, I have observed that you are about the most thorough person I have ever seen. You continue to go deeper into the woods than anyone else. I am retired from the FBI, and in my life, I have had occasions to delve into matters as deeply as I thought was necessary. However, I never knew what deep was until I discovered you. You have been an inspiration to me for thoroughness. Last year, I was conducting an investigation for a lawyer who had sued a city and some of its police officers for illegally arresting and detaining an individual in jail for several weeks without proper cause. After taking my lessons from you, I dug into this case with a fury. The result was that when I was finished, I knew more than anybody on earth about the case, and I was able to dig up enough information to prove one of the police officers was lying through her teeth. Needless to say, I destroyed this officer by exposing her lies. From seeing your scholarly research, applied with your total thoroughness, I am now a better investigator. Thanks Dennis! I now put this thoroughness into

my other endeavors. For example, I am studying French, and I am driving everyone crazy with my knowledge of grammar. It has helped me make straight "A's." One other thing in which I was almost as good as you, is that words have meaning, and you pay exact attention to what has been said or written. You do not let a "play on words" confound you, and neither do I. People should say exactly what they mean, and mean exactly what they say. However, too many people are just repeating the words of others and have very little independent thought of their own. You have changed my life, and I am the better for it.

Editor's Response to Letter #371

Dear JW. To say your letter is gratifying is an understatement. Of all the complimentary correspondence we have received over the years, your's is certainly among the most heartwarming. If there is any reward in this endeavor, it's in knowing we have influenced someone for the better.

Letter #372 from Steven Overholt, Editor of THE FRONTLINE, Box 154, San Juan Capistrano, California 92693

Dear Mr. McKinsey. With the assistance of an honest Christian who believes that the truth should be told, I am sending you the following correspondence from April, 1989. I hope you milk this letter for all that it is worth. The letter is from David R. Andersen, a research assistant at the Christian Research Institute in Southern California, to an inquirer. The inquirer asked: "Dear Sir. I noticed in a humanist publication called "Biblical Errancy" that CRI has debated Dennis McKinsey. I noticed that there was communication in July, 1986 and Sept. 1987. What was the result of this debate? What questions were exchanged? What is CRI's assessment of "Biblical Errancy"? What information do you have about this humanist publication? How would it compare to Madalyn O'Hair's or Paul Kurtz's groups? Thank you for your courtesy and I hope to hear from you soon."

and CRI's Anderson responded:

Dear JR. Thank you for your letter to the Christian Research Institute. We appreciate your interest in this ministry and your taking time to write. Regarding your question about Dennis McKinsey; he is not in the same camp as Madalyn O'Hair or Paul Kurtz. We did carry on correspondence with him at one time concerning his views of the Bible. He simply would not listen to the answers that scholars, such as Gleason Archer, have given for the supposed contradictions of the Bible. Thus, because he would not even consider a scholarly approach to the issues, we discontinued our correspondence. I do hope that this information is of some help. If we can be of any further assistance, please feel free to contact us again.

The "He simply would not listen" fiction can only impress readers who are kept, in my view, at a "safe" distance from your periodical. It would seem to me that, since CRI would have a reputation to uphold as a watchdog group (NOT as an agency for disinformation), they might want to apologize both to your readers and to those proponents of Christian beliefs who uphold higher standards. Indeed, a promise from CRI to cease and desist from similar misrepresentation seems to me in order.

Editor's Response to Letter #372

Dear Steven. I'm certainly glad you sent me this letter, since its author obviously did not intend for it to fall into my hands. I've often wondered what nonsense CRI is peddling to justify their abrupt termination of our correspondence. The above explanation is a classic example of

Christian duplicity and has absolutely nothing to do with the truth. CRI and I both know that one of their spokesmen, Robert Bowman Jr., not only subscribed to BE several years ago but engaged me in critical dialogue over several months. Since it was becoming increasingly evident to any objective observer that he was coming out on the short end of the stick, he allowed his subscription to lapse. I suspect that Walter Martin, the Director of CRI, read our correspondence, decided that Bowman was in over his head, and directed him to bow out, unless he ceased using stationery with the CRI letterhead.

In any event, I can assure you I have never run from an apologist in my entire life and certainly don't intend to start. Not only would I listen to their answers but I am still patiently waiting for a response to mine. I not only considered a scholarly approach, but I am still waiting for one from them. If my memory serves me correctly, I can't think of any reference in their writings to what Gleason Archer said about biblical contradictions. If there is anything I have learned over the years, it is that apologists for superstition are some of the most deceptive, hypocritical, elusive, unctuous critters that ever walked. Penning them down is often like nailing jello to the wall. As is true with all confidence men, being up-front with people is not their trademark. A con game is just that, a con game.

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COMMENTARY

SABBATH (Part 1)--Except for Jesus Christ, probably no topic in the entire Bible receives more attention than the Ten Commandments. From one end of Christendom to the other, they are constantly projected as basic maxims for Christian behavior. Yet, one of the commandments, the fourth, is violated on a regular basis by the overwhelming majority of those adhering to the Christian faith. In Exodus 20:8-11 the fourth commandment clearly says, "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter,...therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it." The important point to note is that the 7th day, Saturday, is the sabbath not Sunday, and no valid biblical reason exists for shifting the sabbath from Saturday to Sunday, as occurred sometime during the post-Apostolic period. Why the switch was made remains a subject of speculation and is of little concern to BE. The fact is that it was a direct violation of the 4th Commandment and cannot be biblically substantiated.

Arguments to the effect that Saturday rather than Sunday should be honored as the sabbath are clearly persuasive. Among the most potent are the following. First, and most obvious, is the fact that many verses clearly state that God made the 7th day, not the first or just any day, the sabbath: Ex. 31:15 ("Six days may work be done; but in the seventh is the sabbath of rest, holy to the Lord"), Ex. 20:9-10 ("Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the 7th day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God..."), Ex. 16:26 ("...Six days ye shall gather it; but on the 7th day, which is the sabbath..."), Deut. 5:14 ("But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God..."), Lev. 23:3 ("Six days shall work be done: but the 7th day is the sabbath of rest..."). And verses such as Gen. 2:2-3 ("And on the 7th day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the 7th day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the 7th day...."), Ex. 20:11 ("For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the 7th day: wherefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it"), Ex. 31:17 ("...for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the 7th day he rested..."), Heb. 4:4 Mod. Lang. ("For somewhere he says this about the 7th day, 'And God rested on the 7th day

from all His works") Ex. 34:21, Lev. 23:8, and Deut. 16:8 show that God rested from creating on the 7th day, not the first. The sabbath was created as a memorial to God resting on the 7th day of creation and couldn't be changed to the 1st day unless creation was gone through again. In the 4th Commandment God specifically said the 7th day was to be kept holy. Why would He place it in the 10 Commandments if it wasn't as important as the others and could be changed? How many biblical laws were actually written in stone and meant to be permanent? The 10 Commandments were written in two tables of stone (Deut. 5:22) by the finger of God (Ex. 31:18). Second, along with the 4th Commandment, many verses clearly show that God specifically decreed the sabbath was to be honored. Ezek. 20:20 ("And hallow my sabbaths; and they shall be a sign between me and you"), Isa. 56:2 ("Blessed is the man that doeth this, and the son of man that layeth hold on it; that keepeth the sabbath from polluting it...."), Isa. 58:13-14 ("If you do not tramp upon the Sabbath by doing your business on My holy day, but call the Sabbath an enjoyment, in order that the Lord might be sacredly honored...then you shall find your delight in the Lord, and I will nourish you...."), and Ex. 31:14 ("Ye shall keep the sabbath therefore; for it is holy unto you: every one that defileth it shall surely be put to death....") show as much. Third, Matt. 24:20 ("But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day") and Luke 4:16 ("...and, as was his custom, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read") show that Jesus honored the sabbath. Fourth, Acts 13:44, 16:12-13, 17:1-4, and 18:4, 11 show that Paul also honored the sabbath. In fact, the Book of Acts records 84 sabbaths on which Paul and his associates held religious services. On the other hand, there is not one word in the entire Bible authorizing Sunday-keeping. In Acts 13:14-16 ("And on the sabbath they [Paul and his company--ED.] went into the synagogue and sat down. After reading of the law and the prophets...Paul stood up, and said....") Paul preached on the sabbath and in Acts 13:42-46 the gentiles asked that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath. If the sabbath had been changed, why did Paul wait a week and pass up Sunday to preach? Fifth, Jews and Christians never argued over the sabbath in the first century because they all agreed on the day. In all the charges against Paul, the Jews never accused him of violating the sabbath. Sixth, Acts 13:42 ("...the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath") shows that gentile converts asked Paul to preach to them on the sabbath. Seventh, in Isa. 56:6-7 RSV ("And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord...every one who keeps the sabbath, and does not profane it,... these will I bring to my holy mountain and make them joyful....") God promised a special blessing on all Gentiles who would keep the sabbath, but he never promised a blessing on anyone who kept the first day holy. Eighth, Luke 23:53-56 ("And he took the (body of Jesus--ED.) down....And that day was the preparation; and the sabbath drew on. And the women...followed after.... And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments: and rested the sabbath day according to the commandment") shows that Christ's followers kept the sabbath even after he died because of the biblical Commandment. Ninth, in Jer. 17:24-25 ("...if ye diligently harken unto me saith the Lord, to bring in no burden through the gates of this city on the sabbath day, but hallow the sabbath day, to do no work therein; then shall there enter into the gates of this city kings and princes...and Jerusalem shall remain for ever....") and Jer. 17:17 ("But if ye will not harken unto me to hallow the sabbath day, and not to bear a burden, even entering in at the gates of Jerusalem on the sabbath day; then will I kindle a fire in the gates thereof, and it shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem....") God promised that Jerusalem would stand forever if the Jews would keep the sabbath. Tenth, Isa. 66:23 RSV ("From new moon to new moon, and from sabbath to sabbath, all flesh shall come to worship before me, says the Lord") says the sabbath will remain as a day of worship for a long time to come.

And lastly, a substantial amount of evidence exists to prove that no valid reason exists for honoring Sunday, the first day of the week. (a) Sunday was never called sacred, the sabbath, the Lord's Day, or holy anywhere in the Bible. (b) All that exists in the OT about the 1st day is in Gen. 1:5 ("And the evening and the morning were the 1st day"). (c) There is no record in all the

Scriptures that God ever removed His blessing from the sabbath and placed it upon another day of the week. Nowhere in all the Bible do we find a command to keep any other day in place of the 7th day sabbath or that the sacredness God gave to the 7th day was transferred to the 1st. (d) Sunday was never given as a memorial of anything. Nowhere in Scripture did God ever say the 1st day was in honor of anything or that it was ever a part of God's law. There is not one occurrence where He ever pronounced anything on the 1st day of the week. The 1st day was always called just that--the 1st day--and nothing else. (e) Gen. 1:4-5 ("...And God divided the light from the darkness, and God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day") shows that the first work done in the Bible by God was done on the first day of the week. (f) In Ex. 20:8-10 ("Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the 7th day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work...."), Ex. 23:12 ("Six days thou shalt do thy work, and on the 7th day thou shalt rest...."), and Ex. 34:21 God specifically commanded us to work upon the 1st day of the week. (g) Jesus never honored the 1st day. Instead, he rested on the sabbath by lying in the tomb and not rising until Sunday, the first work day, and he never had anything to say about the 1st day of the week. Like God, he never gave one instance in which he kept the 1st day as a day of rest or said anything about sanctifying the 1st day. (h) Paul never made any attempt to meet with the Gentiles on the 1st day of the week and he never said he kept Sunday holy or tried to do so. (i) The apostles never rested on the 1st day and never said that it was sacred. (j) And none of the patriarchs of the OT ever kept the 1st day of the week or mentioned it.

In fact, as was noted on the 2nd page of the 18th Issue of BE, the 1st day of the week is mentioned only 8 times in the entire NT and none of them justifies transferring the sabbath from Saturday to Sunday. Only one of the 8 verses involves any sort of religious gathering and the word "Sunday" never appears once. The sabbath is mentioned 59 times in the NT and always with respect; whereas, Sunday is mentioned in the NT only 8 times and never is it referred to with sacredness or sanctity. Because the first day of the week is mentioned only 8 times in the NT, each reference deserves a detailed analysis. (1) All Matt. 28:1 ("In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the 1st day of the week....") says is that the sabbath ends before the first day begins. No sanctity is attached to Sunday in this verse and nothing is changed. The verse clearly states the sabbath has ended before the 1st day begins. In other words, the first day couldn't be the sabbath. (2) Mark 16:1-2 ("And when the sabbath was past....And very early in the morning the 1st day of the week, they came unto the sepulchre at the rising of the sun") is just another reference to when the women arrived at the tomb. Nothing is changed. This verse as well as Matt. 28:1 clearly states the sabbath is past before the 1st day begins. Therefore, the first day couldn't be the sabbath. (3) Nothing is said in Mark 16:9 ("Now when Jesus was risen early the 1st day of the week....") about changing the sabbath. Moreover, the two oldest Greek manuscripts (Alpha and Beta), along with many other manuscripts and patristic witnesses, do not contain Mark 16:9-20. Many scholars have concluded that these verses were not part of the original gospels. Nothing in the verse in question hallows Sunday or says God made it holy. Nothing here commands us to observe it. Nothing here sets it apart as a memorial of the Resurrection, or for any other purpose. There is no command or example of rest on this day. (4) Luke 24:1 ("Now upon the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came unto the sepulchre....") changes nothing and places no religious significance upon the 1st day of the week. (5) There is nothing in John 20:1 ("The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark....") but the simple record of an early morning experience. No religious significance is given to the 1st day of the week and nothing is changed. (6) The gathering of the disciples in the upper room on the Sunday of Christ's resurrection as recorded in John 20:19 ("Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst,....") was "for fear of the Jews." It was to hide and had no worship purpose. They weren't gathered in

honor of the Resurrection because Mark 16:11-14 and Luke 24:37, 39, 41 show they did not yet believe in it. Moreover, there is nothing in the facts to do away with the obligation of keeping the 7th day holy. There is no scriptural basis for concluding this event was of such significance that Sunday should be made the sabbath. Nothing in the text calls this day "the sabbath" or the "Lord's Day" or gives it any sacred title. Nothing sets it apart or makes it holy. There is no authority for changing a command of God. (7) Acts 20:7 ("And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them,...and continued his speech until midnight") is of no force because it says Paul and his missionary company held a gathering on the 1st day of the week at night. Under Hebraic law the first day of the week begins on our Saturday night at sundown and ends Sunday night at sundown. Since the meeting was on the 1st day at night, it must have been held on our Saturday night. Moreover, even if they had held the actual communion services that night, this would in no way have made it a holy day. A meeting does not make a day sacred. The breaking of bread in Acts 20:11 ("When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day....") did not make a day sacred. In Luke 22 Jesus broke bread during the Last Supper on Thursday night and in Acts 2:43, 46 ("...and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles,...And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house....") his disciples continued doing it every day of the week. In addition, Acts 20:7 does not say the disciples held communion every first day of the week. Although it provides clear proof the disciples heard a sermon on Sunday, there is no proof they did not do the same on Saturdays. If the meeting referred to in Acts 20:7 began during the day on Sunday and continued into the night, the next morning was on the 2nd day of the week or Monday. If the meeting began at the start of the 1st day of the week (our Saturday night), it continued until Sunday morning. In either case, nothing is said about a sacred day. (8) And finally, in 1 Cor. 16:2 ("Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gathering when I come") there is no suggestion of a day of worship or religious service. Neither is this verse a command to hold religious meetings on the 1st day of the week. To conclude that this verse indicates the apostolic church recognized Sunday as a day of religious worship (complete with plate passing, et. al.) is to assume more than the biblical writer intended. It speaks of a collection--but for whom--for what? Not for the preacher, not for evangelism--but for the saints. It doesn't say drop a coin in the collection plate at a church service. It says, "let every one of you lay by him in store." Lay by! Store up! Store up by oneself at home. Not lay by at church, but at home. This is the only time Paul mentioned the 1st day and it had no connection with a weekly collection at a church service. Paul taught Christians to do their secular business at home on the 1st day of the week.

We have now completed a comprehensive, biblically-based exposition of why the sabbath was never changed from Saturday to Sunday. Next month's commentary will focus on the major Christian apologetic responses to those denying the sabbath was shifted. As one might expect, Christians have a rather lengthy list of rationalizations.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #373 from RH of New York, New York

Hi, Dennis. Thanks for the "Imperfect Beacon" series on Jesus. It was excellent. Could you amplify your comment #143 in Issue #85 ("Although Jesus strongly stated this prophecy ['Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass, till all these things be fulfilled'] would be fulfilled in the lifetime of his generation, nearly 2,000 years have passed and it's yet to be fulfilled.... Apologetic attempts to apply the word 'generation' to the Jewish people, specifically, are futile"--ED.). It has always seemed to me a perfect refutation of Jesus' infallibility. But you allude to the ploy of apologists to apply "generation" to the Jewish people specifically. You have in other

instances shown that an original text word translates only in one fashion; can you do so for the origin of "generation"; that is, can you show elsewhere in the book where it applies unambiguously to mean "a group of contemporaneous individuals"?

Editor's Response to Letter #373

Dear RH. Fair question! There are several reasons "this generation" does not apply to the Jews specifically. First, and most obvious, is the fact that it does not say "the Jews," "the Hebrew people," "the chosen people," "the Jewish nation," "God's chosen people," etc. Every version of the Bible in my possession uses the word "generation." None uses a word that would apply to a particular group. The most apparent deduction one can make from this is that translators of the various versions of the Bible that are on the market contend the original Greek word, "genera," from which the word "generation" is derived, does not even imply, much less state in this instance, the name of a particular group or race of people. Second, the word "generation" in Matt. 24:34 has the same meaning as the word "generation" today. It comes from "genera" which means generation, age, or time. Every translation of "genera" in the plural in the NT, including Matt. 1:17 ("So all the generations from Abraham to David are fourteen generations...."), Luke 1:48 ("...for behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed"), and Col. 1:26 ("Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations,...."), uses the word "generations" as we would use it today. In no instance does it refer to a particular group or several nations, races, or groups. Third, the word "Jews" is used 169 times in the NT. In every single instance but 2 the word "Jews" is derived from the Greek word "Ioudaios," not "genera." The 2 exceptions aren't derived from "genera" either. Fourth, the word "Hebrew" or "Hebrews" is used 15 times in the NT and in every instance is derived from "Hebraikos," "Hebraios," "Hebrais," or "Hebraisti," but never "genera." In short, does anyone know of one biblical instance in which the Greek word "genera" refers to the Jewish people or is so translated? No, it's just another case in which a biblical prophecy by the christian icon failed to materialize and his followers are desperately seeking an escape. If those who wrote the NT had been referring to the Jewish people, specifically, there are several perfectly appropriate Greek words that could have been chosen. Clearly, they were not referring to the Jews.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #374 from ES of the Rationalist Society of St. Louis, Missouri

Dear Dennis. Move to St. Louis.... We have a full crew operating community access cable television programs with about 30 made at present. We use new, latest equipment, lacking only a teleprompter which the studio will get someday. We have our own background with name: FREETHINKING 101. We use an American Cablevision studio that is only for access use. It is located in a former school and the studio is in room 101. We have two members who operate the equipment and one taking lessons. We have two camera persons plus two to four extra members to take turns when some cannot make the movable dates to do taping. Number two camera is usually locked in place; number one and three are operative.... Our programs are 28 minutes long and we are taping two to a cassette. We have a telephone number and our post office address is on our latest programs. We also hope to exchange tapes with others but are having delays on that. We can send you a sample on VHS tape made from 3/4" TV tapes. Send us a sample of your programs, or better yet, a 3/4" tape and we will make one from it using our Introduction and ending. We use another studio for editing.... But we do not have an expert on the Bible, so visit St. Louis when we have a taping session scheduled (sometimes we know weeks in advance) this summer on vacation time and get to know our fine crew, and make two or three programs in one evening. We can exchange tapes with you. Do you have a crew to operate the equipment? I

believe in all cases the only way it can be done by one person is with a single camera at the equipment itself.... Can we also exchange our Secular Subjects for your Biblical Errancy?

Editor's Response to Letter #374

Dear ES. Your facilities almost make my mouth water. What I couldn't do with that set up! Do I have a crew? I don't even have the equipment, let alone a crew or studio. Your offer is most generous and I might try to put something together and travel to St. Louis. Exchanging publications is possible. Could you send me a copy of yours?

Letter #375 from JW of Richmond, Virginia

Dear Mr. McKinsey. You are the best! WRVA AM station has an open topic radio phone-in program Monday thru Friday (7 PM until 10 PM) and they discuss most everything. The usual host is Jerry Lund. WRVA is 100,000 watts.

There is a toll free number for out-of-state calls. It is 1-800-345-WRVA or 1-800-345-9782. People phone from Ohio, N.Y., Michigan, West Virginia, Pa., N.C., etc. They usually get best reception after 8:30 PM, depending on the weather, etc. You were a guest on the program some years ago, and I wish you could be again. But, if not, maybe you would like to phone some night and introduce a topic. I am not expert enough to discuss biblical errancy, but I believe you could do a lot of good by phoning.

Editor's Response to Letter #375

Dear JW. I remember my appearance well and have tried to arrange a return engagement but to no avail. Perhaps you or some friends of yours could call on our behalf.

Letter 376 from TK of Dallas, Texas

Dear Mr. McKinsey. I just got your sample issue that had the commentary on the Flood. Thank you. I have already made a hundred copies and passed them out. I plan on calling a christian station tonight that has an "ask the pastor" format. I will use your material as well as science to show the flood to be a myth. They teach the Bible is inerrant and the flood really happened. I don't expect the pastor to be converted, but my aim is to "prick the ears" of the thousands of people who listen to that show and hopefully get some of them to "think."

I plan to make a couple of hundred copies of your publications and pass them out. As you might know Dallas is the "Belt" in the "Bible Belt." We have more churches per person than any other city in the nation. We also have half of the major evangelical organizations headquartered here. So you can guess how many right-wing religious fanatics we have running around this city.

I am an atheist. I was a very devout, sincere christian. I believed in the inerrancy of the Bible. My mistake was that I actually read the Bible. As any reasonable person knows, the Bible has more holes in it than Swiss cheese. Also the great scientific evidence supporting evolution showed Genesis to be a complete myth.

I have no hatred toward christians and that is not why I am running a one man "truth squad." It is just that I want people to "think for themselves" and not believe everything they're told. Also, the fundamentalists here are forcing their beliefs onto everybody else. The Last Temptation of Christ can not be rented in most video stores because of their pressure and it was only showed in one theatre for one week here....

Editor's Response to Letter #376

Dear TK. Your assistance is most appreciated and I am always glad to find another person who is carrying the message to the other side. Keep up the good work!

Letter #377 from AS of Chicago, Illinois

Dear Dennis. I am happy to send you this check for \$17 to renew my subscription to Biblical Errancy. I am happy to receive each new issue because it means I am bound to learn something new. I am especially delighted when you and I "cross paths." By that I mean when you talk about something in your newsletter that I have already discovered in my research. It tells me I am on the right road, to keep going the way I am. In this regard, when the time comes a little later this year, I will have finished my basic research and will have completed all the Bible files I will need for a while to help me when from time to time I encounter Christians. I will send you a copy of all those files. You can do with them as you wish.

Three points I wanted to touch on quickly. (1) I intend to continue subscribing to "B.E." for as long as you are willing and able to put it out. I figure when I do encounter Christians, I can show them what I have found in my research and if that either doesn't work or they want to see more, I can go to "B.E." So, don't worry about sending renewal reminders; I will gladly reply. I am happy to see them. (2) You mentioned in a recent issue that you were not convinced that "cut off" means killed in the Bible. I therefore point you to Exodus 31:14-15 and Lev. 20:2-6, both of which make it clear that "cut off" means killed. (3) Did you receive my article on "How long was Jesus in the grave"? In it I show that even on apologists own terms, their argument fails. (I did read it, AS--ED.). If you did not, notify me and I will happily send you another, because I do want your opinion as to whether this will work with apologists. That's it for now. KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK!!

EDITOR'S NOTE: FINALLY IT'S ARRIVED. Our third major project is underway. We began BE in late 1982, moved to pamphlets several years later and are now offering audio tapes of media appearances, speeches, and discussions. Although none were created to be sold and arguments are often repeated, popular demand and the rising educational power of A-V materials have caused us to conclude they are sorely needed.

Issue No. 92

Aug. 1990

COMMENTARY

SABBATH (Part 2)--Last month's commentary provided a comprehensive listing of reasons nearly all Christians are violating one of the 10 Commandments on a regular weekly basis. As was clearly shown by numerous citations, the 7th day of the week, Saturday, is the Sabbath, not Sunday, and there is no valid reason for paying homage to Sunday rather than Saturday. But, as is to be expected, Christians have concocted a wide array of excuses to justify what can only be described as a blatant violation of a cardinal biblical teaching. If one can violate one of the 10 Commandments on a regular basis with impunity, the sky is the limit as far as ignoring biblical teachings in general is concerned. Because Christians heatedly deny any transgression of the 4th Commandment, the following in-depth listing of their rationalizations is presented. (1) The Sabbath was for the Jews only. That's disproven by the following points. (a) Mark 2:27 ("And he said unto them, The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath") shows that the sabbath was made for "man," i.e., all mankind. It was not made for one group such as the

Hebrews. The sabbath is not Jewish. (b) The 7th day sabbath was given as a sacred legacy to mankind 2,000 years before the first Jew existed. It was given to us on the 7th day of Creation Week by God, long before Jews existed as a separate group. (c) The 4th Commandment ("Remember the sabbath....") begins with the word "remember" showing that the sabbath already existed when God wrote the law on stone at Sinai. (d) The Bible never calls the Scriptural sabbath "Jewish" but always the "Sabbath of the Lord thy God." (e) God calls the "sabbath," "my sabbaths." They are his and do not belong to others. They are not Jewish sabbaths or Gentile sabbaths as Ezek. 20:20-21 ("and hallow my sabbaths...they polluted my sabbaths....") shows. (f) If the sabbath was given only to the Jews, then why isn't this true of all the other OT laws as well, since they all came through Hebrew writers and the Jewish leadership. If the sabbath commandment only applies to the Jews, then the other 9 commandments would only apply to the Jews as well. (g) Acts 7:38 ("This is he [Moses--Ed.], that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spoke to him in the mount Sinai, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us") proves the sabbath was not given to the Jews only. (h) And Gen. 26:5 ("Abraham obeyed my voice and my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws") shows that Abraham was keeping God's commandments long before his descendants reached Mt. Sinai. (2) The law was nailed to the cross so we don't need to keep the sabbath according to Col. 2:14 ("Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to the cross"), Eph. 2:15 ("Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances...."), and Col. 2:16-17 ("Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days: which are the shadow of things to come...."). Several problems accompany this theory. (a) If the law was nailed to the cross, then the 10 Commandments go with it. Moreover, Jesus repeatedly said he kept his father's commandments as is shown by John 5:3, 15:10, and 1 Peter 2:21. (b) If an individual can pick any day of the week as the sabbath, then how is that honoring the sabbath? All one is doing is honoring a sabbath or a day he chooses to call the sabbath. (c) In Matt. 5:17 ("Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy but to fulfill") Jesus said he did not come to destroy the law. In order to evade the obvious implication of this verse, some theology schools allege that "fulfill" means to abolish which is foolish. They would have us believe that the verse should read, "Jesus came not to destroy the law but to destroy the law" which makes no sense whatever. Obviously "fulfill" does not mean destroy. (3) The first day is to be kept as the sabbath because it honors the Resurrection. (a) Jesus never told others to change the day in honor of his resurrection. (b) There is no scriptural support for this. (c) The Crucifixion is as important as the Resurrection, so why isn't Friday honored as the sabbath? After all, Jesus came to sacrifice himself for humanity and that occurred on Friday, not Sunday. Those who wish to abandon a clear command to keep the 7th Day for another day would do well to keep Friday holy, not Saturday or Sunday, in honor of Calvary. (d) If the Resurrection of Jesus on Sunday caused the sabbath to be changed to Sunday, then why did Paul and the disciples continue to honor the sabbath after the Resurrection? (4) The first sabbath lasted many ages; so we can't keep it today. (a) If each day of Creation Week was thousands or millions of years long, then the 6th day upon which Adam was created was thousands or millions of years in length. The 6th day was followed by the the 7th day (Gen. 2:1-3) which was also thousands or millions of years in length. Following the 7th day Adam fell into sin and was driven from the Garden (Gen. 3), which would mean Adam lived throughout the entire 7th day and lived for thousands or millions of years. This couldn't be true since we know he lived to be only 930 years old (Gen. 5:3-5). (b) If days were thousands or millions of years in length, why would God command us to keep a day holy when that would have been impossible? (c) There is no scriptural support for the assertion that the first sabbath lasted many ages. (5) Jesus changed the sabbath from Saturday to Sunday. John 1:3 ("All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made"), Col. 1:16 ("For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible...."), and Heb. 1:2 ("Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son,

whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds....") show that Jesus created everything, including the sabbath. Are we to believe he changed his mind? (6) The disciples changed the sabbath to Sunday. (a) There is no scriptural support for this. (b) The disciples would have had no more right to change the sabbath than anyone else. (c) Luke 23:56 ("And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments: and rested the sabbath day according to the commandment") and Acts 13:14-16, 42-46 16:12-15, and 17:1-4 show that Paul and the disciples faithfully kept the sabbath. (7) The Bible sabbath is the 7th Day, but Sunday is the real Lord's Day. Rev. 1:10 ("I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day,....") changed the sabbath from Saturday to Sunday. (a) We are told about the "Lord's Day" in Rev. 1:10 but are not told what day it is. No specific day is mentioned. (b) Nowhere in Scripture is the 1st Day of the week called the Lord's Day. (c) Rev. 1:10 does not mention the first day of the week or Sunday (d) Rev. 1:10 says nothing about changing from Saturday to Sunday. There is no clear-cut rule here for changing the day. (e) The Lord's Day is the day the Lord is Lord of and in Mark 2:28 Jesus Christ said he was Lord of the sabbath--not Sunday. (f) The 7th day sabbath was called the sabbath of the Lord in Ex. 20:10 ("But the 7th day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God"), Lev. 23:3 ("...but the 7th day is...the sabbath of the Lord...."), and Deut. 5:14 ("But the 7th day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God"). It was called the day "unto the Lord" in Ex. 16:23 ("Tomorrow is the rest of the holy sabbath unto the Lord"), Ex. 16:25 ("...for today is a sabbath unto the Lord"), Ex. 31:15 and 35:2. And it was called "His own day" in Isa. 58:13 ("If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord...."). (g) Actually the "Lord's Day" could very easily be the final day of the Lord, the day of his manifest judgment of the world. Rev. 1:10 is not referring to any day of the week but to the general period of prophecy mentioned in more than 30 prophecies as the "day of the Lord." It's speaking of the coming plagues climaxing in the coming of Christ and the millennium. (8) The sabbath can be kept on any day of the week as long as we keep one day a week. (a) There is no scriptural support for this contention. Ex. 20:8-10 ("...Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: But the 7th day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God: in it thou shalt not do any work....") is obviously speaking of the 7th day, not any one day out of seven. (b) Christian reliance on Rom. 14:5-6 ("One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks") is misguided. Their belief that Rom. 14:5-6 shows it really doesn't matter which day of the week a person observes as his weekly "day of worship" as long as he does it "to the Lord," does not hold up. Even a casual reading of Rom. 14 reveals that the subject being dealt with is not which day to worship upon. Rather, the subject is human opinions about food and drink which are matters to be decided between an individual and God. The verses say nothing about which day Christians should worship on. If one can consider any day as the sabbath, then there isn't really a sabbath day to begin with. (9) Some Christians contend every day is holy. There is no scriptural support for this. If all days are holy then no days are holy or more holy than other days and the principle of sabbath observance disappears. (10) The sabbath can't be kept because we don't know what day it is. It's been lost in history. (a) There is no scriptural support for this. (b) The Jews have been keeping the sabbath for thousands of years and know when it occurs. (11) Sunday is the Christian sabbath, not the Jewish sabbath. (a) There is no scriptural support for this. Indeed, the very idea of two different sabbaths verges on blasphemy. (b) Sunday was never the sabbath of the Christians in the Bible or the early Christians afterwards. Sunday was not called the sabbath until the 1600's. (12) And finally, Christians often argue that the sabbath was made for God and not for man and cite Ex. 20:10 ("But the 7th day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God....") as proof. They ignore the fact that this assertion is directly contrary to Jesus' teaching in Mark 2:27 ("The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath") that the sabbath was made for man.

Several years ago a sabbatarian Christian offered a substantial reward to "any person who could supply ONE BIBLE TEXT to prove any one of the following statements." (1) Sunday, or the first day, is the Lord's Day. (2) Sunday, or the first day, has been blessed and sanctified. (3) Christ observed Sunday, or the first day, as the Sabbath day. (4) The apostles kept Sunday, or the first day, as the Sabbath day. (5) Sunday, or the first day, commemorates the Resurrection. (6) We should not work on Sunday, or the first day. (7) Sunday is the Christian sabbath. (8) Sunday is the new day of worship. (9) Christ declared Sunday to be holy. (10) And lastly, the 7th day Sabbath was made for the Jews only. He prefaced his remarks with the correct observation that the Catholic Church is responsible for the change. Changing the sabbath "is a law of the holy Catholic Church alone. The Bible says, 'Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.' The Catholic Church says: 'No. By my divine power I abolish the Sabbath day and command you to keep holy the first day of the week.' As a result, the Christian world bows down in reverent obedience to the command of the Catholic Church."

The only rational conclusion to be drawn from our extended analysis of the sabbath is that most Christians are violating the 4th Commandment on a regular basis. For them to condemn others for violating one of the 10 Commandments seems rather ridiculous when they do so as a matter of routine.

REVIEWS

(PART 1)--In THE KINGDOM OF THE CULTS fundamentalist Walter Martin, founder of the Christian Research Institute, sought to defend the orthodox Christian position on the Sabbatarian controversy by invoking 4 major sources of documentation: (a) the 7th day sabbath isn't shown to be the Lord's Day, (b) the testimony of the church Fathers, (c) authoritative quotations, and (d) primary anti-sabbatarian texts. Each deserves an indepth analysis since they highlight the kind of sophisticated contortionistic reasoning so evident in much of apologetic literature.

First, many sabbatarians reasonably conclude that since Rev. 1:10 ("I was in the spirit on the Lord's Day") refers to a Lord's Day and Mark 2:28 ("Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath") says Jesus is Lord of the sabbath, the Lord's Day must be the sabbath. Martin attempted to divorce the sabbath in Mark 2:28 from the Lord's Day in Rev. 1:10 by going through a "back to the Greek" argument on page 460, which allegedly proves that possession was not involved. "John did not mean that the Lord's Day was the Lord's possession, but rather that it was the day dedicated to Him by the early church, not in accordance with Mosaic law, but in obedience to our Lord's commandment of love." How this addresses the question one can only surmise since Martin admits "it was the day dedicated to Him by the early church." Notice! Martin said "the" day, not "a" day. The only day dedicated to the Lord was the sabbath. Moreover, there is no textual basis for saying the day was dedicated in obedience to "our Lord's commandment of love" rather than the "Mosaic law." Where is the textual support for making such an arbitrary distinction? Where does the Bible say that the Lord's Day was dedicated to him "in obedience to our Lord's commandment of love"?

Martin closed out this rather vacuous argument with the following deceptive comment. "We may certainly assume that if the Sabbath had meant so much to the writers of the NT; and if...it was so widely observed during the early centuries of the Christian Church, John and the other writers of Scripture would have equated it with the Lord's Day, the first day of the week. Scripture and history testify that they did not...." But why does Martin assume they did not? Just because they never wrote words stating they considered them to be equal does not mean they did not consider them equal. The key word is "assume." Martin admits to making an assumption. Just because they did not scripturally equate the two, he is assuming they held them to be different. Can Martin produce any writings where they specifically stated they were not equal? In addition,

Martin subtly slipped in an unproven assertion. Upon what biblical basis does he call "the Lord's Day the first day of the week."

Martin's second major argument on page 460 is that "The Church Fathers provide a mass of evidence that the first day of the week, not the seventh, is the Lord's Day...We have yet to see any systematic answer to what the Christian Church always believed." Although his comment implies that all the Church Fathers support his position, he relates the writings of only ten. For so dramatic a change in the Ten Commandments, each should be quoted verbatim. (1) "If, then, those who walk in the ancient practices attain to newness of hope, no longer observing the Sabbath, but fashioning their lives after the Lord's Day on which our life also arose through Him...."--Ignatius. In no way does this quote say the first day of the week is the Lord's Day. The first day isn't even mentioned. At best, it only implies a distinction between the sabbath and the Lord's Day. (2) "And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together in one place and memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits.... Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness in matter, made the world; and Jesus...rose from the dead"--Justin Martyr and "Wherever we be, all of us are called by the one name of the Messiah, namely Christians and upon one day which is the first day of the week we assemble ourselves together and on the appointed days we abstain from food"--Bardaisan provide two additional quotations. The argument used in last month's issue on page 3 against Acts 20:7 ("And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them....") could also be used in opposition to these two quotes of Justin Martyr and Bardaisan. As was said earlier, "even if they had held actual communion services that night, this would in no way have made it a holy day. A meeting (or meetings) do not make a day sacred." (3) "'Your new moons and your sabbaths I cannot endure' (Isaiah 1:13). You perceive how He speaks: Your present sabbaths are not acceptable to me but that which I had made in giving rest to all things, I shall make a beginning of the eighth day, that is a beginning of another world. Wherefore also, we keep the eighth day with joyfulness, a day also in which Jesus rose from the dead"--Epistle of Barnabas. One should immediately notice how apologists don't hesitate to quote from a writing which is not considered canonical when it suits their interests. If Barnabas is to be trusted, then why isn't his epistle in the Canon? Moreover, is Barnabas saying that the Jewish writer, Isaiah, is actually changing the sabbath from the 7th day to the first? One could just as easily understand it as Isaiah saying to the Christians, "Your new sabbaths I cannot endure, i.e., your act of changing the sabbath from Saturday to Sunday I cannot endure." By saying, "You perceive how He speaks: Your present sabbaths are not acceptable to me," Barnabas could very well have interpreted Isaiah incorrectly. The latter said, "Your NEW sabbaths," which could easily refer to the Christian alteration, if one wants to view this as prophetic as Christians do. And lastly, just because Barnabas said "we keep the eighth day with joyfulness" because Jesus rose from the dead does not mean the sabbath has been changed. (4) "On the Lord's own day, gather yourselves together and break bread and give thanks"--Didache of the Apostles. Where does this quote say that the first day of the week is the Lord's Day? (5) "They [the Christians] affirmed...that the whole of their crime or error was that they had been wont to meet together on a fixed day before daylight and to repeat among themselves in turn a hymn to Christ as to a god...."--The Epistle of Pliny. Where does this quote say that the first day is the Lord's Day? (6) Because "The mystery of the Lord's resurrection may not be celebrated on any other day than the Lord's Day"--Irenaeus, "We keep the Lord's Day as a day of joy because of Him who arose thereon"--Peter, Bishop of Alexandria, and "...the mystery of the Lord's resurrection should be celebrated on no other than the Lord's day"--Eusebius are three quotations that say the Lord's Day is the day of the resurrection. Mark 16:9 RSV ("Now when he rose early on the first day of the week") says Jesus arose on the first day. These comments, along with "The Lord's Day is both the first and the eighth day"--Cyprian, do seem to prove that a few of the Church Fathers considered Sunday to be the Lord's Day. It should be quickly noted, however,

that: (a) Martin cited only 4 men to this effect, (b) none of these men wrote a word of the Bible, (c) nowhere does the Bible, itself, say that the first day or the day of the Resurrection is the Lord's Day, (d) none of these men specifically stated the 7th day (the sabbath) was no longer to be honored but, instead, replaced by honoring the first day, and (e) one of the men cited, Eusebius, had a history of intellectual dishonesty. Indeed, his citation is a verbatim duplication of that of Irenaeus. But, let's assume for the sake of argument that the Lord's Day is different from the sabbath, although the Bible does not say so. The Bible says we are to "Honor the sabbath." Nowhere does it say we are to "Honor the Lord's Day". Are we going to go by the Bible or a few of its revisers? Upon what biblical basis are we going to assume the Lord's Day takes precedence over the sabbath?

Martin's third major tactic, although blunder would be a far more appropriate term, arises on pages 461-62 and involved listing the following quotations which contend the sabbath is not the Lord's Day: "The Lord's Day did not succeed in the place of the Sabbath....The Lord's Day was merely an ecclesiastical institution....The primitive Christians did all manner of work upon the Lord's Day"--Bishop Taylor, "The observance of the Lord's Day (Sunday) is founded not on any command of God, but on the authority of the church"--Augsburg Confession of Faith, "But they err in teaching that Sunday has taken the place of the OT Sabbath and therefore must be kept as the Seventh day had to be kept by the children of Israel"--T.J. Mueller in Sabbath or Sunday, "Although Sunday was in primitive times and differently called the Lord's day or Sunday, yet it was never denominated the Sabbath; a name constantly appropriate to Saturday, or the Seventh day both by sacred and ecclesiastical writers"--in A Theological Dictionary by Charles Buck, and "The notion of a formal substitution by apostolic authority of the Lord's Day (meaning Sunday) for the Jewish Sabbath (or the first for the seventh day)...the transference to it perhaps in spiritualized form of the Sabbath obligation established by promulgation of the fourth commandment has no basis whatever, either in Holy Scripture or in Christian antiquity"--in A Dictionary of Christian Antiquities by Smith and Cheetham. Martin concludes his listing by saying, "Thus the Adventists (the sabbatarians) have in effect destroyed their argument by appealing to (these same--Ed.) authorities (which I just quoted who--Ed.) state unequivocally that the first day of the week is the Lord's Day and that it was observed by the early Christian Church from the time of the Apostles." Apparently Martin failed to realize that he not only "proved" that Sunday is the Lord's Day but that the Lord's Day is: "merely an ecclesiastical institution," "not founded upon any command of God, but on the authority of the Church," "has not taken the place of the OT sabbath," and "was never denominated the sabbath." He also "proved" that "the transference to Sunday in a spiritualized form of the Sabbath obligation established by promulgation of the fourth commandment has no basis whatever, either in Scripture or Christian antiquity." In effect, he destroyed his own argument by stripping Sunday-observance of any importance. Martin let everything ride on three words--The Lord's Day. He did everything possible, he was so determined to prove Sunday was the Lord's Day at all costs that he stripped it of any biblical legitimacy in the process. His own sources, sources which he cited, contend that the Lord's Day (a) is merely an ecclesiastical institution not founded upon any command of God, (b) was never called the sabbath, and (c) was never instituted as a replacement for the sabbath. Why on earth, then, would one worship on Sunday rather than Saturday?

Martin's concluding argument in the "Authoritative Quotations" section on page 463 involved citing the following quotation by a sabbatarian source in the Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge by Schaff-Herzog and registering a strong objection to the omission of the capitalized words. "Sunday...day of the sun because it was dedicated to the sun, was adopted by the early Christians as a day of worship. The sun of Latin adoration they interpreted as 'the sun of righteousness.' SUNDAY WAS EMPHATICALLY THE WEEKLY FEAST OF THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST, AS THE JEWISH SABBATH WAS THE FEAST OF THE CREATION. IT WAS CALLED THE 'LORD'S DAY,' AND UPON IT THE PRIMITIVE

CHURCH ASSEMBLED TO BREAK BREAD (Acts 20:7, 1 Cor. 16:2). No regulations for its observance are laid down in the NT, nor, indeed, is its observance even enjoined; YET CHRISTIAN FEELING LED TO THE UNIVERSAL ADOPTION OF THE DAY, IN IMITATION OF APOSTOLIC PRECEDENCE. IN THE SECOND CENTURY ITS OBSERVANCE WAS UNIVERSAL." Martin's protestation is without substance, since we have already shown by Martin's own quotations that even if Sunday is the Lord's Day, that's of little import. Even if Christians did assemble on Sunday to break bread, that did not relieve them of the sabbath obligation. No biblical requirement was ever instituted that Christians were to honor Sunday or that the sabbath had been shifted from Saturday to Sunday. Just because some Christians met on Sunday to break bread as in Acts 20:7 and 1 Cor. 16:2 does not mean that the Bible intended for that day to be honored by all subsequent Christians or that a day other than Saturday is to be honored.

Martin also objected to the omission of the part referring to "CHRISTIAN FEELING" leading "TO THE UNIVERSAL ADOPTION OF THE DAY." Are we going to follow "Christian feeling" or biblical injunction? Just because Acts 20:7 and 1 Cor. 16:2 show the apostles had some meetings on Sunday and subsequent Christians "felt" they should follow suit, does not mean: (a) Sunday had become the new sabbath, (b) the Lord's Day rather than the sabbath was to be honored every week, (c) the Lord's Day took precedence over the sabbath, or (d) that honoring Sunday has been instituted for all time by God. As was quoted earlier, Martin's own sources say "The Lord's Day was merely an ecclesiastical institution" and its observance "is founded not on any command of God, but on the authority of the church. If you are a bible-believing Christian who believes the Bible created the Church rather than the Church created the Bible (the Roman Catholic position), if your primary source is the Bible rather than the Church, then you have no choice but to honor Saturday rather than Sunday. There is no solid biblical basis for doing otherwise. (TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT MONTH)

EDITOR'S NOTE: TAPE #22 is now complete. It consists of PART 2 of TAPE #8 (40 Minutes) WO/Comm. and an appearance on John Otto's "Night Call" in 1987 (40 Minutes W/Comm.).

TAPE #29 is now available. It is a May 19, 1990 debate on a Christian station in Los Angeles with apologist, Dr. Robert Morey, Executive Director of the Research and Education Foundation. The Host was Greg Koukl. 85 Minutes WO/Comm.

Many of our radio appearances over the years were not recorded for various reasons. If anyone recorded an appearance that did not appear on our recent list of 29 tapes, would you please let us know. We would like to add it to the list.

We have never criticized bulk mail delivery before but an exception is in order. Last month's performance can only be described as appalling. As usual we mailed the issue on the last day of the month (June 30); yet, some subscribers only 200 miles away didn't receive the July issue until the 22nd or 23rd day of the month.

Issue No. 93

Sept. 1990

COMMENTARY

This month's Issue will conclude our itemized critique of Walter Martin's assault on sabbatarianism--the belief that Saturday rather than Sunday is the sabbath and the day to be honored.

REVIEWS

(PART 2)--The fourth and final source employed by Walter Martin in *THE KINGDOM OF THE CULTS* to prove Christians are honoring the correct day, Sunday, is the biblical text itself. Four passages from the writings of Paul (Col. 2:16-17, Gal. 4:9-11, Rom. 13:8-10 and Rom. 14:4-6, 10, 12-13), which he refers to as the primary anti-sabbatarian texts, are used to "reflect the position of the historic Christian Church from the times of the Fathers and the reformers to the leading exegetical commentators of our day...and contain the comprehensive NT teaching on Sabbatarianism" (p. 471). For so important an alteration of the 10 Commandments to ride upon 4 biblical passages, an in-depth discussion of each is in order. Martin began his analysis by stating that "from the ascension of Christ on, the NT and early church observed the first day of the week or the Lord's Day (Rev. 1:10) as we have endeavored to show." He may have "endeavored to show" but he endeavored in vain. On page 471-72 Martin says, "...historic evidence establishes that the first day of the week was the Lord's Day." Notice the apologetic duplicity in this comment. He said "historic evidence establishes." But he didn't say the Bible establishes. That was carefully avoided and quietly tiptoed past for obvious reasons. Some members of the early church may have observed the first day of the week as the Lord's Day but there is no textual support for their efforts and Rev. 1:10 ("I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day") says nothing of the sort. That's the only time the Lord's Day is even mentioned in the Bible and it certainly doesn't say it is Sunday. Martin refers to "the passages which contrast the Lord's Day with the Sabbath," when there are no passages of this nature. All he quoted were passages from a few Church Fathers who wrote no part of the Bible. Are we going to heed their teachings absent textual support? Who's in charge, them or Scripture? Martin concluded his opening comments by saying, "To narrow the issue down to simple analysis, we shall review the major NT texts, which in context and in the light of syntactical analysis refute the Sabbatarian concept, and substantiate the historic position of the Christian Church since the days of the Apostles and the Fathers." Having said all of the above, let us turn to his four passages and critique them in sequence.

First is COL. 2:16-17 ("Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a sabbath. These are only a shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ"). After quoting this verse and providing an elaborate explanation of why the sabbath referred to is the weekly sabbath, Martin said, "...how can the seventh-day Sabbath be retained? In light of this Scripture alone, I contend that the argument for Sabbath observance collapses...." The entire commentary in Issue #51 was devoted to biblical verses related to the use of alcoholic drink. If Martin's analysis of Col. 2:16 were correct, people could imbibe to excess with impunity. But even more importantly, Martin has again thrown out the baby with the bathwater. Under his interpretation, people not only don't have to honor the 7th day sabbath, but they don't have to honor any sabbath or any day of any kind. In effect, he has thrown out the 4th commandment and made the 10 commandments the 9 commandments. After all, he has removed any obligation to the sabbath and there is no biblical command to honor the Lord's Day or any other day.

The second passage, GAL. 9-11 RSV ("...how can you turn back again to the weak and beggarly elemental spirits, whose slaves you want to be once more? You observe days, and months, and seasons, and years! I am afraid I have labored over you in vain"), has the same weaknesses as the first. Martin spent so much time developing an argument against the 7th Day Adventists that he didn't realize the inadequacy of his approach when directed toward someone who has no allegiance to any part of the Book.

After quoting the third passage, ROM. 13:8-10 ("Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. The commandments...are summed up in this sentence, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' ...therefore love is the fulfilling of the law"), on page 469, Martin says, "It is really unnecessary to comment extensively upon the foregoing verses since they speak so plainly for themselves." How these verses speak plainly for themselves is a mystery. Although he decrys "the false teaching that love of one's neighbor does not fulfill all the law of God," he never explains how loving your neighbor as yourself fulfills the 4th Commandment. What has loving thy neighbor as thyself have to do with the 1st ("You shall have no other gods before me"), the 2nd ("You shall not make for yourself a graven image"), the 3rd ("You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain"), and the 4th ("Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy") commandments? It can be related to those having to do with honoring parents (5th), killing (6th), adultery (7th), stealing (8th), bearing false witness (9th), and coveting (10th), but it certainly doesn't cover the first four. Those require specific provisions. He incorrectly says that "the Holy Spirit twice declares that love fulfills the law. The Sabbatarians cannot exempt the Sabbath from this context without destroying the unity of the 'Eternal Ten'" (p. 469). Yet, they can if they are willing to admit that the author of Romans erroneously classified 4 of the Ten Commandments under the general heading of "loving thy neighbor as thyself" when they cannot be so categorized. For Martin to bewail those destroying the unity of the "Eternal Ten" is truly ridiculous, when he is as guilty as any.

The fourth passage, ROM. 14:5-6, 13 ("One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it.... Let us not therefore judge one another any more....") is the weakest of the lot. All it is saying is that anyone can make any day of his choosing the sabbath or honor no sabbath at all. Martin asserts on page 470 that "It is a matter of liberty and conscience." If that is true, then "the sabbath" no longer exists. The 4th Commandment becomes null and void and we now have the Nine Commandments. To say "Let every one be fully convinced in his own mind" is to say "let anarchy reign supreme." How could one honor "The Sabbath" or "The Lord's Day" when any day could be so designated by anyone and all would be equally valid? When Martin says on page 471 in regard to sabbatarians that "their 'special truths' have, to say the least, questionable theological origins," he'd do well to take stock of his own imaginings.

In wrapping up the entire sabbath controversy, we would only ask Walter Martin four simple questions. First, can you provide any textual support whatever that the first day of the week is the Lord's Day? Second, can you provide any textual support that the day to be honored has been shifted from Saturday to Sunday? Third, can you provide any textual support that the Lord's Day is to be honored in any manner different from that of all other days? And fourth, what are you doing to honor the 4th Commandment or do you feel the Ten Commandments are now Nine?

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #378 from JW of Alpha and Omega Ministries of Phoenix, Arizona (Part a)

Dear Mr. McKinsey. I am in receipt of the May, 1990 edition of Biblical Errancy. I noted with interest the letter from "FG of East Pittsburg, Pennsylvania." I know of no "FG" from East Pittsburg (there is one person with those initials on our mailing list), so how this person could presume to know that I know nothing of "truth or love" but instead practice "intolerance and fanaticism" is beyond me. The person seemingly is referring to the description of the little Letters to an Anti-theist booklet that we made available. It is interesting to note that you have kept your own personal world-view from being a matter of discussion in BE hence this letter and the attendant issue. That is a wise move, of course, for attempting to defend your own world-view would certainly take up space that you would rather use in your campaign against the Bible and Christianity in general. Most people who would be willing to accept your reading of the Bible, incredibly faulty as it consistently is, would not be asking themselves too many questions about what you have to suggest as being true in its place.

Given the fact that you have mentioned in past issues of BE attending such functions as the Freedom From Religion Foundation Convention (Dan Barker's letter was in that edition) or the meetings of American Atheists, and given the fact that your materials ridicule the Biblical presentation of theism (and this would, then, include the historical Jewish view of theism), it is hard to escape the logical conclusion that if you do not personally claim to be an atheist, you show great sympathy (and support) for that world-view. To print a letter suggesting that I should be "sued" for calling you an "anti-theist" is reprehensible.

Editor's Response to Letter #378 (Part a)

Dear James. James, James, what are we going to do with you? Your virtually uncontrollable urge to defend a dead-end cause drives you to ever more untenable comments. Just step back and take an objective look at your utterances. First, any reasonably intelligent person knows that you don't need to subscribe to a periodical or purchase literature in order to read it. FG could very easily have received all of your material from friends, relatives, acquaintances or libraries. Just because he is not a subscriber does not mean he is not reading everything you publish. Consequently, he could very well be in as good a position as anyone who reads your material to make judgments with respect to your adherence to truth, love, intolerance and fanaticism. Second, you have not only attempted to put me on the defensive by challenging me to reveal my world-view, but implied there is something insidious about my reluctance to discuss my own philosophy. Do you have something you believe should be aired or is your observation merely based on a feeling that something sinister is involved. Perhaps you failed to note that the title of this publication is not MCKINSEY'S INERRANCY OR PHILOSOPHY. I have no objection to discussing my views, but BE is not the proper forum. Anyone who has read every issue of BE already has a pretty good conception of my outlook on Christianity in particular and religion in general. Third, you refer to my reading of the Bible as being incredibly and consistently faulty. I would be most appreciative if you would not engage in grandiose generalizations of this nature. Unless and until evidence is forthcoming, please keep your unsubstantiated prejudices to yourself. So far in this letter you have provided nothing of real merit. Unless and until you provide cold data and hard facts, please don't summarize to the jury. If there is one fact I have learned after numerous appearances on the radio, it is that biblicists love to summarize to the audience before the evidence is in. The overwhelming majority of callers don't deal with facts but expound opinions. They will call in to a program that has aired for only a few minutes and begin with: "The general error you are making is" or "Your whole problem is" or "All your examples show" or "Where you are making your mistake is," etc. In fact, many begin their conversation with "I think that," "It seems to me," "I feel that," "I would say," "In my opinion," "I have always believed," "I have been taught," or "My gut reaction is"--all of which is irrelevant and immaterial. Who cares? What difference does it make what people think or feel? The question is not what one feels but what the Book says. Before criticizing the writings of others you would do well to note that in

your own literature you not only often spend too much time on petty details of a secondary, if not tertiary character, but also seek to rewrite or reinterpret biblical verses of a troublesome nature in the many versions available, while carefully avoiding the creation of your own version, because you don't want to stick your neck out. After all, we both know it would be much harder to say "that's what it says but that's not what it means" when you wrote it yourself. If you were the author and repeatedly used that approach, one could reasonably conclude that your writing skills are nil. Fourth, upon what basis do you conclude that "people who would be willing to accept" my reading of the Bible would not be willing to ask themselves too many questions about what I have to put in its place. Why do you feel qualified to make a psychological evaluation of our readership, few of whom you have ever met? How do you know what they are thinking? Based on past experience, the readers of BE ask questions in abundance. Indeed, unlike NT Christians who don't mind being referred to as sheep with a shepherd, our readers are quite inquisitive and independent and have asked us many personal questions. Fifth, when did I say I attended a meeting of the American Atheists? I tried to set up a booth several years ago at one of their meetings in Kentucky, but that never materialized for reasons mentioned in the 16th Issue. Sixth, you object to the fact that I printed FG's letter suggesting that you should be 'sued' for calling me an 'anti-theist'. I fail to see how this was "reprehensible." Are you saying FG is not entitled to his opinion? He made a suggestion which I have no intention of implimenting. What's wrong with that? And lastly, only one of your comments has much credibility. You say that "it is hard to escape the logical conclusion that if you do not personally claim to be an atheist, you show great sympathy for that world-view." With that I have little disagreement, James.

Letter #378 Continues (Part b)

Even if you claim some kind of theistic belief, whether pantheistic, deistic, panentheistic, or whatever, the fact remains that from my perspective it is perfectly logical to label your work, and yourself, as an anti-theist. If God has truly revealed Himself in Jesus Christ (and this is a basic belief of Christianity), then to be opposed to that revelation is to be opposed to God Himself. The apostle John put it this way, "Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father" (1 John 2:23). In that case, all who oppose the testimony and message of Jesus Christ are, by Biblical definition, "atheists," for they do not have God.

You have given a great deal of evidence in the pages of BE of holding views that are fully in line with atheistic concepts. If you do not wish to be called an atheist, then state your world-view clearly and openly so that it can be evaluated and accurately reviewed.

Editor's Response to Letter #378 (Part b)

With each passing minute you are digging your hole deeper, James. Now the narrowness of your perspective steps out of the shadows with an ominous appearance second to none. You say that "if God has truly revealed Himself in Jesus Christ..., then to be opposed to that revelation is to be opposed to God Himself....'Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father' (1 John 2:23)....all who oppose the testimony and message of Jesus Christ are, by Biblical definition, 'atheists,' for they do not have God." According to you, not only is every Moslem, Jew, and Hindu an atheist but so are many organizations you refer to as cults. They are all atheists because they all deny the divinity of Jesus and much of his message. To oppose that revelation is to oppose God Himself? That's about as restricted a view as one can have and you are only corroborating the commentary we had on EXCLUSIVISM several months ago. Under your definition almost the entire world is composed of atheists.

My world view, with which you seem obsessed, would probably be that of agnosticism, although I have stated I have no firm views in this regard. I didn't realize my world-view had been closely guarded rather reasonably open for all to evaluate.

Letter #378 Continues (Part c)

I am enclosing my renewal for BE. When my new book *The Truth on Trial* comes out later this year, I'll need to make sure that "Biblical Errancy" is spelled properly, n'est-ce pas? I also find BE to be useful in teaching classes on the Bible, and modern attacks upon it. Most students are not only amazed at the leaps of illogic presented in each issue, but they are most surprised by your dogmatic insistence of not recognizing the different kinds of literature and language in the Bible. You often mix up various kinds of literature, not following the only logical path of interpretation which would keep you from contrasting your literal view of a passage of poetry or parable with your literal view of a passage of apocalyptic literature. And your consistent (I will give you that) inability to understand the language of the text within any context other than your own very limited one is often noted as well.

A recent example from the September, 1989 issue, under "Peter versus the OT," number 1, demonstrates this. You cite Peter's statement that "God is no respecter of persons" and then contrast this with many statements in regards to God's election of a people for Himself. Of course, you have badly misunderstood what "respecter of persons" means, and, on the basis of that error, have gone on to create a non-existent contradiction. Being a "respecter of persons" would mean that God is influenced by the actions or status of individuals; that He would be "impressed" by one person who might claim to have some kind of "special position" before God, some kind of "merit" in His sight. The fact that God, outside of any action of man, but solely on the basis of His own will, has chosen to elect a people to Himself (Deuteronomy 7:6-8 for the people of Israel; Ephesians 1:3-11 under the new covenant) demonstrates the truth that Peter announced: God's election is not based upon any action of man (for then He would indeed be a "respecter of persons") but is based solely on His will and purpose. The contradiction exists only in your misunderstanding.

Editor's Response to Letter #378 (Part c)

"Leaps in illogic," "dogmatic insistence," "inability to understand the language of the text within any context other than your own!" There you go again, James, throwing glittering generalities around with reckless abandon, using phrases that are most applicable to yourself. Only after moving 2/3's of the way through your letter do you actually get down to a specific piece of evidence. And what an example it is! One thing I have always noticed about your logic, James, is that it is always off-center. For some reason you can't seem to arrange a mass of facts into a meaningful hierarchy. You gather data but don't seem to know what to do with it or how to prioritize. You don't seem to have a feel for what is important and what isn't. You get so involved in that which is of lesser importance that you lose the big picture. You also don't seem to realize that your "resolutions" of biblical contradictions often create more problems than are resolved. In this instance, for example, you conclude your defense by saying, "God's election is not based upon any action of man...but is based solely on His will and purpose." If that isn't playing favorites, what is? People should be chosen on the basis of merit, effort, and behavior. According to you it's based on God's whim or capriciousness, and has nothing to do with their actions. In that case, what other criteria could there be except "playing favorites?" Remember my Commentary entitled *Works or Whim* in the Nov. 1988 Issue? You stepped off the bank into the quicksand.

But equally important, upon what basis do you conclude that being a "respector of persons" would mean God is influenced by the status or "special position" of "one person?" You are engaging in "eisegesis" not "exegesis." Acts 10:34 in the NASB says, "God is not one to show partiality;" the NIV says, "Does not show favoritism;" the NEB says, "God has no favourites;" and the Good News says, "God treats everyone on the same basis." None of these versions as well as others I could cite are referring in any sense to particular individuals with a higher status or position. They are all referring to humanity in general and saying God will consider no one above another. They are not saying God is looking upon people with a higher status in the eyes of men and considering them equal to all others. All you have done is concoct an arbitrary definition of "no respector of persons" for purposes of expediency. The only one who has badly misunderstood the text is yourself. You are the one who displays an "inability to understand the language of the text within any context other than your own." You have a preconceived notion of what the Book should say and the text is going to be bent accordingly, regardless. Also worthy of note in your writings is that you, like all fundamentalists, jettison the literal interpretation of scripture when it no longer suits your ends. When the literal interpretation exposes an obvious contradiction, you quickly resort to figurative, allegorical and symbolic meanings. Contrary to fundamentalist propaganda, little of the Bible is composed of poetry or prose. Vague and obscure verses abound, but there is little reason to believe they are not to be taken literally. Even more important, those are not the ones upon which we focus. Nebulous books such as Revelation and Daniel are the last to fall under our ax.

Letter #378 Concludes (Part d)

The same is to be said of your supposed contradiction cited in an even more recent issue, that being #115 of December, 1989. Ignoring the Biblical teaching that Jesus is identified as Jehovah God in the NT, you assert that Jesus' statement that no one had seen the Father is contradicted by the visions of Jehovah God in the OT. Of course, if one were to logically think about this, one would see your error. If Jesus Christ, the Son, is identified with the Father as Jehovah God, and if John wrote, "No man has seen God at any time, the unique God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has made Him known" (John 1:18), then the one who was seen in the OT and who is identified as Jehovah (as when Jehovah walked with Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, or when Isaiah saw Jehovah in Isaiah 6:1/John 12:40-41), then the individual that they saw was the Son, not the Father. No man has seen the Father at any time. The passages you cite from the OT do not say that it was the Father who was seen. Again, your "contradiction" is found to rest solely on your own ignorance of the whole Biblical teaching.

Editor's Response to Letter #378 (Part d)

Remember the old cliché, "What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander?" I can't resist it this time, James. If you can use the Trinity at will, so can I. God and Jesus are identical, remember! So the text is guilty of a blatant lie when it says, "Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape." Jesus was heard and seen by many on numerous occasions; therefore, by your own definition, God has been seen and heard also. And that's that.

But your argument is also flawed in other respects. Your comment that "if one were to logically think about this, one would see your error" describes your position exactly. The only ignorance involved comes from your almost total inability to critically analyze a book that has more holes in it than a backdoor screen. You have been so indoctrinated from birth that you are incapable of viewing the Bible with any real degree of objectivity. Indeed, the very idea of the Book being flawed is so far outside your realm of possibility that you will employ any rationalization, justification, prevarication, or obfuscation to put the best face on a hopeless mess. Case in point! In the present instance, you cite John 1:18 which refers to seeing God when that was never

mentioned in the 115th example. That wasn't even a part of the contradiction. You subtly tried to shift the focus from hearing to seeing. The 115th example referred to the contradiction between John 5:37 which says God was never heard and numerous examples to the contrary. Gen. 3:8-10 says the Lord God called unto Adam; Ex. 19:19 says Moses spoke and God answered him by a voice, and Job 38:1 says the Lord answered Job out of a whirlwind. What more do you want? How could the text be any clearer? The Lord God is talking in the OT and Jesus is completely wrong when he said in John 5:37 that no one has heard God at any time. Moreover, John 5:37 says God's shape was not seen, but you admit yourself that God was seen by Isaiah (Isa. 6:1) and walked with Abraham by the Oaks of Mamre. So He was not only heard but seen.

Incidentally, you quoted John 1:18 as saying, "No man has seen God at any time, the unique God, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has made Him known" when many versions (the KJV, JB, NIV, ASV, BBE, LB, and NEB) say the underlined part should be "the only begotten son." The latter would make more sense since putting God, rather than the son, in the bosom of the Father would make the Bible even more absurd than it already is.

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COMMENTARY

SALVATION BY GRACE--Few biblical topics are more confusing or contradictory than that of salvation. Is it obtained by works, by faith, by predestination, by grace or by some other mechanism. Texts are wholly inconsistent in this regard. Although the fundamentalist wing of Christianity contends that faith alone is the sole means by which to obtain salvation, many verses show that it is obtained by grace, a euphemism for "whim." God simply looks down and chooses who he wishes to save based on no criterion other than capriciousness. Verses in support of this position are: PSALM 65:4 ("Blessed is the man whom thou chooseth and causeth to be near unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts"), JOHN 6:44 ("No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him"), 1 COR. 12:18 ("But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him"), JOHN 6:65 ("And he said, Therefore said I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father"), ROM. 9:18 ("Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth"), ROM. 9:16 ("So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy"), JOHN 3:27 ("A man can receive nothing, except it be given him from heaven"), EPH. 2:8-9 ("For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God not of works, lest any man should boast"), 2 TIM. 1:9 ("Who [God--Ed.] hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began"), TITUS 3:5 ("Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost"), ISAIAH 43:25 ("I, even I [God--Ed.], am he who blotteth out the transgressions for my own sake, and thy sins I will not remember"), ACTS 22:14, JER. 30:21, ROM. 3:24, ROM. 11:5, ACTS 15:11, EPH. 2:5, and PSALM 86:13. Is it any wonder many Christians throw themselves on fate and allow the elements to direct their destiny? Why be concerned when salvation is out of one's hands anyway.

Other verses say we are saved by "calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 2:21, Joel 2:32, Rom. 10:13), "hope" (Rom. 8:24), "fearing the Lord" (Acts 10:34), and "eating Jesus" (John 6:50-51, 53-54, 57-58). With verses such as these, is it any wonder the issue is so terribly muddled.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #379 from RS of Richmond, Virginia (Part a)

Dear Dennis. In your Jesus Christ Is the Answer? pamphlet on #8 ["How could Jesus, whom the NT repeatedly refers to as the son of man, be our savior when this is clearly forestalled by Psalm 146:3 ('Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man in whom there is no help') and Job 25:6 ('How much less man, that is a worm? and the son of man, which is a worm')"?] you cite Psalm 146:3 and Job 25:6 but couldn't the phrase "son of man" have been identified with Jesus later? Perhaps by himself about himself? OT verses shown might only apply to earthly men and their sons.

Editor's Response to Letter #379 (Part a)

Dear RS. What difference would it make when the phrase was applied to Jesus or if it was applied to himself by himself later? The fact remains that we have an OT verse that can be related to Jesus far more easily than most of the OT verses that apologists apply to him. As long as he is called "the son of man" in the NT, that is all that is necessary. When the phrase was first applied to him and by whom is irrelevant. That makes no difference. We still have an OT verse that can be applied to him because of identical words in the NT.

Letter #379 Concludes (Part b)

Also in the same tract is #17 which states ["Jesus told a man in Mark 8:34 that 'whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.' What cross? He hadn't died on the cross yet. There was nothing to take up. That man would have had no idea what he was talking about"]. Didn't the Romans execute people by crucifixion throughout the ancient world during NT times?

Editor's Response to Letter #379 (Part b)

I fail to see how your comment addresses the issue, RS. Yes, the Romans used crucifixion but the text is referring to the Christian cross in particular. Are you saying Jesus meant that one should take up just any cross? If so, then Jesus would be saying that one could follow him by just taking up any cross and there need be no reference to Christianity whatever. But that ignores the context because the next verse ("For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it") shows Jesus is dealing with salvation itself and that could only refer to the Christian cross.

Letter #380 from KEH of Sacramento, California

Dear Dennis. I received issue #90 of BE. Congratulations on one of your best issues -- most of the chronological contradictions were brief, pithy and compelling, the kind that are easy to communicate and difficult to refute. Lots of great ammunition here for debates. I believed I noticed an error, however. Please double check item (14) on the first page. According to your entry, in the Luke passage Jesus said during supper that the hand of his betrayer was with him on the table, while in the Matthew and Mark passages Jesus made the announcement after supper. But this is what I found when I looked up the passages in the King James Version, the NIV and the NAB: {At this point KEH quoted Luke 22:14-21, Matthew 26:21, and Mark 14:18--ED.}. It seems that every version of each passage implies that the announcement took place during the supper. If you made an error, you should correct it as soon as possible, before the fundamentalists pounce on it and use it against you.

Editor's Response to Letter #380

Dear KEH. I did make a mistake in this instance but not the one you suggest. My 14th point in the 90th issue's Commentary was as follows: ("In Luke 22:14-21 Jesus said during supper that the hand of his betrayer was with him on the table, while in Matt. 26:21 and Mark 14:18 Jesus made this statement after supper"). "During" and "after" should have been reversed. The comment was made after supper in Luke and during supper in Matthew and Mark--not the other way around. I stand corrected.

However, your concluding comment that "every version of each passage implies that the announcement took place during the supper" is inaccurate. Because you have been a long-time supporter of BE, I am inclined to believe you are making a sincere attempt to be of assistance. Otherwise, I would view this as a subtle apologetic maneuver to create a defense where none exists. Although you correctly quoted Matthew 26:21 and Mark 14:18, you failed to quote all of Luke 22:14-21. Instead you omitted verses 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, and 20, which are critical to what occurred. Verses 17 and 18 clearly show them eating supper and verses 19 and 20 are even more important. Notice what they say in the RSV: "And he took bread, and when he had given thanks he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me'. And likewise the cup after supper, saying, 'This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood'." It says "after supper" and then verse 21 refers to the hand of the betrayer being on the table. Clearly, then, the comment with respect to the hand being on the table was made after supper in Luke and the contradiction remains.

Letter #381 from TF of Pasadena, Maryland (Part a)

(TF is editor of the Bible Answers Newsletter. In Issues 77, 78, 79, 80, 84, and 85 we debated many of the points made in the two pamphlets issued by BE. TF again seeks to resume the encounter by debating other material--ED.).

Dennis McKinsey...in his Feb. 1990 issue writes...["MATT. 19:17-19 ('...but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments. He said unto him, Which? Jesus said, Thou shalt do no murder, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Honor thy father and thy mother: and Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself'). Jesus omitted 5 of the 10 commandments. Possibly he doesn't know the entire 10 or he doesn't consider 5 of them to be commandment material. In any event, he created one of his own ('Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself') out of whole cloth."]

There you go again, Dennis. As I have already pointed out in two previous issues of BAN (Jan. 89, p. 7 and Sept 89, p. 3) you are incorrect in assuming that there are only ten commandments. Specifically, I wrote in the Sept. 89 issue: "Matt. 19:16-22 has Jesus quoting another commandment which isn't among the Big 10, namely Lev. 19:18.: In the King James version the following command is found in that OT verse: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." Furthermore, none of the gospel accounts claims to present the entire dialogue, so you are speculating when you assert that "Jesus omitted 5 of the 10 commandments." It appears that your sarcastic tone is totally unjustified.

Editor's Response to Letter #381 (Part a)

Dear TF. I really wish you would read the Bible more and theorize less. You make so many mistakes so rapidly it is hard to stay abreast. First, virtually every Christian scholar I know of claims there are 10 commandments. I have never heard of anyone saying there are eleven, twelve or thirteen. Who in the world is supporting your position? Are you quoting someone? Second,

the 10 commandments are listed in Exodus 20:3-17 and Deut. 5 and are specifically labeled as such in the Revised Standard Version, the Today's English Version, the New American Bible, the American Standard Version, the New International Version, the Jerusalem Bible and the Living Bible. Are you saying you are more knowledgeable in this regard than all the scholars who translated all of these versions? I am not "assuming that there are only 10;" I'm stating a fact that is conceded by virtually everyone I know of except yourself. You embark upon some of the most untenable arguments I have ever heard, TF. They border on the inane. Third, if you are not going to limit the 10 commandments to the 10 rules specifically laid down by God in Ex. 20:3-17 and Deut. 5:7-21, you are going to blend them into the hundreds of other rules and regulations God laid down in the OT. Upon what biblical basis, then, are you going to make a distinction? And if you don't make a distinction, then Jesus should have added not only Lev. 19:18 but hundreds of other requirements. Fourth, nothing in the OT says Lev. 19:18 is one of the commandments. In fact, it isn't even listed in the same book with the 10 commandments. So obviously Jesus created one of his own, since there are literally hundreds of other maxims he could have drawn from the OT. Fifth, he certainly did omit five of the ten, which virtually every scholar I know of would admit. Moreover, according to you there are 11 commandments in which case I could have said he omitted 5 of the eleven. Sixth, you claim that "none of the gospel accounts claims to present the entire dialogue" so I am speculating when I assert that "Jesus omitted 5 of the 10 commandments." Your scholarship is going from bad to worse, TF. I am not speculating, you are. You are guessing there was additional dialogue for which there is not a shred of biblical evidence. Following your logic, everyone on this planet could revamp the Bible dramatically by simply inserting, in a wholly gratuitous manner, any kind of dialogue they deemed appropriate at any point of his or her choosing. Talk about utter chaos! The Bible is chaotic enough as it is. It doesn't need your assistance; it's doing quite well on its own. Many months ago I suggested that you consult more competent apologists, TF. Apparently you ignored my advice and struck out on your own again.

Letter #381 Continues (Part b)

McKinsey continues: "And in Matt. 9:14-15, Mark 2:18-20, and John 8:4-11 he denied the OT law requiring fasting." Wrong again, McKinsey. First John 8:4-11 does not refer to fasting. Perhaps you meant Luke 5:33-35, the parallel passage to the other two you cite. Secondly, Jesus neither forbids nor commands fasting, so you cannot conclude that "he denied" a law which requires fasting. Finally, contrary to your claim, there is no "OT law requiring fasting."

Editor's Response to Letter #381 (Part b)

Again, let's take them one at a time. First, you said there is no OT law requiring fasting. Let me recommend The New Compact Bible Dictionary of 1967 by Zondervan Publishing House. You'll find the following observation on page 173: "The only fast required was that of the Day of Atonement. Before the Babylonian Captivity it was the one regular fast (Lev. 16:29, 31; 23:27-32; Num. 29:7; Jer. 36:6)." Jer. 36:6 even says "in the Lord's house upon the fasting day." Second, whether Jesus forbid or commanded fasting is irrelevant to the point at issue. We are discussing what he said when asked by the disciples of John and the Pharisees why his disciples did not fast. He said it was not necessary while he was with them. In other words, as I said, he ignored the OT law requiring fasting. Third, your only correct comment was that Luke 5:33-35 should have been substituted for John 8:4-11. With as many verses as I employ, it's a wonder there aren't more miscitations.

Letter #381 Continues (Part c)

...McKinsey continues: [On the other hand, we have Paul's comment in 1 Cor. 1:17 ("For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel...") which strongly implies baptism is not required and directly opposes the Great Commission. Moreover, if baptism is an absolute requirement for salvation, why would Paul say, "I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius," and why did Jesus baptize no one according to John 4:2 ("although Jesus Himself was not baptizing, but His disciples were"). Other verses could be used by both sides in this debate, but that would only muddy the waters further. The fact remains that the biblical position on baptism, as with many other major topics, is inconclusive and leads to no definitive resolution of the conflict].

Dennis, let me quote again from the Jan 89 issue (p. 5) of Bible Answers Newsletter, where I answered you on the same subject: "You are absolutely incorrect. Paul never spoke against baptism. First, Jesus sent the eleven to teach and baptize (Matt. 28:19-20). Then, he sent Paul to preach to the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel (Acts 9:15). Paul did not contradict the assignments Jesus had given the eleven. Instead, Paul taught that it is God's wise choice to assign different work to different people (1 Cor. 12). Paul did baptize (1 Cor. 1:14-17), but it was not the essence of his ministry to do so (verse 17)."

You now ask why Paul would say, "I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius..." Paul himself answers you in the second half of that sentence, "...lest any should say that I had baptized in my own name...."

Editor's Response to Letter #381 (Part c)

You don't read as closely as you should, TF. In 1 Cor. Paul said Christ sent him not to baptize but to preach the gospel and I said that "strongly implies baptism is not required and directly opposes the Great Commission." Your response is that "Paul did baptize (1 Cor. 1:14-17) but it was not the essence of his ministry to do so (verse 17)." What difference does it make whether or not it is the essence of his ministry when the 17th verse says he was not to baptize at all? He didn't say, "I'm not to baptize if I'm going to consider it within the essence of my ministry." The fact is that Paul did baptize according to the Great Commission of Matt. 28:19 ("Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of...") and, yet, he said "Christ sent me not to baptize....", period. The Great Commission did not say "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing...them without considering it within the essence of your mission." Why is he baptizing at all when he said "Christ sent me not to baptize?"

Paul's comment about Crispus and Gaius is without strength also. He said, "I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius Lest any should say that I baptized in my own name." Then why did he baptize them either, because people could say he did so in his own name? Moreover, following this logic, the Great Commission should be totally ignored by everyone because anyone who baptizes anybody could be accused of doing so in his own name? My original comment on page 3 that "the biblical position on baptism, as with many other major topics, is inconsistent" remains intact.

Letter #382 from SS of Winter Haven, Florida (Part a)

Dear Dennis. I wouldn't call you overzealous and vituperative. You do a good job. But Ingersoll and Twain...as quoted in Issue #89 certainly are vituperative and overzealous. They should have abided by the leading quote, page 1, "...first prove facts and deduce doctrines from them afterwards." Don't "assume everything and prove nothing." I'm in reference to the quotes under the heading "God," bottom of page 3, in which Ingersoll calls the Hebrew God "utterly detestable," and then Geismar claims Twain said the Jewish God breaks all of His own laws,

including adultery. And Ingersoll calls the Jewish God despicable, hateful and arrogant." These claims are left unsupported by quotes and examples from the OT. (Anything in the NT of course refers to the Christian God, not the Jewish God, and the Christian God can be said to have committed adultery with Mary, naturally.)

Editor's Response to Letter #382 (Part a)

Dear SS. One might contend that Ingersoll and Twain were vituperative, but they wouldn't have much trouble proving that the Bible's presentation of God was anything but complimentary. BE's third issue showed that God's behavior in the Bible is little short of appalling. Surely you don't wish to dispute that point? Secondly, how do you distinguish a Jewish God from a Christian God? There is only one God according to the Bible. There may be two different presentations of God but there is only one God. Judging from your statement, one could easily conclude you believe in two gods and are bitheistic.

Letter #382 Continues (Part b)

The demonstrable fact is that chapter and verse quotes exist in the OT that prove the exact opposite of Ingersoll's and Twain's claims. For example, Ex. 34:6-7 describes the Jewish God as follows: "And the Lord passed by before Moses, and proclaimed, 'The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and who will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation'."

Editor's Response to Letter #382 (Part b)

It's hard to believe that you used this quotation to prove your point, SS. You concentrated so much on words such as merciful, gracious, longsuffering, goodness, mercy, forgiving, and truth that you ignored the second part which virtually nullifies the first. It clearly states he will punish the children for the sins of the fathers for many generations to come. That's precisely the opposite of merciful, gracious, good, and forgiving.

Letter #382 Continues (Part c)

It only makes your otherwise excellent newsletter lose credibility if you put in quotes that have no supporting proof or quotes, and that in fact can be proven untrue with chapter and verse quotes. It seems to me the quotes of Ingersoll and Twain are typical anti-Semitic diatribes that aren't aimed against religion or the truth of the Bible, but only aimed against Jews and the Jewish religion. Such quotes don't help the cause of atheism. It has become a "scholarly" thing, even, for anti-Semites to say that the Jewish God was an angry, vengeful God, while the Christian God is a loving and forgiving God.... It is the Christian God, through the NT, that says the whole world has to be converted to Christianity and non-Christians are damned to eternal hell. It is the Christian God that is the angry and vengeful one. God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son so that anyone who doesn't fall on his knees and worship Jesus will burn in eternal hell. Some "love"!....

Editor's Response to Letter #382 (Part c)

Anti-semitism has nothing to do with the writings of Ingersoll and Twain, SS. One need only read all of Ingersoll's religious commentaries to see that he has little use for the God of the OT, the NT, the Koran, or any other testament. He doesn't make the kind of distinction you offer. In

fact, your criticism of the Christian belief that one must accept Jesus or burn in hell is a point with which he is in full agreement and often expressed. Christians often distinguish God's behavior in the OT from that of the NT for the reasons you suggest, but that cannot be validly attributed to Exposers of the Bible such as Ingersoll and Twain.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #383 from JB of Annapolis, Maryland

Dear Mr. McKinsey. I was pleasantly surprised to receive your sample issue of Biblical Errancy. Immediately, I ripped open the envelope and quickly read the contents, savoring each syllable. Needless to say, I found it to be enormously engaging. In fact, I got quite a kick from it. A finer little newsletter was never published for less than two dollars.

Alas, you have tempted my darker, fiendishly non-religious self. Consequently, you must send more without delay! I am particularly interested in arguments against the divinity of Jesus and the existence of miracles; the more esoteric the better. If you happen to have anything that screams out to be read, send that too....

Letter #384 from Dan Barker of the Freedom from Religion Foundation, P.O. Box 750, Madison, Wisconsin 53701

Dear Dennis.... I did a fun show in Seattle last week. I was teamed up with a Baptist (fundamentalist) preacher, RC priest, and a Sephardim Rabbi. I got more than my fair share of time, this time. The audience was fairly well distributed. It was mostly state/church separation, but the bible did come up now and then. They conducted a (non-scientific) phone-in poll of viewers on the question, "Do you believe in a god?" The response was 69% YES and 31% NO. I thought that was a mistake because the national polls normally show atheists between 5% and 10% but I was told that the Pacific Northwest is pretty individualistic--lots of frontier-type people. There are many more freethinkers in this country than people realize. It's just that most of us are not overly eager to proselytize or advertize our unbelief so the impression is that everyone is religious....

Would you like an analysis I did on the contradiction between Acts 9:7 and Acts 22:9?....

Editor's Response to Letter #384

Dear Dan. Your experience in Seattle tends to show that the results of polls are often dependent on those who take them. Pollsters have attitudes, too, and no doubt many go to church. I read your analysis on the contradiction between Acts 9:7 and 22:9 some time ago. Perhaps you don't remember sending me a copy. But thanks for the offer.

Letter #385 from JK of New York, New York

Dear Dennis. I'm very pleased with your listing of pertinent quotations, many of which I had never encountered. They will be valuable ammunition in the on-going battle with superstitious believers. You're a valuable resource and I greatly admire your dedication to the cause of free thought.

Issue No. 95

Nov. 1990

COMMENTARY

Before returning to the Bible directly, this month's commentary as well as that which follows will continue the alphabetical listing of notable quotes which last appeared in the May, 1990 issue.

QUOTATIONS

(PART 4)

GOSPELS--"To prove the Gospels by a miracle is to prove an absurdity by something contrary to nature." Diderot

"We are distressed because our churches are half empty; and many of them would be emptier if the Gospel were preached in them." William Inge {This quote has contradictory interpretations--Ed.}

HEBREWS--"In the first place, the fact that Hebrews is not an epistle of St. Paul, or of any other apostle, is proved by what it says in chapter 2...." Luther's Works, Vol. 35, p. 304

"Another great difficulty occurs in chapters 6 and 10 (of Hebrews--ED.) where the epistle flatly denies and refuses to recognize a sinner's repentance for sin after baptism; and in chapter 12, it says that Esau sought repentance and did not find it. This contradicts (Note Well--ED.) all the gospels and St. Paul's epistles. Although one might attempt to explain it away by a gloss, the words are so clear that I do not know whether it could be done. My opinion is that this is an epistle put together of many pieces, which does not deal systematically with any one subject." Luther's Works, Vol. 35, p. 394-95

HISTORY--"For my own part, I do not believe there is one word of historical truth in the whole book (the Bible--Ed.). I look upon it at best to be a romance: the principal personage of which is an imaginary or allegorical character founded upon some tale...." The Theological Works of Thomas Paine, p. 244-45

"It is safe to say that every truth in the histories of those times is the result of accident or mistake." "Ghosts" in Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 1, p. 294

HUMAN SACRIFICE--"Christian authors exclaim against the practise of offering up human sacrifices, which, they say, is done in some countries; and those authors make those exclamations without ever reflecting that their own doctrine of salvation is founded on a human sacrifice. They are saved, they say, by the blood of Christ. The Christian religion begins with a dream and ends with a murder." The Life and Works of Thomas Paine, Vol. 9, p. 295

INCARNATION--"And the day will come, when the mystical generation of Jesus, by the Supreme Being as his father, in the womb of a virgin, will be classed with the fable of the generation of Minerva in the brain of Jupiter...." Jefferson's Works, by H.A. Washington, Vol. 7, p. 284

INERRANCY--"Few intelligent Christians can still hold to the idea that the Bible is an infallible Book, that it contains no linguistic errors, no historical discrepancies, no antiquated scientific assumptions, not even bad ethical standards. Historical investigation and literary criticism have taken the magic out of the Bible and have made it a composite human book, written by many hands in different ages. The existence of thousands of variations of texts makes it impossible to

hold the doctrine of a book verbally infallible. Some might claim for the original copies of the Bible an infallible character, but this view only begs the question and makes such Christian apologetics more ridiculous in the eyes of sincere men." Christianity in America, by Elmer Homrighausen, former Dean of Princeton Theological Seminary, p. 121

INFIDELITY--"Infidelity does not consist in believing, or in disbelieving; it consists in professing to believe what he does not believe." The Age of Reason, Thomas Paine, p. 22

"'Infidel' is a term of reproach, which Christians and Mohammedans, in their modesty, agree to apply to those who differ from them." Science and Christian Tradition, Thomas Huxley, p. 233

INSPIRATION--"...if the Bible is true, it needs no inspiration, and...if not true, inspiration can do it no good." Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 11, p. 233

"The inspiration of the Bible depends upon the ignorance of the gentleman who reads it." Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 11, p. 387

"...but if the witnesses are inspired of God then there is no reason for their disagreeing on anything, and if they do disagree it is a demonstration that they were not inspired...." Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 11, p. 295

"No matter how many people regard the Bible as inspired--that fact furnishes no evidence that it is inspired. Just as many people have regarded other books as inspired; just as millions have been deluded about the inspiration of books ages and ages before Christianity was born." "Interviews" in Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 5, p. 298

INTERPRETATION--"No public man believes that the Bible means what it says: he is always convinced it says what he means." George Bernard Shaw

"A good rule for interpretation is: 'If the literal sense makes good sense, seek no other sense lest you come up with nonsense'." Anonymous

"It must be remembered that a deviation from the literal sense is not justified unless the Scriptures themselves prescribe such a course." Bible Difficulties, by Apologist W. Arndt, p. 133

"There are no witches. The witch text remains; only the practice has changed. Hell fire is gone, but the text remains. Infant damnation is gone, but the text remains. More than two hundred death penalties are gone from the law books, but the texts that authorized them remain." Mark Twain and the Three R's, Ed. by Maxwell Geismar, p. 110

INTOLERANCE--"He who begins by loving Christianity better than Truth, will proceed by loving his sect or church better than Christianity, and end in loving himself better than all." Samuel Taylor Coleridge

ISAIAH--"Whoever will take the trouble of reading the book ascribed to Isaiah, will find it one of the most wild and disorderly compositions ever put together; it has neither beginning, middle, nor end; and, except for a short historical part, and a few sketches of history in the first two or three chapters, is one continued, incoherent, bombastical rant, full of extravagant metaphor, without application, and destitute of meaning; a school-boy would scarcely have been excusable for writing such stuff; it is...prose run mad." The Age of Reason, Thomas Paine, p. 129-130

"Isaiah is, upon the whole, a wild, disorderly writer, preserving in general no clear chain of perception in the arrangement of his ideas, and consequently producing no defined conclusions from them. It is the wildness of his style, the confusion of his ideas, and the ranting metaphors he employs, that have afforded so many opportunities to priestcraft in some cases, and to superstition in others, to impose those defects upon the world as prophecies of Jesus Christ. Finding no direct meaning in them, and not knowing what to make of them, and supposing at the same time they were intended to have a meaning, they supplied the defect by inventing a meaning of their own, and called it his (Isaiah's--ED)." The Life and Works of Paine, Vol. 9, p. 229-30

JAMES, THE BOOK OF--"Many sweat to reconcile St. Paul and St. James.... but in vain. 'Faith justifies' and 'faith does not justify' contradict each other flatly. [Isn't it refreshing to hear an avowed apologist, especially one as knowledgeable as Luther, dispense with all the doubletalk and rationalizing by admitting the obvious--ED.). If any one can harmonize them I will give him my doctor's hood and let him call me a fool." The Life and Letters of Martin Luther, by Preserved Smith, p. 269

"This enables one to observe that the Epistle of James is no truly apostolic epistle...." Luther's Works, Vol. 30, p. 12

"We should throw the Epistle of James out of this school (the University of Wittenberg--ED.) for it doesn't amount to much. It contains not a syllable about Christ. Not once does it mention Christ, except at the beginning. I maintain that some Jew wrote it who probably heard about Christian people but never encountered any. Since he heard that Christians place great weight on faith in Christ, he thought, 'wait a moment. I'll oppose them and urge works alone.' This he did.... Besides, there is no order or method in the epistle. Now he discusses clothing and then he writes about wrath and is constantly shifting from one to the other. He presents a comparison: 'As the body apart from the spirit is dead, so faith apart from works is dead.' O Mary, mother of God! What a terrible comparison that is! James compares faith with the body when he should rather have compared faith with the soul! The ancients recognized this, too, and therefore they didn't acknowledge the Book of James as one of the catholic epistles." "Table Talk" in Luther's Works, Vol. 54, p. 424-25

"...to be sure, we cannot put it (the Epistle of James--ED.) on the same level with the apostolic epistles." Luther's Works, Vol. 35, p. 395

"However, to state my own opinion about it (the Epistle of James--ED.), though without prejudice to anyone I do not regard it as the writing of an apostle, and my reasons follow. In the first place it is flatly against St. Paul and all the rest of Scripture in ascribing justification to works (2:24). It says that Abraham was justified by his works when he offered his son Isaac (2:21), though in Romans 4:2-22 Paul teaches to the contrary that Abraham was justified apart from works, by his faith alone, before he had offered his son....this epistle is not the work of any apostle. ...(the author of James--ED) throws things together so chaotically that it seems to me he must have been some good, pious man, who took a few sayings from the disciples of the apostles and thus tossed them off on paper." Luther's Works, Vol. 35, p. 396-97

"Therefore, St. James' epistle is really an epistle of straw, compared to these others, for it has nothing of the nature of the gospel about it." Luther's Works, Vol. 35, p. 362

"I almost feel like throwing Jimmy into the stove, as the priest in Kulenberg did." Luther's Works, Vol. 34, p. 317

JESUS--"I believe Christ was a man like ourselves; to look upon him as God would seem to me the greatest of sacrileges." Leo Tolstoy

"The careful reader of the NT will find three Christs described:--One who wished to preserve Judaism--one who wished to reform it, and one who built a system of his own." "What Must I Do To Be Saved," Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 1, p. 443

"There are some of his sayings which show him to have been a devout Jew, others that he wished to destroy Judaism, others showing that he held all people except the Jews in contempt and that the wished to save no others, others showing that he wished to convert the world, still others showing that he was forgiving, self-denying and loving, others that he was revengeful and malicious, others, that he was ascetic, holding all human ties in utter contempt." "The Foundations of Faith," in Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 4, p. 270

"The Son of God was crucified; I am not ashamed because men must needs be ashamed of it. And the Son of God died; it is by all means to be believed, because it is absurd. And He was buried, and rose again; the fact is certain, because it is impossible." Tertullian in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, by Roberts & Donaldson, Chapter 5, p. 525

JONAH--"It required effort once for the whale to swallow Jonah, and now it requires effort to swallow the story." Anonymous

"Jonah proved that you can't keep a good man down." Anonymous

JUDE--"...although I value the book, yet it is not essential to reckon it among the canonical books that lay the foundation of faith." Luther's Works, Vol. 35., p. 398

LIBRARIES--"Every library is an arsenal...." "The Ghosts," Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 1, p. 313

MESSIAH--"The central problem of Christianity is: if the Messiah has come, why is the world so evil? For Judaism, the problem is: if the world is so evil, why does the Messiah not come." Seymour Siegel

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #386 from Dan Barker of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, P.O. Box 750 Madison, Wisconsin 53701

Dear Dennis. I think your June B.E. is just wonderful, especially Imminence and Miracles. Regarding the so-called Exclusivism of salvation through Jesus, a theologically significant contradiction appears in Isaiah 43:11--"I, even I, am the Lord [Yahweh]; and beside me there is no savior." According to this, Jesus is superfluous.

I also agree with letter #368 from SHF of PA that B.E. does a fantastic job of getting the periodical out regularly and on time. However, SHF must not be a subscriber to Freethought Today when s/he says of every freethought publication {that s/he knows exists} that "All the others are late or published erratically." Freethought Today has never been published late. Since 1983 its 10 issues a year have been regularly published and mailed during or before the month of publication. Our aim is to have it mailed the week preceding the month of issue, but occasionally it is 1 - 3 weeks behind schedule, such as when editor Annie Laurie was hospitalized last September. Still, it has never been mailed after the month of issue. However, bulk mail can travel slowly. We sometimes hear from subscribers on the east and west coasts that it takes 2 - 3

weeks for delivery. B.E. probably hears the same thing. All this is to say that we appreciate the effort and dedication it takes for you to continue to publish an excellent and professional periodical. Please be encouraged.

Editor's Response to Letter #386

Dear Dan. We appreciate your kind words and hasten to add that your scholarship and professional demeanor on the media and in your writings show you are qualified to be the leading atheist spokesman in the Nation. As far as the Isa. 43:11 quote is concerned, apologists will probably pull out the Trinity and say Jesus is God, allegedly, so he is needed as much as God. That's why I have always referred to the Trinity as the Great Back-Door. When hopelessly mired in so many of the obvious contradictions in the Gospels, what else can they do but resort to a "mystery."

With respect to promptness of mailings, SHF might not be acquainted with your publication. Incidentally, we also have had mailings that didn't reach subscribers for 2 or 3 weeks. That can be quite aggravating, especially when subscribers call to register an understandable complaint about a problem over which we have no control.

Letter #387 from John Sikos, P.O. Box 4179, Romeo, Michigan 48015-4179

Hi Dennis. Regarding your July issue on the "SABBATH," is there any biblical way to deal with the argument, often made by Christians, that what we now think of as Sunday (the first day of the week) is actually what early Christians knew as Saturday, THE SABBATH, or seventh day of the week?

Editor's Response to Letter #387

Dear John. Yes there is. Jews have been honoring the sabbath far longer than Christians and are in an excellent position to know which day is the seventh. For them, the sabbath is from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday. In essence, for them our present Saturday is the 7th day, the Sabbath, and Sunday could not qualify.

Letter #388 from RN of Moscow, Idaho (Part a)

Dear Dennis. After I sent off my renewal the other day I remembered a couple of things I forgot to mention. One: on p. 4 of your latest BE (#91) in your response to Letter #373 you--absentmindedly?--used the term Hebrew words when you meant Greek words. I found 4 of them. Since you were talking about the Hebrew people, I can understand how your error occurred. I'm sure the fundies will jump on you, though.

Editor's Response to Letter #388 (Part a)

Dear RN. You are correct on both counts. I should have used the word "Greek" instead of "Hebrew" and the mistake was made because I was talking about the Hebrew people. You are quite observant and at this stage of the game I am finding I don't have very many subscribers who aren't. My originals have been corrected since your letter arrived.

Letter #388 Concludes (Part b)

Two: on p. 6 of #88, in a letter from CWT, he (?) refers to a bookmark that you issue which can be inserted in books in Xian bookstores for missionary purposes. If you can send me some, I will spread the Gospel, i.e., the Good News!

I...fight the good fight against the enemy, both local and students....

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #388

We don't distribute bookmarks, RN. I think CWT was referring to the 10 cent pamphlets we distribute that several people are inserting into Christian books.

Letter #389 from NS of Richmond, Indiana

Dear Dennis. Keep up the good work! Every issue is informative and enlightening and the last three have been especially enjoyable. It still escapes my reasonably intelligent and rational mind how a large part of the population can continue to believe in the myths, fairy tales and fables of the Bible. And what is even more amazing is how they can be shown the Bible is nothing more than this and still believe it is the truth. I guess you summed it up in your last issue by saying if you are fed these untruths from childhood on, you are hooked. Witness Hitler. Thank goodness I wasn't raised in a religious household and was able to make a choice.

There is a glimmer of hope (small though it may be) for while scanning television channels the other evening, I heard Pat Robertson bemoaning the fact that there are those out there who are putting down the Christian religion. He stated that people like this would be fought with every means for "they" were gaining a foothold. I hope it is more than a foothold....

Science is proving more and more every day that creationism just cannot possibly be true yet the argument goes on, ridiculous though it may be. It must be tough shedding beliefs you have had all your life, but to maintain a closed mind creates the vacuum you are fighting. To continue, the main reason I am writing is your mention of perhaps offering audio tapes for sale in the future. What a wonderful idea! I will be among the first to order if you decide to do so. Thanks for the great publication.

(From another letter--ED.) I am rather relieved that you made the comments at the end of your August issue concerning the lateness of mail delivery. In July I seriously considered calling to see if you were still among the living! In fact, my copies (and I'm sure everyone else's) have been arriving erratically for the past few months. The thought has occurred to me that perhaps it would be wise for you to leave all form of identification off the area you use for mailing! Or just use your name and leave off Biblical Errancy. I know the P.O. has no right to discriminate, but I would bet some of our Christian friends "accidentally" leave your mail (1) out of sight (2) on a back table with junk mail (3) or throw it in a corner somewhere with the "I'll do it later" things. In other words, I feel all this must be deliberate and I highly resent it. Which, I'm sure, is nothing compared to what it does for you.

In my work as a typesetter for a weekly newspaper, it galls and angers me to no end to have to set the church news with the ridiculous sermons, and whatever tripe they have to offer. But I would NEVER consider not doing it, even though it goes against all my beliefs. I put this in the same category as the mail service ignoring your publication! Incidentally, I DID receive your August issue on the 10th, which is somewhat of an improvement. No matter when it is received, it is always a welcome breeze amidst Christian chaos.

Editor's Response to Letter #389

Dear NS. Maybe it's a case of vacation subs. I'm not sure what's causing the problem but only hope it ends and our suspicions are unjustified. However, I do know from personal experience that we are up against an unscrupulous bunch who mouthe platitudes about ethics and morality but act as they please when they feel conditions warrant. Anybody who believes otherwise simply hasn't opposed them on any serious basis.

Letter #390 from FG of East Pittsburg, Pennsylvania

Dear Dennis. Great B.E! I would not be surprised if Christians in favor of a Saturday Sabbath use #92 to justify it....

There is a portion of Biblical Errancy #91 that I wish to comment on. The failure of Christ to return in His generation as promised is not the only Biblical prophecy missed.

Jeremiah 25:12, 51:26 and 51:63-64 pertain to the nonfuture of Babylon. Surprise! The Iraqi government has rebuilt Babylon as a tourist attraction. There is even a Babylon Hotel there and people are living there in Babylon full-time year-round, even as I pen this....

Letter #391 from TG of Arlington, Texas

Dear Mr. McKinsey. Letter #378 from JW of Alpha and Omega Ministries and your four-part response to it was an excellent, if an unequal exchange. Not that JW can't sling the rhetoric, but, as you pointed out to him, the facts are simply against the bibliolaters.

But I'm surprised you missed the most telling answer to the matter of Jesus' claim that no one has ever seen the Father, blatantly contradicted by accounts of such events in the OT, which JW then has to say are sightings of the Son. That is, in John 14:9 Jesus himself says, "...he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?" The contradiction is apparent and undeniable.

A little suggestion: could you make the left hand margins of BE wider to facilitate its being kept in a ring binder of some sort?

Editor's Response to Letter #391

Dear TG. Good point about Letter #378! It should have been mentioned. As far as widening the margin is concerned, I measured this before we began to use the computer several years ago and except for an occasional L or E being punched out, sheets fit in our three-ring binders quite well. Maybe you have different size binders.

EDITOR'S NOTE--I recently relistened to some of my audio tapes and came to the agonizing conclusion that I overdid the "Mr. Nice Guy" approach. Although my arguments were sound, I was so concerned with not alienating the host, the audience, the sponsors, and the station management that I occasionally came across as defensive, if not obsequious. I was so focused on receiving a return engagement that I overemphasized style, tact, and appearance at the expense of assertiveness and command. Consequently, I've decided to enroll in the Sam Donaldson/Mike Wallace school of charm and jettison any urge to win a popularity contest. Come what may, from now on I'm going to tell it like it is and employ a style which is more in keeping with my real inner urges. Comments are welcome!

Issue No. 96

Dec. 1990

COMMENTARY

This month's commentary will continue the alphabetical listing of notable quotes resumed last month and next month's commentary will return to the Bible per se.

QUOTATIONS

(PART 5)

MIRACLES--"An unseen event described by those to whom it was told by someone who did not see it." Anonymous

"All the biblical miracles will at last disappear with the progress of science." Matthew Arnold

"...all the tales of miracles, with which the Old and New Testament are filled, are fit only for impostors to preach and fools to believe." *The Life and Works of Thomas Paine*, Vol. 9, p. 81

"The happy do not believe in miracles." Goethe

"The Christian religion not only was at first attended with miracles, but even at this day cannot be believed by any reasonable person without one." David Hume

"Miracles happened every day. The supernatural was expected. Gods were continually interfering with the affairs of this world. Everything was told except the truth, everything believed except the facts." "Myth and Miracle," *Ingersoll's Works*, Vol. 2, p. 453

"Do away with the miracles, and the superhuman character of Christ is destroyed. He becomes what he really was--a man. Do away with wonders and the teachings of Christ cease to be authoritative." "Orthodoxy," *Ingersoll's Works*, Vol. 2, p. 399

"In those parts of the world where learning and science have prevailed, miracles have ceased; but in those parts of it as are barbarous and ignorant, miracles are still in vogue." Ethan Allen

"The credulity of the church is decreasing, and the most marvelous miracles are not either 'explained,' or allowed to take refuge behind the mistakes of the translators, or hide in the drapery of allegory." "Some Mistakes of Moses," *Ingersoll's Works*, Vol. 2, p. 146

"Again gentlemen (biblical apologists--ED.), let me warn you of the danger of trying to explain a miracle. Let it alone. Say that you do not understand it, and do not expect to until taught in the schools of the New Jerusalem. The more reasons you give, the more unreasonable the miracle will appear. Through what you say in defence, people are led to think, and as soon as they really think, the miracle is thrown away. Among the most ignorant nations you will find the most wonders, among the most enlightened, the least. It is with individuals, the same as with nations. Ignorance believes, intelligence examines and explains." *Ibid.* Vol. 2, p.

MORALITY--"...the Bible was written by barbarians in a barbarous, coarse and vulgar age." "Some Mistakes of Moses," *Ingersoll's Works*, Vol. 2, p. 179

"It has been contended for many years that the Ten Commandments are the foundation of all ideas of justice and law. Eminent jurists have bowed to popular prejudice, and deformed their

works by statements to the effect that the Mosaic laws are the fountains from which sprang all ideas of right and wrong. Nothing can be more stupidly false than such assertions. Thousands of years before Moses was born, the Egyptians had a code of laws.... The Egyptian code was far better than the Mosaic." "Some Mistakes of Moses," Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 2, p. 234

MYSTERIES--"When men, whether from policy or pious fraud, set up systems of religion incompatible with the word or works of God in the creation, and...repugnant to human comprehension, they were under the necessity of inventing or adopting a word that should serve as a bar to all questions, inquiries, and speculations. The word mystery answered this purpose...." The Age of Reason, Thomas Paine, p. 77

NEW TESTAMENT--"Now, Sir, it is impossible for serious men, to whom God has given the divine gift of reason, and who employs that reason to reverence and adore the God that gave it, it is I say, impossible for such a man to put confidence in a book that abounds with fable and falsehood as the New Testament does." The Life and Works of Thomas Paine, Vol. 9, p. 128

OLD TESTAMENT--"But the Old Testament, beside the numberless absurd and bagatelle stories it tells of God, represents Him as a God of deceit, a God not to be confided in.... This, so far from being the Word of God, is horrid blasphemy against him. ...put thy confidence in thy God, and put no trust in the Bible." The Life and Works of Thomas Paine, Vol. 9, p. 283-84

ORIGINAL SIN--"It is said that Adam ate of the forbidden fruit, commonly called an apple, and thereby subjected himself and all his posterity for ever to eternal damnation. This is worse than visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation." The Theological Works of Thomas Paine. 333

ORTHODOXY--"An ox wearing the popular religious yoke." Anonymous

PAINE, THOMAS--"Paine struck the first grand blow. The Age of Reason did more to undermine the power of the Protestant Church than all other books then known." Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 1, p. 152

"He saw oppression on every hand; injustice everywhere; hypocrisy at the altar; venality on the bench, tyranny on the throne; and with a splendid courage he espoused the cause of the weak against the strong...." Ibid. p. 122

PAUL--"The conversion of Paul was no conversion at all; it was Paul who converted the religion that has raised one man above sin and death...." George Bernard Shaw

"There is not one word of Pauline Christianity in the characteristic utterances of Jesus." Androcles and the Lion, George Bernard Shaw

"Of this band of dupes and impostors, Paul was the great Coryphaeus, and first corruptor of the doctrines of Jesus." Jefferson's Works, H.A. Washington, Vol. 7, p. 156

"Paul asserted that he was a law unto himself.... 'For if thy truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his Glory; why am I also judged a sinner' (Rom. 3:7). It would seem from this statement that, although he knew he was lying, Paul felt that the means justifies the ends; but it is not understood how truth would abound through a lie." Jesus, A Prophet of Islam, Muhammed Rahim, p. 71

"All this (Paul's writing--Ed.) is nothing better than the jargon of a conjurer who picks up phrases he does not understand to confound the credulous people who come to have their fortune told. Priests and conjurers are of the same trade." The Age of Reason, Paine, p. 180

"...but this grain does not, and shews Paul to have been what he says of others, a fool." Ibid.

PRAYER--"To ask that the laws of the universe be annulled in behalf of a single petitioner confessedly unworthy." Ambrose Bierce

"What men usually ask of God when they pray is that two and two do not make four."
Anonymous

"Common people do not pray, my lord: they only beg." George Bernard Shaw

"When the gods wish to punish us they answer our prayers." Oscar Wilde

"Most people don't pray when they are on their knees but when they are on their backs."
Anonymous

"A man does not serve God when he prays, for it is himself he is trying to serve...." The Age of Reason, T. Paine, p. 208

"He (mankind--Ed.) finds fault with everything. His selfishness is never satisfied; his ingratitude is never at an end. He takes on himself to direct the Almighty what to do, even in the government of the universe. He prays dictatorially. When it is sunshine, he prays for rain, and when it is rain, he prays for sunshine. He follows the same idea in everything that he prays for; for what is the amount of all his prayers, but an attempt to make the Almighty change his mind, and act otherwise than he does? It is as if he were to say--thou knowest not so well as I." The Age of Reason, T. Paine, p. 44

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #392 from Jeff Frankel of Decatur, Illinois

Hello Dennis. I recently read the September issue of B.E. and your exchange with James White of Alpha and Omega Ministries. I had my own dealings with White recently as a result of my recent article on the inerrancy doctrine in FRONTLINE. (A copy of my correspondence from White is enclosed along with a letter critical of White from the noted Bible scholar Howard Teeple.)

I find it a regrettable necessity that you had to devote 2/3's of an issue to dealing with White's rantings. It was a necessity because, as head of a well-funded ministry, White has significant influence and must be answered. It was regrettable because some readers may mistakenly see White's behavior as being representative of apologists or fundamentalist Christians in general.

In my experiences with fundamentalists I have never dealt with anyone as arrogant, unreasonable and mean-spirited as White. The only individual I've dealt with whose abrasiveness rivals White's is the infamous atheist Madalyn Murray O'Hair. It is important to make the distinction between a person using poor reasoning and an unreasonable person. Many atheists resent having O'Hair looked upon as representative of that position, and rightfully so. I hope in the spirit of fairness we can all avoid the temptation to view White and his ilk as representative of the fundamentalist Christian position. His arguments are representative, but he, personally, isn't.

You are to be commended for dealing with White's abrasive argumentation as reasonably as you did. That is hard to do when dealing with someone so unreasonable, and it appeared that you were pushed to your level of tolerance. Yet you did not sink to his level. You stayed cool and let the evidence speak instead of your feelings.

Editor's Response to Letter #392

Dear Jeff. I think White is representative of the fundamentalist position but less concerned with appearances than most apologists. If he wants to turn the biblical debate into a war, that is fine with me. Incidentally, you said you have never dealt with anyone as arrogant and mean-spirited as White. You might want to debate Dr. Robert Morey sometime. He never lets truth and accuracy supercede his efforts to project Christianity as something it isn't. If you have to pervert, slander, malign, misrepresent, and prevaricate to spread the Christian message; so be it. That's his stock and trade. His completely inaccurate radio comments to White about my analysis of his book are egregious examples of prevarication in action.

Letter #393 from John Sikos, P.O. Box 4179, Center Line, Michigan 48015-4179

Dear Dennis. BE arrived only today. As usual, I read it all immediately. Letter #378 from James White of Alpha and Omega Ministries was the most ridiculous bunch of drivel I've seen in a long time. My girlfriend, who is a social worker, says James should go for some therapy. He is obviously too closed-minded to look at his own arguments objectively. This was obvious from his self-defeating "booklet" entitled

"Letters From An Anti-Theist" in which he tries to argue against Biblical Errancy. In this little publication, he argues with something like one or two percent of BE's content, none of which he does convincingly, and pretends he has thereby defeated Dennis McKinsey. As far as I'm concerned, James White has admitted to BE being fully correct in 98 to 99% of its arguments!

I think you should start a new rule in BE. Do not print letters from anyone who does not agree to let the evidence lead him to the truth. Do not waste your time with closed-minded basket cases who are not man enough to admit defeat when defeat strikes them in the face. James W obviously has decided to rant and bitch till he drops, without regard to the scoreboard or the referee's clock. Your dialogue with James W is over. Dump him. Keep up the excellent work, Dennis.

Editor's Response to Letter #393

Dear John. Although your rule is worthy of consideration, I'm afraid that if it were adopted other letters would enter the circular file of outgoing mail. When it comes to addictions, and that's the essence of religion, White has no corner on the market. Did you ever try to reason with a drunk or someone on drugs. They will resort to any method available to maintain their habit and justify its presence. Religionists suffer from the same affliction. If they have to rationalize, distort, deceive, and lie to maintain their addiction, many will. It's a blanket that provides a feeling of security and woe be to anyone who tries to remove it. To get people off of drugs and into religion is to get them off one drug and onto another. Many aren't really that concerned about accuracy. Like drugs, it provides the desired emotional security and that's what really matters. Reality is quite secondary. It provides a much desired escape from everyday reality, a kind of pollyanna that keeps one going and uplifts the spirit in hopes for something better.

Letter #394 from DL of Ipswich, Massachusetts

Dear Dennis. I certainly enjoy listening to your audio tapes over and over again because they are so very interesting, educational, lively, and another way of delivering your vital message to the uninformed Christians.

Letter #395 from LR of Belmont, North Carolina

Dear Dennis. I thoroughly enjoyed your last two issues' devastating refutation of the Sunday sabbath. The total lack of any biblical foundation for a Sunday sabbath clearly demonstrates the degree of divergence between the early church and its Jewish origin. Apparently ecclesiastical priorities outweigh biblical injunction--so much for the Torah!

Letter #396 from RC of Placentia, California

Dennis. I really look forward to receiving your pamphlets. It's so refreshing to hear somebody who dares criticize the Bible and Jesus Christ--intelligently and rationally. I'm beginning to share BE with some Christian relatives and friends and it is disturbing them no end. But truth should disturb those who believe lies.

Letter #397 from MD of Sacramento, California

Dear Dennis. Biblical Errancy is a pleasure to read and is always welcome in my mailbox.

Letter #398 from RH of Hubbard, Ohio

Dear Mr. McKinsey. For many reasons I am still active in the Trumbull Baptist Association of the Ohio Baptist Convention and the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A. I have given up so many times, but have been drawn back into active service because of the cultural, social, and religious pressures. My name is anathema in many of our churches. For example, at a church in Ashtabula I was asked if I believed Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. I responded that I didn't know, but that I do believe there are certain laws of nature which are inexorable. Of course, the next question was do I believe in miracles. Again, breaking the laws of physics is catastrophe. But I am experiencing emotional and mental conflict. Yet, I believe I can do something to bring about sane thinking on Latin America, Prisons, Poor, Peace; so I continue for a spell at least to try to get our churches to strive for a better life for all people. However, I am in constant controversy with some of the ministers I have to work with....

Sometimes I don't think too much, but my actions do speak. I admire your ability to debate, to see through questions and to use reason. That is why I read your material. You are honest and very competent and, I might add, patient. I fly off the handle when someone is illogical and unreasonable and ignorant. So keep up the good work. I am going to send a brochure I received from the Layman's National Bible Association, Inc. One word came to my mind immediately after reading it: Power. I hope your little magazine BE continues to have influence, and that you keep healthy and happy in your pursuit of truth.

Letter #399 from RA of Boca Raton, Florida

(In the 2nd Issue of BE many years ago, we discussed the Resurrection at length. RA recently sent us the following encapsulated material from JEWS FOR JUDAISM which supports BE's position--ED.).

Since the claim of the resurrection is the foundation of the Christian faith, we should certainly examine the credibility of this story. What is the evidence for the belief that Jesus rose from the

grave? Aside from the accounts in the NT, there is no independent supportive documentation, nor is there any circumstantial evidence. The entire claim hangs exclusively on the NT texts. Is this testimony reliable? As a seeker of truth, you are the judge. Obviously, a judge must be impartial, and objectively weigh all of the relevant evidence. Realize this is not a routine case.... As a Jew examining the case for the resurrection, you should not be swayed by conjecture or hearsay, but demand clear proof. If you were the judge presiding over a murder case, you would want to be absolutely certain before convicting the defendant. If the prosecutor calls his key witnesses, but each tells a different story, his case would be shaky. The defense attorney will argue for the acquittal of his client by demonstrating the weakness of the prosecutor's case. He will impeach the state's witnesses by showing how their accounts are contradictory. The resurrection narratives in the Gospels may be convincing testimony for people who have not read them very carefully. As a responsible judge, though, you can't be satisfied with just a casual examination of the evidence. The stories told in the NT are so inconsistent, that the resurrection story collapses under careful scrutiny. The conflicting testimony of the evangelists is so unreliable, it would not stand up to critical cross-examination in any court of law. Yet, the entire Christian faith is based upon this story. The following study has been prepared to help you critically evaluate the case of the alleged resurrection of Jesus...examine the evidence--this is one of the most important decisions of your life.

QUESTIONS ABOUT THE RESURRECTION: (1) How is it possible to reconcile the conflicting accounts of the resurrection story found in the Gospels? Many Christian apologists have argued that it is similar to a traffic accident that is viewed by four different witnesses - each will see it from a different perspective. This might be a tenable idea if the evangelists were actually on the scene, and watched the story unfold as the women approached the tomb. Yet this was not the case. Not only were the Gospel writers not eyewitnesses, they didn't even write their accounts of the story until at least 40 years after it allegedly took place. Moreover, most of the inconsistencies in the resurrection narratives (i.e., date, time, place) can't be explained away as differences in perspective. There is, however, a more significant issue here: according to 2 Tim. 3:16, the Gospels are the revealed word of G-d, and not the product of human agents. G-d doesn't suffer from human fallibility and certainly wouldn't present such a garbled account of what Christians consider the most crucial event in world history. (2) Why would the compilers of the NT allow contradictory accounts to remain if they were responsible for the story? Could they have been so careless? Perhaps - it is certainly possible. We'd certainly be naive to accept testimony as reliable in spite of the fact that it is riddled with inconsistencies. (3) A solid case can only be built on the testimony of witnesses who provide very clear testimony. If they can with 100% certainty pick a suspect out of a lineup, their testimony inspires confidence. If they view the suspects and don't recognize any of them, and later change their minds, the defense counsel will certainly bring this up at the trial. One would think that the witnesses to history's greatest event would have no doubts about what they saw. However, in the Gospel accounts, the post-resurrection Jesus is not even recognized by his closest disciples (Luke 24:16, 37; John 20:14, 21:4). (4) If, as Paul claims, the resurrection of the Messiah is the most important concept in the Bible, isn't it strange that in the entire Tanach, there isn't one clear reference to it? An indication of this conspicuous absence is that none of Jesus' disciples were aware that he was supposed to be resurrected. Not only were they not expecting Jesus to be resurrected (Matt. 16:21-22, 17:23; Mark 8:31-32, 9:31-32, Luke 18:33-34), but when they find the empty tomb, they assume that someone moved the body (John 20:2). Subsequently, they refuse to believe early rumors about the resurrection (Mark 16:11-13, Matt. 28:17, Luke 24:11, and John 20:3, 13). Is it possible that the predictions of the crucifixion and resurrection were put into Jesus' mouth by the Gospel writers to give more credibility to their belief that he rose from the dead? (5) Matt. 27:52-53 claims that at the time of Jesus' passion, the graves in Jerusalem were opened and the bodies of many righteous Jews were resurrected, appearing to many people. If this actually happened, it would have been one of the greatest news stories of its day. If Matthew's

story took place as reported, it's strange that Josephus, who wrote a detailed history of that time, failed to mention it. Not only does it not appear in any contemporary Jewish sources, but this fantastic occurrence isn't mentioned by the other Gospels. Is it possible that Matthew fabricated the entire story? (6) In Matt. 12:38-40, the scribes and Pharisees are said to have asked Jesus for a sign. He said that the only sign they would receive would be the sign of Jonah: he would rise after being in the grave for three days. If the resurrection was supposed to be a sign for the Jewish religious leaders, why didn't Jesus appear to them? Isn't it convenient that he only appeared to people who were his followers. Joseph Smith also claimed that there were witnesses who saw the golden plates used to write the Book of Mormon. Of course his story would be more credible if he would have showed the plates to people other than his best friends. (7) What should our reaction be to the reports that Jesus appeared to 500 people after his resurrection? What is our reaction to the thousands of Catholics who yearly claim to see the Virgin Mary? People claim many things; that in itself doesn't mean it is true. (Just as importantly, 500 people never said they saw anything. Paul says 500 people so testified, the same Paul who admits in Rom. 3:7 that he lies for the glory of God--ED.). (8) Was Jesus resurrected in the flesh (John 20:17, 26-27; Luke 24:39-43; Acts 2:31, 13:35) or was only a spirit resurrected? (1 Cor. 15:44, 50; 1 Tim. 2:5, 1 Peter 3:8). One wonders why there is such a fundamental disagreement over such a critical element of the story. (9) If the guards weren't sent to the tomb until sometime on Saturday (Matt. 27:62-66), how do we know that the body wasn't removed on Friday night or early Saturday morning? (10) Shouldn't a red flag go up when we realize that the idea of a divine savior who suffers a brutal death and ascends to heaven was very common among Pagan and Gnostic religions at the time of Paul? (This was especially true for the regions around Tarsus, his hometown). Roman mythology had a widespread belief that notable mortals returned from the dead. See accounts of Romulus, Apollonius of Tyana, Drusilla, Claudius, Dionysus-Bacchus, Tammuz-Adonis, Mithra, Osiris, Krishna, and Buddha. (11) Why would the disciples willingly die for their belief in the resurrection if it weren't true? Every religion has martyrs who are killed for the beliefs they hold. Scores of Muslims enthusiastically blow themselves up each year in their hope to join their prophet Mohammed, who they believe ascended to heaven in the presence of many witnesses. Willingness to suffer doesn't substantiate a false belief.

COMMENTARY

ACCOMMODATIONS (Part 1)--One of the most egregious violations of intellectual integrity by the founders of Christianity is shown by their gross distortions of the OT for purposes of indoctrination. In their never-ending quest for religious legitimacy and status, they have not hesitated to twist, distort, pervert, and concoct OT verses as expediency dictated. Here, as much as anywhere else in the Bible, the true colors of the creators of Christianity come through in all their radiant splendor. Examples of their perfidious display of propagandistic propensities are abundantly evident to anyone with a reasonably critical eye. This month's commentary, as well as several to follow, will concentrate on the most prominent cases of biblical duplicity. Generally speaking, they fall into the three broad categories of misquotations, nonquotes, and misinterpretations. A misquotation is defined as deliberately misquoting an OT passage; a nonquote consists of quoting a non-existent OT passage, and a misinterpretation consists of correctly quoting an OT passage while distorting the meaning intended. We'll begin our discussion with an extensive exposure of the prime misquotations.

OT Misquotations -- (1) MATT. 3:3 ("For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias (Isaiah--Ed.), saying, 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight'") is an inaccurate translation of Isa. 40:3 RSV ("A voice cries: In the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God"). (a) Nothing is said in Isaiah about one crying in the wilderness. (b) The present tense verb "that crieth" shows that Isaiah is not making a prophecy but only speaking of a contemporary. (c) Matthew has "paths," (pl.) while Isaiah has "a highway." (2) MATT. 4:10 ("Then Jesus saith unto him, 'Get thee hence Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve'") is a major distortion of Deut. 6:13 ("Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name"). Nowhere does Deut. 6:13 say thou shalt serve God only. (3) MATT. 4:13-16 ("And leaving Nazareth, he (Jesus--Ed.) came and dwelt in Capernaum.... That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias the prophet saying, 'The land of Zabulon, and the land of Nephthalim, by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles; The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up'") is a misquotation of Isa. 9:1-2 ("Nevertheless the dimness shall not be such as was in her vexation, when at the first he lightly afflicted the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, and afterward did more grievously afflict her by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations. The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined"). (a) Matthew falsified the text. He began his quote where there is not even a comma and thereby cut off everything relating to the first affliction. He then left out all that related to the 2nd affliction. He left out everything making the verse intelligible. He extracted just what he wanted. Matthew left out those words that show Isaiah was speaking of some past events relating to afflictions already suffered. (b) The "great light" which the people saw was the joy they felt in having their burdens lifted and their oppressor broken; it was not Jesus. (c) Isaiah says the people that "walked" in darkness, not "sat" in darkness. (d) "Walked," "have seen," and "hath shined" show that the events have already occurred. Everything in Isaiah relates to two circumstances that had already occurred when Isaiah wrote. One refers to the lands of Zebulun and Naphtali being lightly afflicted. The other refers to the more grievous events that happened afterwards by way of the sea. (4) MATT. 11:10 ("For this is he, of whom it is written, 'Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee'") misquotes Mal. 3:1 ("Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me...."). (a) The OT

says "the way before me," not "thy way before thee." (b) Jesus created the phrase "before thy face" which does not exist in Malachi. (c) As is true in much of the Bible, it is unclear as to whom many of the pronouns refer. There is little reason to believe that Malachi is referring to John the Baptist or Jesus. (d) Mal. 3:1 says "will send" (future tense) rather than "send." (e) The coming of the Lord in Malachi 4:1 ("For Behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble....") and Mal. 4:5 ("Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes") are scenes of fear and terror like the day of judgment. Yet, the coming of Jesus was always spoken of as a time of joy and happiness. How, then, could the scene in Malachi be referring to the birth of Jesus as some allege? (5) The attempt by Matthew in MATT. 12:17-21 ("That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Esaias (Isaiah--Ed.) the prophet, saying, Behold my servant, whom I have chosen; my beloved, in whom my soul is well pleased: I will put my spirit upon him, and he shall shew judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not strive nor cry; neither shall any man hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed shall he not break, and smoking flax shall he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory. And in his name shall the Gentiles trust") to apply Isa. 42:1-4 ("Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law") to Jesus is a major distortion for many reasons. (a) Isaiah says "have put" (past tense) rather than "will put." (b) "Not strive" isn't in Isaiah. (c) "Nor lift up" is in Isaiah but not Matthew. (d) "Streets" in Matthew is "street" (singular) in Isaiah. (e) "Victory" in Matthew is "truth" in Isaiah. (f) There is no conditional "till" in Isaiah. (g) "in his name shall the Gentiles trust" is not in Isaiah. (h) And it appears Matthew omitted, "He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law" because reality set in. (6) MATT. 13:35 ("That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet saying, I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world") is an inaccurate portrayal of Psalm 78:2-3 ("I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old: Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us"). (a) Psalm 78 says nothing about "things which have been kept secret since the world began." It only says they were dark sayings of old. These sayings refer to old sayings, not things which have been kept secret. (b) "Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us" is the opposite of secret. (c) And Psalm 78 says "a parable," while Matthew says "parables." (7) MATT. 21:16 ("Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise") is not a reproduction of Psalm 8:2 ("Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies..."). What does "perfecting praise" have to do with "ordaining strength because of thine enemies"? (8) In LUKE 4:17-21 ("And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias (Isaiah-Ed.). And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written. 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised. To preach the acceptable year of the Lord; and he closed the book, and gave it again to the minister, and sat down.... And he began to say unto them, This day is the scripture fulfilled in your ears") Jesus misquoted Isaiah 61:1-2 ("The spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God to comfort all that mourn..."). (a) Isaiah says nothing about healing the blind. (b) Isaiah says "opening of the prison to them that are bound" not "to set at liberty them that are bruised." (c) Jesus left out proclaiming "the day of vengeance of our God" in Isaiah. (d) The statement in Isaiah was made by Isaiah concerning himself, long before Jesus was born. It can't be twisted into proving that Jesus was

anointed. (e) Actually, what Jesus is quoting is a statement by Isaiah that he (Isaiah--Ed.) has been appointed by God to tell the exiled, broken, downtrodden, afflicted, captive Jews that the day is coming when they shall be saved and eat the riches of the Gentiles and have eternal joy. (9) JOHN 19:37 ("And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced") is an incorrect representation of Zech. 12:10 ("...and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son...."). (a) The statement in Zechariah has nothing to do with Jesus. Zechariah is saying that God will make Judah and Jerusalem very powerful in the future, such that those nations who attack them will be destroyed. Then the people of Jerusalem will look with compassion and mourning on those they have pierced and killed. The interest in the life of one's fellow man will be deeply felt in the latter days. (b) Why say "as" when Jesus is a son of the house of David? It would make no sense to have the house of David responsible for Jesus' death when that is the house from which Jesus arose. Would his own house kill him? (c) Zech. 12:11 says, "In that day shall there be a great mourning in Jerusalem." Actually, there was very little mourning for Jesus on the day he died. (d) If correctly translated "pierced" should be "blasphemed." Both "blasphemed" and "pierced" come from the same Hebrew root. Note" Lev. 24:11. (e) And "Upon me whom they have pierced" is questionable. How could they pierce God (Jehovah) who is the speaker? (10) ACTS 1:20 ("For it is written in the Book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein....") is a distortion of Psalm 69:25 ("Let their habitation be desolate; and let none dwell in their tents"). (a) Psalm 69:25 says "their" habitation and "their" tents. At no time does it refer to one person or "his." (b) Psalm 69:25 is actually an appeal by David to God for aid in David's struggle with his enemies. (11) The last part of ACTS 1:20 ("For it is written in the Book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishopric let another take") is a distortion of Psalm 109:8 ("Let his days be few; and let another take his office"). (a) Psalm 109:8 says nothing about a bishopric. Office and bishopric are not identical. (b) The Psalmist is referring to his enemies, not Judas. David is saying he hopes his enemies are punished. The context of Psalm 109:8 shows it is not a prophecy of David about Judas. (12) ACTS 2:16-17 ("But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; and it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God....") is a perversion of Joel 2:28 ("And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour...."). Joel says nothing about "the last days." (13) And finally, ACTS 7:43 ("Yea, ye look up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made to worship them: and I will carry you away beyond Babylon") does not correctly reproduce Amos 5:26-27 ("But ye have borne the tabernacle of your Moloch and Chiun your images, the star of your god, which ye made to yourselves. Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus...."). (a) Amos says, "the tabernacle of your Moloch and Chiun your images" not "the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan." (b) Amos says, "which ye made to yourselves," not "which ye made to worship." (c) And Amos says, "I cause you to go into captivity beyond Damascus," not "I will carry you away beyond Babylon." (To Be Continued)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #400 from RC of Placentia, California

Dear Dennis. ...I really look forward to receiving BE each month, and I hope to hear you on more radio talk shows in Los Angeles. I'm grateful for your pioneering work in opening doors for what I hope will be more and more criticisms of the Bible and of the Naked Emperor, Jesus Christ, and his Motley Crew. I really believe that most of the world has been bedazzled and hypnotized to a false reverence of these mortal and very fallible gods....Thank you for your DARING. It takes guts to go against the GoSPELL.

Letter #401 from RM of Alberta, Canada

To Dennis McKinsey. Please send me information about biblical errors and contradictions. I live in central Alberta, a real "Bible Belt," and feel like I am besieged with every "Christian" kook and cult in the country who have all too many slick "apologists" ready to squish the minds of anyone who dares to doubt. I don't want to be rude to them and yet I am getting a bit tired of being accosted by them, not only on the streets but all over the college campus. If you have a listing or catalog of any other materials and books dealing in this area I would be very grateful.

Editor's Response to Letter #401

Dear RM. People claiming they live in the Bible Belt have sent me letters from virtually every area in North America. You certainly shouldn't feel alone in this regard. In fact, many claim they live on the buckle of the Bible Belt, which only highlights the importance of a publication such as BE. Don't run when they accost you; counterattack! Use the best of what you feel BE has to offer and show them the error of their ways.

Letter #402 from RN of Moscow, Idaho

Dear Dennis. Thanks for the last batch of back issues. They are all fascinating. And thanks, too, for the cassette. I was dismayed that Madalyn would not let you have a table at her convention....Since she publishes THE BIBLE HANDBOOK, I don't see why she shouldn't welcome you. Maybe she thinks you might cut into her sources of revenue.

I keep running into people here who tell me how much they enjoy my letters to the editor, which are usually contra fundies. When I recently pointed out that God had killed every single child and all pregnant mothers by drowning them, a fundie preacher wrote: "How strange to call God's calling a child to be with him in heaven 'murder'." Well, I turned right around and used this quote to ask why Xians should be opposed to abortion. Nobody has replied to that letter yet. Please send me issues 25 through 48.

Letter #403 from TF of Webster, Wisconsin

Dear Mr. McKinsey. I'm glad to see that you've made your tapes available. I'll be ordering them all one at a time.... I'm impressed that you've done so much debating with the Church of Christ. As you know, I'm an ex-Fundamentalist, but you probably didn't know that I used to be a member of the Church of Christ. I was attending one of their colleges with the intention of becoming a minister, when I studied my way out of Christianity. I had independently discovered numerous contradictions and errors in the Bible, which their professors, ministers, and scholars could not adequately explain. Privately, I've debated with clergy and laity from several different denominations, and I've never encountered any who were as well-versed in the Bible and prepared to debate as the Church of Christ is. If you can handle those people, you can handle anyone....

I really enjoy your periodical. It's unfortunate that more Fundamentalists don't write to challenge you. Perhaps you have scared them off?

Letter #404 from HA of Seattle, Washington

Good Person. In the years of my reader subscription to BE, no writer identifies himself/herself as CATHOLIC, LDS, MORMON, Et. al in the Letters to the Editor section. Question? Are the 'apologist' corresponders reluctant/embarrassed to state/admit personal affiliation or do they request 'GENERIC' status? Or do you minimize antagonisms by non-identifying? Frankly, we rarely know what denomination they represent.

Editor's Response to Letter #404

Dear HA. We have had some readers identify their denomination in the past but your assertion that that rarely occurs is correct. They rarely ask for their affiliation to be kept anonymous and we certainly don't seek to minimize conflict by non-identification. Actually, we rarely know what religious bent they represent.

Incidentally, someday we intend to have a commentary entitled CATHOLICISM VERSUS PROTESTANTISM. Because of its role in the history of Christianity, Catholicism merits a special critique.

Letter #405 from DM of Pasadena, California

Dear Dennis. Your reasons for sticking to the hard biblical contradictions are, I think, sound. They are the prime target. Yet, I can't help but feel that BIBLICAL ERRANCY could benefit from a column dealing with scientific and philosophical issues central to biblical errancy. Such a column might consist of an additional leaf (two pages) every other month, and it would add an additional element of interest to BE.

I am willing to donate the necessary labor to write such a column, either in the capacity of an occasional guest writer or as a full-time columnist. A degree in mathematics, a broad education in the sciences, written debates with biblicists, and a continuing interest in debunking biblical nonsense will insure an interesting and lively column. I also have access to a deskprinter which will produce xerox-ready copies.... Whether you add this proposed column or not, I'll continue to look forward to each issue of BE....

Editor's Response to Letter #405

Dear DM. I appreciate your suggestion but, in essence, you have asked for an extensive analysis of extrabiblical information and its relationship to the Bible. In prior issues we have noted the weaknesses associated with extrabiblical assaults on religion in general and the Bible in particular. What kind of scientific, historical, or philosophical data are you going to bring to a Book which millions believe is superior to any and every source. Do you intend to use "man-made" data to refute a Book "written by God"? Surely you realize that their answer is going to be: "I don't care what kind of data you have, if it says the Bible is wrong, then it's wrong and that's that." For millions of people the only weapon you can use against the Bible is the Bible. I don't have something outside the Bible telling me the Bible is false; I have the Bible telling me the Bible is false. And that's something that is far harder to evade or combat. The Bible is its own worse enemy. Secondly, an entire publication could be devoted to the kind of analysis you suggest and several already exist. I don't see what can be gained by duplicating the work of others? BE, on the other hand, is unique in its approach. But thanks for the suggestion.

Letter #406 from MO of Chicago, Illinois

Dear Dennis: Greetings. I am so pleased with your work. I really believe it is our moral obligation to confront the bibles' believers and every religion preaches HELL to our fellow man. This is exactly what I am doing at the University of Illinois at Chicago's campus. I am also engaged in deadly debates with the Moody Bible Institute's students. Be assured that they are always the losers....

Editor's Response to Letter #406

Dear MO. Keep up the good work. That's the kind of effort we need in abundance.

Letter #407 from NS of Richmond, Indiana

Dennis. After all these years of reading and enjoying your publication, I am more firmly convinced than ever that religion is a total waste of time. When I think of the energy people put into the reading of the bible, and many going so far as to base their whole life on it, it makes me rather sad that they cannot (or will not) use rationality and good common sense in place of reading myths, fairy tales, and fables. I have even given up getting angry about the religion that is shoved into our faces on TV and radio. One thing that I have always questioned tho, is if religion is all that great and is believed in by so many, why do they have to shout it at you 24 hours a day? Why can't it stand on its own??? It reminds me of the old phrase, "Methinks you do protest too much!"

Letter #408 from AH of Sonoma, California

Dear Dennis.... I have been following your instructions and confronting Christians with the errors contained in the Bible. When I find that an acquaintance is a Christian, I ask if they are an ordinary Christian or a Bible-believing one. Usually they are Bible-believing. My first question is always, what is the Bible's position on the consumption of alcohol? So far, no one has known the correct answer, that the Bible both promotes and condemns. Usually they suggest moderation. However, I am prepared with a little card with ten verses that absolutely forbid the consumption of alcohol, by anyone, at any time, for any reason, on one side, and on the other side, ten verses that promote wine and hard drink as a reward from God.

After being confronted with the actual verses from that book, and being able to verify for their very own selves the obvious fact that that book contains contradictions, amazing things happen. Immediately they want to know about me as a person, and what my motives are. I ignore this and return to the Bible (Wise move AH--ED.), but they will have no part of that. Something must be wrong with me, or I am unhappy, or I had a rotten childhood. They just cannot accept that some one might read the Bible to find out what it says. Their next ploy is to say, of course, you cannot understand the Bible; you must be saved to understand it. And on and on it goes. What I would like to do is chart out the responses of Christians to objective and impartial observations of the Bible. Then when confronting them with facts, it would be a simple matter to circle a 1 or a 2 or a 3 to record their response.

.....I have asked these Christians that since they are saved, and I am not, what does Ex. 33:20 mean to a saved person? They reply that no one can see God's face and live. But that is exactly what it means to me and I am not saved! Next, (of course) I direct them to Gen. 32:20 where they read that a man saw God's face and lived. Again, how does being saved reconcile this blatant contradiction. The most I usually can get is they repeat that you must be saved to understand, and they will explain no farther. Even though most of these Christians will not give up their comfortable superstitions and replace them with facts, it is still important to continue exposing the stupidities in the Bible, because it really does effect the believer, even if just a little.

Copies of Issue #91 (Sabbath Commentary) were well accepted by these Christians. Amazingly! But they still don't get it; they want me to read the Bible as the word of God, while they ignore the fourth commandment. If they refuse to obey the Bible, they have a lot of nerve asking someone else to accept it as the work of God. Thanks Dennis. You are doing a fabulous job. I just wish I could do more.

Editor's Response to Letter #408

Dear AH. You are doing a good job. Keep it up! The more you engage in this kind of activity, the better you will become. You are learning how to take it to the other side in their arena and that's the essence of the struggle. If only more people were following your example! As far as the defenses you have encountered are concerned, I've confronted the same tactics and have the same feeling.

Letter #409 from SMB of Santa Rosa, California

Dear Mr. McKinsey. I thought I had collected a lot of Biblical errors and contradictions. But after seeing your Sample Issue and list of back issues, I see that I have only begun. This is fantastic!

...I have compiled a pamphlet entitled "Bible Study Book" which incorporates the errors and inconsistencies that I have found. My plan is to market it in the classified ads of newspapers throughout the country, hoping many "believers" will take it up. Sort of getting even for several thousand years of religious intolerance (and persecution) of free thinkers....

Issue No. 98

Feb. 1991

COMMENTARY

This month's commentary will continue the listing of OT Misquotations begun in ACCOMMODATIONS (Part 1) last month.

ACCOMMODATIONS (Part 2)--(14) ACTS 15:17 ("...that the residue of men might seek after the Lord and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things") incorrectly reproduces Amos 9:12 ("...that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name, says the LORD who does this"). (a) Amos says nothing about men who "seek after the Lord." It speaks of the remnant of Edom. (b) Amos says nothing about Gentiles seeking after the Lord. It says all those nations who are called by God's name will be possessed by Israel. (15) ROM. 3:4 ("...as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged") perverts Psalm 51:4 ("...that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest"). Psalm 51:4 says "judgest", not "art judged." There is a big difference between judging and being judged. (16) ROM. 9:25-26 ("As he saith also in Osee (Hosea), I will call them my people, which were not my people; and her beloved, which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God") does not correctly represent Hosea 2:23 ("...and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God") and Hosea 1:10 ("...and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God"). (a) Hosea is speaking only of Jews as Hosea 1:11 ("Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel be gathered together....") shows. It is not referring to Gentiles and does not justify spreading the word to Gentiles. (b) "and her beloved, which was not beloved" is not in Hosea. Paul created these words. (c) Hosea 2:23 says, "and they shall say, Thou art my God." Paul conveniently left this out of his quote since millions of Gentiles have clearly not made such a statement. (17) ROM. 9:33 ("As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed") is a false reproduction of Isa. 28:16 ("Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste") and Isa. 8:14

("And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence to both the houses of Israel..."). (a) Isaiah says nothing about "on him" or being "ashamed." (b) Isaiah 8:14 speaks of a stumbling stone and a rock of offence, but it is speaking of God himself. (c) Isa. 28:16 says the stone God will lay is a precious corner stone, a sure foundation, not a stumblingstone or a rock of offence. So which is it? (d) Paul deceptively combined two unrelated verses and altered the text in the process. (18) In ROM. 10:6-8 ("But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, who shall ascend into heaven? [that is, to bring Christ down from above] or, who shall ascend into the deep? [that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.] But what saith it? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart; that is, the word of faith, which we preach;...") Paul mutilated Deut. 30:12-14 ("It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, And bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? Neither is it beyond the sea, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go over the sea for us, and bring it unto us, that we may hear it, and do it? But the word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it") for several reasons. (a) Deut. is only saying that his (Moses--ED.) commandments are easy to obtain. They are not far off but as close as one's heart or mouth. (b) Deut. says nothing about "faith." (c) Deut. does not even imply Jesus or Christ, let alone mention him. (d) Deut. refers to seeking "it" and doing "it," not seeking "him" or doing "him." (e) The verse in Deut. refers to Penitence. It has nothing to do with believing in or bringing down Jesus from heaven or up from the dead. (f) Deut. is saying that God wills us to repent of sin and that we may know when we have sinned. You have only to look at his law which is very close by. (19) In ROM. 11:9-10 ("Let their table be made a snare, and a trap and a stumblingblock, and a recompense unto them: let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back always") Paul misquoted Psalm 69:22-23 ("Let their table become a snare before them: and that which should have been for their welfare, let it become a trap. Let their eyes be darkened, that they see not; and make their loins continually to shake"). (a) The Psalm says nothing about a "stumblingblock" a "recompense" or "bowing down their back always." (20) Paul's comments in ROM. 11:26-27 ("And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Zion a Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob. For this is my covenant unto them when I shall take away their sins") are a distortion of Isa. 59:20-21 ("And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord. As for me, this is my covenant with them, saith the Lord..."). (a) Isa. 59:20 says "to Zion," not "out of" Zion. (b) Isaiah says the Redeemer shall come "unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob." It does not say the Deliverer "shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob." In other words, he will come to those who turned from transgression on their own volition. It does not say he will turn away ungodliness. (c) Moreover, "when I shall take away their sins" is not in Isaiah 59. Paul created it out of whole cloth. (d) Nowhere does Isaiah use the word "saved" or "salvation" as Paul uses it. Isaiah never used the word "saved." (21) ROM. 15:12 ("And again, Isaiah saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles; in him shall the Gentiles trust") does not accurately reproduce Isa. 11:10 ("And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek;..."). Isa. 11:10 does not state that he shall reign or rule over the Gentiles. It merely states that the root of Jesse will act as a standard or banner for the people. (22) ROM. 15:21 ("But as it is written, To whom he was not spoken of, they shall see: and they that have not heard shall understand") does not quote Isa. 52:15 ("...the Kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they consider") correctly. (a) Isa. 52:15 says nothing about "he was not spoken of"; it says "that which had not been told them." (b) "They that have not heard shall understand" is not the same as saying, "that which they had not heard shall they consider." Because something is considered does not mean it is understood. (23) And lastly, 1 COR. 2:9 ("But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him") misquotes Isa. 64:4 RSV ("From of old no one has heard or perceived by the ear, no eye has seen a God besides thee, who works for those who wait for

him"). (a) Nowhere in Isa. 64:4 does it say, "neither have entered into the heart of man." (b) Isa. 64:4 says, "no eye has seen a God besides thee," which Paul omitted entirely. (c) Paul said, "the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." Yet, Isa. 64:4 does not imply or state that there will be a future reward for those that love God. It merely states that God will work for those who wait for him.

Misquotes are Concluded Next Month

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #410 from JC of Citrus Heights, California

Dear Dennis. After examining your material I came to the conclusion (sic) that it is rhetoric. Let's get to the heart of the matter. The logical fallacy you commit is circular reasoning. Let me explain. You say:

A. There is no god.

B. There is no evidence of God's existence (sic) (i.e. Bible, Supernatural miracles, ect. {sic}).

C. All theistic evidence is false, and the Bible is a product of men.

D. Since the Bible claims to be from God it is false because there is no God. Therefore the Bible has errors.

You have just reasoned in a circle! Dennis, you have no evidence to say there is no God. Besides, being an atheist defies human reasoning! Have you searched every inch of the entire universe? Do you possess (sic) all knowledge? To say there is no god you must possess (sic) all of these qualities. I find your newsletter seriously lacking in scholarship and objectivity. Some of your difficulties are absurd, and it takes nothing but common sense to remove the difficulties (sic).

Editor's Response to Letter #410

Dear JC. First let me say that before you write someone a letter you should consult a dictionary as to the correct spelling of words. For such a short letter you certainly overshot your quota and no doubt this exposed your general comprehension of the topic. In any event, as far as your letter, itself, is concerned the problem lies not within my circular reasoning but within your failure to reason at all. Let me give you some words of wisdom. Before you set out to attack another's writings, read what they have written and committed themselves to. Clearly you have failed in that regard as far as BE is concerned. Your first premise was that I alleged there was no god. Out of nearly 95 issues of BE could you cite chapter and verse? If you had read what went before you would know that I have repeatedly said on numerous occasions that the burden of proof lies on he who alleges. That is axiomatic in all rational/scientific endeavors. I am under no obligation to prove a god does not exist; you are obligated to prove he does. After all, you are the one who is bringing up the idea. If someone tells me they are visited by angels, I am not required to prove it doesn't occur. They must prove it does. Otherwise, every crackpot theory imaginable is true until someone can prove it's false. How absurd! Prove I did not talk to the Devil this morning if I say I did. After all, you weren't there. If I say I am followed by a green man every day and you say that is ridiculous, under your twisted logic it's true unless you prove otherwise. Secondly, although I've never addressed the issue of miracles and the supernatural directly, can you provide me any tangible evidence to substantiate the existence of either? Can you show me

one event that does not have a natural or material cause? As with the efficacy of prayer, few subjects receive more attention with less corroboration than miracles and the supernatural. It is hard to believe so much gab is devoted to so little dab. Thirdly, I can't help but note that apologists who talk the most about logic and reason are often those who practice them the least. If there is any lack of scholarship and objectivity involved, JC, it lies in your inability to jettison your Christian upbringing and view your own inadequacies. You began with a premise which proved you had not read prior issues of BE and quickly followed this up with a weak attempt to shift the burden of proof. Later, you not only promoted the existence of miracles and the supernatural but claimed "being an atheist defies human reasoning" without providing any proof of either. Apparently we are to lend them credence simply because you say so. Don't let your initials get the better of you. You are no more qualified to pontificate than your idol. You ask if I have "searched every inch of the entire universe" and if I "possess all knowledge." A modicum of rationality would tell you that you are obligated to conduct such a search, not I, and come back with the appropriate evidence. You concluded your invective with comments to the effect that "some of your difficulties are absurd, and it takes nothing but common sense to remove the difficulties." To begin with I don't know what difficulties you are talking about. Could you dispense with glittering generalities and be specific. Like many apologists you dodge detail because of what it would entail. As I have told critics of BE in the past, please don't engage in broad generalizations. Relate chapter and verse. And finally, JC, I can think of few people less qualified to cite common sense as their mainstay than yourself. Judging from your letter, you believe in a god, miracles, the supernatural, the divine inspiration and inerrancy of the Bible, and your own objectivity without providing evidence of anything. Your letter was written from the heart, not the head, my friend.

Letter #411 from FA of Santa Rosa, California

Dear Dennis. In your response to letter #381 (Part a) in Issue #94, you wrote about the Ten Commandments. In comment #2 you said the 10 listed in Exodus 20 and Deut. 5 "are specifically labeled as such," that is, "The Ten Commandments." Actually, the only labels are chapter headings or section headings supplied by the translators and not part of the original. I want to point out something most people miss and I am afraid you also missed. The only list of 10 commandments in the Bible which is called "the ten commandments" is found in Exodus 34:10-28. Here is a list not familiar to many, but specifically called "the ten commandments." This is from the J source and dates from 950-850 B.C. The Deut. 5 list with the Sabbath command referring to the Exodus from Egypt is from the D or Deuteronomist of about 620 BC. The list in Exodus 20 with the Sabbath command referring to the six day creation is from P or the Priestly version from about 500 BC.

This may be only a technicality but it does show that the Exodus 34 list could fit into the time of 1200-1400 BC. The later versions had #2 - Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image. Moses had 2 golden cherubs made for the Ark of the Covenant and even made a brazen serpent himself. It would be out of the question for Moses to have known of such a commandment and still make cherubs and the serpent. #10 deals with coveting houses and lands but for a nomadic people who didn't have houses or lands, this would make no sense.

What happened was the Priests wanted to give authority to their ideas of 500 BC so through the device called a "legal fiction," they wrote their laws into an older setting and had Moses receive them from God. I hope I have made it clear enough for you to understand. I have done a great deal of research on the Bible in preparation for a book I have just completed. My book will be published in January 1991. It should be of interest to you and also JB, the writer of letter #383. The title is "Miracles that Never Were." I have explained the 200 Bible miracle stories in natural terms instead of supernatural terms. I will send you a copy as soon as I get them from the printer.

I have been a subscriber from the very first issue and I have only praise for you and your work. If I can be of help in answering any question about miracles, please let me know.

Editor's Response to Letter #411

Dear FA. I appreciate your addendum to our response to Letter #381 (Part a) but have a problem with your interpretation of Ex. 34:10-28. As I understand your position you are alleging that the directions laid down therein by God are the only laws in the Bible that are called the ten commandments. If that is a correct statement of your analysis, then we diverge at verses 27 and 28. If you will notice, rules are laid down in verses 10 through 26. Beginning at verse 27 God says, "Write thou these words for after the tenor of these words I have made a covenant with thee and with Israel." In other words, after listing in verses 10 through 26 all of the rules to be followed, God told Moses to write them down. Then, in verse 34:28 the subject shifts and the text says, "And Moses was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he did neither eat bread, nor drink water. And he wrote upon the tables the words of the covenant, the ten commandments." In other words, Moses wrote the rules listed in verses 10 through 26 and in the following 40 days he wrote an additional set of laws entitled the Ten Commandments. That is how I interpret the text. If what you say is true, then there should only be 10 laws or commandments listed in Ex. 34:10-26; yet, the text clearly shows there are more than 10. Depending on where you make your divisions, I counted 17. Moreover, the rules in Ex. 34:10-26 just don't have the caliber, potency, and substance that would be attributed to TEN COMMANDMENTS. They are the kind of legalisms with which the Bible is replete--ritualistic matters of a secondary or tertiary nature. Indeed, the Book of Leviticus is a veritable miasma of ritualistic mumbo-jumbo. In addition, I don't think cherubs could be classified as graven images and I have no doubt nomads had houses, even though they might be of a temporary variety. I can understand the point you are trying to make, but I don't think the text will bear you out. You might want to bounce it off some notable apologists and note the kind of response that is engendered before placing it in your book.

Your offer to send me a copy of your book is only too kind. I just hope I can get through the stack of literature I have received from other supporters before yours arrives.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #412 from Dan Barker of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, P.O. Box 750, Madison, Wisconsin 53701

Dear Dennis. It was nice to hear your voice again. I am glad to know all is okay with you.... Even though I agree with you that the most effective strategy is to attack the source (scripture), we have a lot of members who are completely uninterested in biblical criticism. They don't want to change any minds; they just want to ensure that we are all free in this country to believe or disbelieve as we please. FFRF has a pretty broad agenda--I am glad B.E. exists to focus on the crucial specifics of errancy.

Did you receive the copies of contradiction books I mailed you? That was a couple of months ago. If not, I have one extra copy.

Editor's Response to Letter #412

Dear Dan. It was nice to hear from you again on the phone but I'm sorry to say that if what you say is true then FFRF has a lot of naive people living in a world of hopes and dreams. You win by focusing on the changing of minds, not by focusing on the changing, buttressing, or fortifying

of laws, regulations or social customs. People run the show; laws don't. Let me repeat: People run the show, laws don't. Laws, and especially the Constitution, say whatever people say they say. Contrary to popular misconception, every government is a government of men not laws. Laws are merely a reflection of which group has the greatest resources, especially numbers and wealth. Justice is quite secondary. In fact, it often has very little to do with what occurs. Judges and legislators are merely a reflection of group strengths. Consequently, the will of the group with the greatest strength is going to prevail, regardless of what the Bill of Rights or any other legal documents say. Nowhere is this more evident than in having "under God" in the pledge of allegiance, "In God We Trust" on the currency, and government-financed chaplains in Congress and the military. If these aren't violations of the First Amendment, there is no such animal. Government support of religion is clear and blatant in every instance and not really subject to rational dispute. Yet, it exists, nevertheless. Why? Mainly because freethought advocates, such as those you mentioned, have focused on law enforcement rather than converting millions of opponents to their point of view. Once we have the numbers and resources the law will be reinterpreted accordingly. But as long as we are terribly outnumbered, we aren't going to prevail regardless of what the law says. In other words, convince people to join your side and the laws will be rewritten and reinterpreted in compliance. As matters now stand, many of your members are engaged in a hopeless, never-ending bucketbrigade of running from one fire to another. While they are abolishing one creche on one court house lawn, or one prayer at a sports event, or one Bible distribution in one school or hotel, or one cross on public property, and so on ad infinitum, others will be emerging in ever greater numbers, if not more rapidly. If that isn't a hopeless quest, I don't know what is. They will not only be engaged in expending resources in futile endeavors but indirectly allowing the religious crowd to maintain their stranglehold indefinitely. A lot of people are going to be consumed, indeed wasted, in an enervating escapade of moving from court case to court case. They will never be able to put out the fires as fast as they arise, not without a substantial change in numbers. First you must show people the errors of their ways by debunking their fundamental beliefs and then demonstrate the correctness of yours before real progress is possible. Changing minds, deprogramming, restructuring what people learned in Sunday School as children is basic, if not axiomatic. As of now we are greatly outnumbered and any substantial movement in our direction can be blocked. Witness current trends in the Supreme Court of the United States. The "live and let live" philosophy is a pipe dream. They aren't going to leave us alone, regardless of what FFRF members do or think. Fortunately, I know from personal experience and our prior discussions on strategy that you are more realistic than some of your membership.

I did receive the books which you were so gracious to send. Thanks ever so much. You are a gentleman and a scholar as usual.

Letter #413 from JP of Hemet, California

Dear Dennis. Thanks for your work. It's great to see in print some of the things I've wondered about over the years.

EDITOR'S NOTE: How would you like to earn \$10,000. A Jewish organization in Israel with a philosophy somewhat similar to BE's has offered \$1,000 to any Christian for each of the following 10 challenges he/she can surmount. I would think every biblicist, every fundamentalist, every evangelical, indeed, most apologists for Christianity would look upon this as an easy opportunity to get some quick cash. To them I would say: If the book holds together as well as you claim, what are you waiting for. \$1,000 will be given to any believer:

(1) who can find in the OT any verse that says Abraham bought a sepulchre for a sum of money from the sons of Emmor as is recorded in Acts 7:16 of the NT.

- (2) who can find in the OT any verse that says Jacob was buried in Shechem as is recorded in Acts 7:15-16 of the NT.
- (3) who can find in the OT any verse that says 75 souls went down with Jacob into Egypt as is recorded in Acts 7:14 of the NT.
- (4) who can find any verse in the OT that says, "a virgin", shall bear a child, as is recorded in Matt. 1:23 of the NT.
- (5) who can find in the OT any prophet who said, "He shall be called a Nazarene" as is recorded in Matt. 2:23 of the NT.
- (6) who can find in the book of the prophet Jeremiah any passage that speaks of a potter's field and 30 pieces of silver as is recorded in Matt. 27:9-10 of the NT.
- (7) who can find in the OT any mention of a "son of perdition" as is recorded in John 17:12 of the NT.
- (8) who can find in the OT any verse that says the Torah (the first 5 books in the Bible-ED.) was given by angels as is recorded in Acts 7:53 and Gal. 3:19 of the NT.
- (9) who can find in the OT any place where it says that when Elijah returns he will have his head chopped off, as is recorded in Mark 6:16 and 9:11-13 of the NT.
- (10) who can find in the OT any place where it says the Jews killed Zacharias, son of Barachias, as is recorded in Matt. 23:35 of the NT.

So there you have it! \$10,000 easy dollars, just for the asking! \$1,000 for each problem answered! To the Christians I say, "Hurry, don't delay or the money might vanish." Oh, I almost forgot! The organization has a periodical entitled Biblical Polemics and can be reached at P.O. Box 13099, Jerusalem, Israel.

Audio Tape #30 is now available. During an atheist luncheon on January 19, 1991 in Columbus, Ohio the editor of BE employed considerable vitality to focus on strategy and philosophy rather than the Bible's contents. 57 Minutes plus 19 Min. Q & A Session.

Issue No. 99

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COMMENTARY

This month's commentary will conclude the listing of Misquotations that was discussed in the prior two issues. At some time in the future we will address the second category of ACCOMMODATIONS -- Nonquotes.

ACCOMMODATIONS (Part 3)--(24) In 1 COR. 3:20 ("The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain") Paul misquoted Psalm 94:11 ("The Lord knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity"). Psalm 94 says "man" not the "wise." Most assuredly, all men are not wise. Wisdom and men are by no means identical. (25) FIRST COR. 15:54-55 ("...then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?") is a perversion of both Isa. 25:8 RSV ("He will swallow

up death for ever") and Hosea 13:14 ("...O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction"). (a) Isaiah says death will be swallowed up "for ever" not "in victory." (b) Hosea says "thy plagues" not "thy sting." (c) Hosea says "thy destruction" not "thy victory." (d) And Hosea was not written in interrogatory form. It is difficult to see how the words of 1 Cor. 15 could be accurately derived from Isaiah and Hosea. (26) EPH. 4:8 ("Wherefore he saith, 'When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men'") does not correctly reproduce Psalm 68:18 ("Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men...."). (a) Psalm 68:18 says "received gifts" not "gave gifts." (b) Psalm 68:18 also says "thou" not "he." (c) Jesus never led captivity captive or led others to a high mount. (d) What gifts did Jesus give unto men? (e) And lastly, there is a tremendous difference between "giving gifts to men" and "receiving gifts for men." (27) HEB. 4:3 ("For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest....") could not have come from Psalm 95:11 ("...unto whom I swear in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest"). The "not" in Psalm 95:11 makes them inconsistent if not contradictory. (28) In HEB. 10:7 ("Then said I, Lo, I come [in the volume of the book it is written of me] to do thy will, O God") Paul apparently quoted Psalm 40:7-8 ("Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me. I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart"). Yet, he left out the last phrase which says, "thy law is within my heart." In other words, God's will is the law. If Paul had quoted Psalms correctly he would have been stressing the importance of upholding the old law. Doing God's will, according to Psalms, means upholding the old law. Since Paul never stressed the old law, he understandably left out the last verse. Moreover, the Psalmist said, "my God," which Jesus would not have said to his co-equal, if, in fact, they are co-equal. (29) HEB. 10:16-17 ("This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more") is a distortion of Jer. 31:33-34 ("...but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts;...for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more"). (a) The New Covenant referred to in Jer. 31:31 is not that of Jesus' New Testament but a reaffirmation with Israel of the importance of following the Old Law. Jer. 31:33 clearly states that God's law (my law) will be put in them. (b) "and in their minds will I write them" does not appear in Jer. 31:33-34. (c) Jer. 31:33-34 speaks of the Old Law and the importance of following same. Nowhere is Jesus, the man, even implied. (30) HEB. 10:36-37 ("...ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry") is a misquotation of Hab. 2:3 ("For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry"). (a) Habakkuk says nothing about "he." The "it" in the verse is a vision, not Jesus. Habakkuk is referring to the maturation of a vision he has. The "it" referred to has nothing to do with the arrival of any individual. (b) Where in the OT, especially Habakkuk, did God promise "he will come and not tarry?" (31) 1 PETER 2:6 ("Wherefore also it is contained in the Scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded") distorts Isa. 28:16 ("...therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste"). (a) Isaiah says, "he that believeth shall not make haste." It never uses the phrase "he that believeth on him." (b) Isaiah also says "make haste" not "be confounded." (c) Isaiah never implies the stone is "elect" or "chief" among many. (32) 1 PETER 2:22 ("Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth") misquoted Isa. 53:9 ("...because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth"). (a) Isaiah says "no violence" not "no sin." Sin and violence are not identical. Apparently Peter realized "he hath done no violence" could not be applied to Jesus as the moneychangers discovered. (33) And finally, HEB. 12:20 is a misquotation of Ex. 19:12-13 just as 2 PETER 2:15 does not accurately reproduce Num. 22:5.

That concludes our presentation of major misquotations of the OT by the NT. In later commentaries we will address the 2nd and 3rd parts of ACCOMMODATIONS, namely, Nonquotes and Misinterpretations.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #414 from RS of Oak Lawn, Illinois

Dear Mr. McKinsey. I would like to know who you are and what degrees you possess. I would like to know also how long you have been doing what you are doing.... P.S. I have enclosed \$9 for a 1st year subscription, and do you repeat the same materials in your issues after you have once degraded the Bible? Is there a limit?

Editor's Response to Letter #414

Dear RS. I included your letter in the D & D section because of your use of the word "degraded." We have spent over 12 years exposing the incredible number of problems associated with the Bible and have created what is probably the most comprehensive refutation of the Bible available in the English-speaking world, if not the entire world. I take exception to the implication that the Bible is worthy of respect and our endeavors are less than honorable. We provide facts, thousands of facts, not degradation. If people conclude from our mountain of data that the Bible has been degraded, that is their own conclusion based upon their evaluation of the evidence. Please don't impugn our motives because of what the evidence leads you to surmise. If any degradation is in evidence, it arises from facts, evidence, proof, and logic, not our predispositions. Then, again, perhaps you just chose a word carrying unintended baggage; in that case just ignore my catcall.

As far as your questions are concerned, I have a bachelor's degree in philosophy and a master's degree in the social sciences. We have been publishing BE for 8 years and try to have as little repetition of material as is possible.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #415 from RC of Placentia, California

Dear Mr. McKinsey. This morning I was reading "Jesus The Magician" by Morton Smith, wherein it says that the gospels were written around 70 to 100 A.D. A question came to my mind which I wonder if you've covered? If the gospels were written by the actual Matthew, Mark, Luke and John who were Jesus' disciples (and there are many questions about that) and if the disciples were around Jesus' age, wouldn't that make them centurians at the time they wrote their gospels?

I've told my Fundamentalist sisters who push the gospel on me that the Book of Revelation is so fantastic and ridiculous that John had to be drunk, senile or out of his head when he wrote it. (They have no answer). If you have any comments or answers on that subject, I shall look for them in B.E.

Editor's Response to Letter #415

Dear RC. The problem with historical critiques of the Bible is that no matter what you say apologists can pull out historians who say the opposite. None of us were there so it mainly becomes a matter of whom you want to believe. They also lack emotional commitment from

present-day believers. With respect to your specific question, biblicists will contend that the gospels are entitled "The Gospel According to --?--". It doesn't say they were written by. Or they will say that if Methusaleh can live to be 969 why couldn't they live to be 100. Or they will concoct some other historical legerdemain. That's their standard approach to historical difficulties and that's why BE does not address questions of this nature to any significant degree, although you have posed a logically valid problem.

The Jewish apologist, Gerald Sigal, expressed an attitude in this regard that is almost identical to that of BE. He said, "I do not utilize the works of those Christian scholars (the Higher Critics) who, using the scientific approach to the NT, have, for more than a century, dismissed as unhistorical many of the traditional episodes in Jesus' life. The reasoning behind this approach is that Christian missionaries accept these traditions as literally factual. As a result, it is extremely important that one who wishes to challenge missionary claims be able to effectively counter their arguments through means other than the scientific. Perhaps of even greater value than the scientific approach is the effective use of the very sources considered valid by the missionaries themselves. Therefore, it is not unfamiliarity with modern NT study, but the conscious recognition that the problems engendered by the missionaries must be approached squarely through the very works the movement accepts as authoritative, that makes it necessary to investigate their assertions through these sources. Hence, we will examine the missionary claims on the basis of the Hebrew Scriptures (the OT) and the NT, and these works alone. It would make little sense to approach the problem through the use of what is termed the scientific study of the NT when such scholarship would be simply dismissed as invalid by Christian missionaries and Christian converts...."

While occasional reference has been made to nonbiblical works, the use of the OT and the NT has been overwhelmingly emphasized. These are the fundamental texts upon which all missionary arguments are based.... Refutations of the claims of the missionaries are taken from the very books in which they profess to believe: the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures, often termed the Holy Bible." (The Jew and the Christian Missionary, Page XVIII).

As far as the Book of Revelation is concerned, you might note that your sentiments echo those of Ingersoll, Paine, Martin Luther and others.

Letter #416 from Dan Barker of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, P. O. Box 750, Madison, Wisconsin 53701

Dear Dennis. I'm sorry you were not able to make it to the Ann Arbor convention in October. It would have been great to see you again.... I agree with you and RA that bible criticism is the crux of freethought in America. We should hit them where it counts. Freethought Today is dedicated to a healthy dose of biblical criticism even though we have members who disagree with us. There are some atheists and agnostics...who feel it is a waste of time (or not worth not much time) to dig into the biblical text. The bible, to them, is like the Koran to us. "Who cares?" they say. But I care. Truth is truth. The world should not be allowed to pass a bunch of lies as a "Good Book." Anyway, as an organization that is dedicated primarily to the separation of church and state (which is the main reason we are growing so well), we have to balance biblical criticism with philosophy, state/church, legal, church crimes, etc....

Editor's Response to Letter #416

Dear Dan. It is a pleasure to hear from you again. As far as your comments on biblical criticism are concerned I have experienced the same opinions. Unfortunately, many of those in the freethought persuasion, especially atheists, are engaged in a sizable number of tactical and

strategic mistakes which warrant an enumeration. First, religious people, especially Christians, cover a wide spectrum of opinion. If you are going to oppose an extremely numerous opponent, one must focus primarily on those elements representing the greatest threat. Conservative, fundamentalist, evangelical Christians are the most vocal, the most determined, and among the most numerous and richest rivals we have. Naturally, I'm going to assail those most directly opposed to my philosophy. And what better way to attack them than by exposing the absurdity of their most prized possession, the Bible. Second, to attack God or a God's existence is to focus on one issue while minimizing the role of all others; in effect, they are doing precisely what some attribute to BE. BE is occasionally accused of having a very narrow focus by dwelling only on the Bible, while in reality it addresses a wide variety of topics from a biblical/anti-biblical perspective. The Bible is merely the platform from which many topics are observed. Salvation, government, morality, sexism, racism, homosexuality, original sin, abortion, heaven, hell, saviors, Jesus, the Ten Commandments, faith, works, God, and slavery are only a few of the myriad of topics that have been covered in BE. On the other hand, the narrow focus on God's existence, that is so prominent in several atheist publications, relies almost entirely upon one issue to sway people's opinions on hundreds of topics. Third, our supporters need only observe media conflicts in which atheists, agnostics and/or humanists are pitted against religionists to note the number of times the latter resort to the Bible as their ultimate weapon in any serious encounter. Even more importantly, they need to note the number of times the spokespersons for rationality are unable to respond effectively, because of a noticeable absence of biblical knowledge, in order to realize why we should be aware of the Bible's shortcomings. If "God's Word" is going to be constantly relied upon by the religionists as their ace in the hole, then we need to put a hole through the ace. Fourth, proving or disproving the existence of some sort of supreme being is far more nebulous and imprecise than focusing on biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies. The former is just too hard to pin down with any degree of precision and finality. It's too hard to get your opponent to say "Uncle." There are too many loop-holes and vagaries through which religionists can escape. The Bible, on the other hand, has many direct, obvious, and blatant contradictions that even the least intelligent can understand and relate to. Fifth, about the only belief which all religionists hold in common is belief in a god. Consequently, any assault upon such a concept will be opposed by the largest number of religionists possible. Unfortunately, this will include millions of people who not only agree with your assessment of fundamentalism in general and the basic book of Christianity in particular but also would be willing to join us in our opposition to the most determined elements of the religious crowd. In effect, atheist organizations are spreading themselves so thin that they are all but innocuous. And they are simultaneously alienating those elements that can be of some assistance in our ongoing struggle with the most determined opponents we have. Sixth, fundamentalists and other biblicists are the ones who promote church/state violations the most vociferously and effectively; whereas, Christians of a liberal persuasion are much more prone to support church/state separation, abortion rights, the peace movement, an active social agenda, etc. Seventh, since the fundamentalist/evangelical wing of Christianity is composed of those most inclined to proselytization, evangelization and indoctrination, the more one can reduce their numbers the better. They are: the ones who show up at your door or accost you on a college campus; the ones who recruit with the greatest enthusiasm; the ones most likely to produce fanatics; the ones most likely to destroy your organization and beliefs; and the ones whose numbers are growing the most rapidly. Eighth, those who most strongly believe in the Bible, not those who believe in a God, are those most opposed to equality of rights, least focused on the improvement of the world's conditions, least opposed to war, and most supportive of prayer and other debilitating activities. Virtually their entire spectrum of beliefs are reactionary and inimical to the improvement of man's condition. Ninth, like anyone believing they are following that which is inerrant and infallible, they will not be open to discussion, compromise, or opposing data. They will be most inclined to censor our appearances, our access to the media, our educational endeavors, and our efforts to hinder or prevent religious encroachment in our community and

schools. Tenth, the fundamentalist/evangelical approach to life in general and the Bible in particular has a relatively coherent and consistent body of theology. Stated bluntly, it is much easier to pin down. It is far easier to cope with someone who considers the Bible to be infallible and inerrant than someone who says, for instance, that crucial biblical concepts such as Adam and Eve, miracles, the Flood, and the Resurrection are mythological. Those who have left the inerrant/infallible biblical position have gone in all directions and for us to try to chase down every one of them and highlight the error of their ways would require hundreds of BE's. Like branches of a trellis, the scores of biblical/theological positions that have emerged from the fundamentalist/evangelical perspective are quite numerous and not one represents a sufficient number of people to supercede the Bible-above-all-else position. By critiquing the Bible we are not only opposing the entire basis of Christianity and influencing everyone afflicted with a religious perspective, because they all rely on the Bible in varying degrees, but shifting everyone toward a more rational approach to life. If, on the other hand, we concentrated on the innumerable liberal positions that are available, we'd be chasing hundreds of positions, each of which represents a far smaller number of adherents, and leaving untouched millions of died-in-the-wool biblicists. Eleventh, jettisoning a belief in god is the last and most difficult step for most people. Initially, it is far easier to shake their faith in the Bible in general and Jesus in particular than it is to create an army of atheists. Most people have to crawl before they can walk and weakening attitudes in their strongest order of adherence is important. People are more inclined to jettison belief in a book or even a god/man than in some kind of supreme being concerned with their welfare. As a practical matter, you are going to have more success initially in convincing people that the Bible, Jesus, Paul and Moses are not to be trusted than a god doesn't exist. Above all else people are insecure and want to believe that somehow the elements have a heart. Twelfth, with a reasonable degree of biblical knowledge and a repertoire of poignant questions, a freethinker can shake the beliefs of most biblicists, since most expounders of the Bible don't know the Book very well and an even smaller number are aware of its shortcomings. Thirteenth, many atheists erroneously believe that if they destroy people's belief in a god they will simultaneously eradicate their adherence to the Bible. They fail to realize that for many people belief in a god is based upon biblical teachings, not vice versa. As far as millions of people are concerned, God must exist because the Bible says He does. The favorite Christian refrain--How do I know; because the Bible tells me so and The Bible said it; I believe it, and that settles it--come readily to mind. And how do we know the Bible is telling the truth? Because only a divinely inspired book could have so many accurate prophecies, especially those pertaining to Jesus. What other book has such an incredible batting average. What other book is so internally consistent and flawless. In what other book does a savior die for mankind and rise from the dead to prove his credibility, etc. It must be the product of a perfect being, at least that is how the "reasoning" goes. Many people use the Bible to prove God exists, not vice versa. They don't use God's existence to prove the Bible is true; they use the Bible's "truth" to prove God is real. Consequently, disproving the Bible must be of primary concern for atheists and other freethought advocates. If many atheists read Christian apologetic literature more, they would see how the Bible is used to prove God's existence. Focusing on teleological, cosmological, ontological and other kinds of arguments, ignores or minimizes the biblical proof for the existence of God and Jesus's divinity. Once one accepts the Bible as inerrant, then everything it says is true. Among other things, the Bible says there is a God, Jesus rose from the dead, and Jesus is God. Apologist Geisler summarized the situation rather well when he said, "The Bible is the fundamental from which the other fundamentals come. And if the fundamental of the fundamentals is not fundamental, then what is? Fundamentally nothing!" (The Battle for the Resurrection, p. 161). Much more could be said in this regard but the point has been made. Fourteenth, Christian belief in the innate depravity of man, the importance of faith over works, the efficacy of prayer, the punishment of hell and the reward of heaven, the subjugation of women, the legitimacy of slavery, the importance of supporting one's government regardless, and other debilitating concepts arise more from biblical teachings than a belief in God. Even if one

could somehow eliminate the belief of people in God and, thus, prove the Bible couldn't be God's Word, millions would still be inclined to follow its teachings. Why would the Bible have to be removed as a guide for one's life just because one stopped believing in God? Fifteenth, it's hard to see how believing in a God is doing as much damage to people as belief in a book that promotes miracles, the supernatural, inequities, prayer, self-effacement, saviors, social indifference, and other debilitating, negative beliefs. One need only read the Age of Reason and his other theological works to see that no one held the Bible in greater contempt or heaped more scorn on its contents than Thomas Paine. Yet, he would have to fall under atheist ridicule as much as Jerry Falwell or Jimmy Swaggart because he was a deist and believed in a god. It is hard to conceive of anyone who strongly believes in the Bible's validity being the kind of citizen we seek to create, while that is much less true of those who merely have a nominal belief in some sort of supreme being. I can live with Paine; but it is all I can do to stomach the others. And lastly, far too many atheist/agnostic/humanist organizations in the United States are little more than support groups in which people of like mind periodically meet over fine cuisine to recharge their batteries and discuss the nonsense of the opposition. I really don't need anybody to hold my hand, assuage my intellectual loneliness, or buttress my wounded psyche. What I do need is an army of energetic fighters willing to do the leg work that's required if we are to effectively combat the avalanche of superstition that dominates this nation. On top of all the religious nonsense that we must endure, even if only for a fleeting moment on a religious channel, we now must cope with an additional layer of New Age mental illness that has flooded the nation in recent years. How was that for a short response!

Fortunately, Dan, you are much more realistic in this regard than many of your colleagues. Your appearances on the media and your recent article in FREETHOUGHT TODAY on your debate with the prominent apologist, Norman Geisler, demonstrate that you have a firmer grasp of the overall situation than most freethought advocates. I am glad to see that you are becoming increasingly viewed as the major national representative for our position.

Letter #417 from JRB of Tallahassee, Florida

Dear Dennis. Thanks for the great work you're doing. The pamphlets I got last year, I put in bus stations and books in Christian Book Stores. Thanks again.

Editor's Response to Letter #417

Dear MM. You deserve a pat, too, for your efforts. I only wish more supporters of BE would distribute our pamphlets in this manner. Several people browsing through the apologetics sections of Christian bookstores have ended up contacting us.

Letter #418 from TF of Webster, Wisconsin

Dear Dennis. One of my favorite sayings, which I'm sure you'll agree with is: "Those who do not know their opponent's arguments do not completely understand their own."

....I've really been enjoying your tapes. In fact, I recently bought a boombox so that I can listen to the tapes wherever I go. My wife and kids think I'm crazy, but I've listened to them over and over and learned a lot. Keep up the good work.

Issue No. 100

Apr. 1991

COMMENTARY

Some time ago we instituted a policy of periodically devoting an entire issue of BE to letters from our readers. This month's issue will continue that tradition.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #419 from SS of Winter Haven, Florida (Part a)

(In an earlier letter SS tried to prove that the God of the OT, as opposed to the God of the NT, was just, merciful and good--ED.).

Dear Dennis. Thanks for printing my letter (#382, Issue #94)... I notice that you didn't print, or even make reference to, the OT's Psalm 103, which I enclosed with my letter, and referred to in my letter, which describes God's mercies and doesn't contain any contradiction of this within the Psalm....I take it you didn't mention Psalm 103 because you had no answer to it. That's unfair. Surely you must be secure enough in your beliefs to be able to admit it when the other side is correct about something? Naturally, you can "prove" someone is wrong if you omit references or words. But that's not proof. It's actually an admission on your part that you have no response and have to resort to censorship. By resorting to such tactics, you concede the debate.

Editor's Response to Letter #419 (Part a)

Dear SS. I didn't print Psalm 103 because your point was so weak that it didn't really merit a response. Censorship had nothing to do with it. If BE ever started censoring, I would resign from the staff. When compared to the opposition's, our case is as solid as granite. Apologists don't have a case; they have a feeling, a desire, a hope that is masked in a shroud of rationalizations and obfuscations. If there is one thing I have learned over the years, it is that knowledgeable apologists for religion in general and Christianity in particular are horribly dishonest and deceptive. Instead of being central to their thought processes, truth is of little importance when one is trying to justify an emotional high at all costs. The need for a feeling of security and influence, if not control, over their fate supercedes any adherence to veracity or reality. All religious/superstitious people have one overriding desire--justification for a belief that the elements have a heart, that somehow something out there is looking out for their welfare. An indifferent, impersonal world is just too much for them to handle. That's why religion is so attractive to the weak, the insecure, the infirm, the poor, the oppressed, the exploited, the unintelligent and the uneducated.

Your reference to Psalm 103 is of no import because many of God's actions throughout the OT nullify its assertions that God is righteous, merciful, kind, gracious, and just. Again, I recommend that you read the list of OT deeds committed by God that can be found in Issue #3. Are we going to go by words or deeds? Are we going to go by what God did or what the Bible says, and you believe, he represents?

Letter #419 Continues (Part b)

I'd like to see where in the OT you believe God behaved badly. I do dispute your claim.... The OT God never destroyed or punished anyone who wasn't evil or sinful. The OT God even eventually repealed the sacrifices of animals (Hosea 6:6) and also repealed the death penalties (Ezek. 18:23).... Yes, I dispute your claim that the OT God did appalling things.

Editor's Response to Letter #419 (Part b)

You really have embarked upon a hopeless defense, SS. The evidence that God did "appalling things" is overwhelming. Several examples are as follows. In Ezek. 9:6 ("Slay utterly old and young, both maids and little children, and women....") God ordered the killing of innocent children; in Ex. 12:29 ("...the Lord smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt") he killed innocent children, and in Ex. 22:29-30 ("...the firstborn of thy sons shalt thou give unto me. Likewise, shalt thou do with thine oxen, and thy sheep....") he ordered human sacrifice . Since this list could go on for pages, I again suggest that you read the 3rd Issue.

Letter #419 Concludes (Part c)

I'm not bitheistic. But the OT God and the NT God are two different Gods, even if some theists claim they're the same God. You don't believe their other claims, so why believe that one?....Since all religions teach different things, only one of them can be the true religion, if there is a true religion. And only the God of that one religion is the true God....I wonder if you'll print this letter, and if you have any good answers to it--using factual quotes from the Bible and logical argument and no semantic games, and no omission of references and statements of mine that you can't refute, or which refute your refutations....

Editor's Response to Letter #419 (Part c)

You talk about two different gods while claiming you are not bitheistic. Yet, you claim I am the one who is engaging in semantic games?? When you concede the existence of two gods, you are bitheistic whether you like it or not, SS. Equally important is the fact that you can't seem to realize that people can have different conceptions of the same god. You say, "the OT God and the NT God are two different Gods." Why can't everyone be referring to the same god while having different conceptions of his/her nature? After all, you do claim to be monotheistic, don't you? You say that there can only be one true religion and only the God of that religion can be the true God. That is false. You should have said, "...and only the God of that religion can be the true conception of God." Why couldn't there be several monotheistic religions, as there indeed are (Christianity, Judaism, Islam), while only one has a true conception of God, assuming one exists? Why couldn't they worship the same God while only one has an accurate idea of his nature? You seem to be at a loss as to whether or not the gods of other religions are, in fact, gods.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #420 from Dan Barker of the Freedom from Religion Foundation, P.O. Box 750, Madison, Wisconsin 53701

Dear Dennis. Regarding your comments about the importance of state/church separation vs. bible criticism, I can only respond that they are both of utmost importance. FFRF is quite committed to exposing the bankruptcy of the bible (and other religious writings). Our continual best-seller is *The Born Again Skeptic's Guide to the Bible* by Ruth Green, a powerful indictment of scripture which exposes the contradictions, cruelties, and absurdities of the so-called Holy Bible--published by FFRF. Our first film, "A Second Look at Religion," concentrates primarily on bible criticism. Almost every issue of *Freethought Today* has at least one article on the bible or related aspects of Christianity. Most of our noncontracts deal with the bible. Most of the public debates I have done deal directly with the bible. (In Atlanta, for example, I debated "Is the Bible an acceptable guide for morality?"). Our second most popular book is *Annie Laurie's Woe to the Women: The Bible Tells Me So*, which goes through the entire bible, documenting its treatment of women. We do dozens of radio shows each year, and most of them end up with some form of bible criticism. The same is true with TV, regional and local. Just because FFRF also deals with

state/church separation does not mean we have discounted criticism of the bible or of religion. We agree with you that it is of utmost importance to give the lie to mythology. But most of our 4,000 members feel that state/church separation is at least of equal importance. We are a democratic national group, so different members will have different emphases. A few of them tolerate bible criticism while preferring legal activism, and a few feel the opposite. But generally, most FFRF members agree that both areas are vital.

In the late 1940's Vasti McCollum's kids were forced to participate in religious instruction in their public school (prayer, worship, bible readings, etc.). She took it to court and, at first, she lost her case. She lost again on appeal. But when she appealed to the Supreme Court she won the case in an historic decision. Since 1949 there has been no religious instruction in the public schools (except for a few outlaw teachers). Are you suggesting that Vashti should not have taken her case? Should we have allowed the evangelists into the public schools to teach religion during normal hours? Aren't you glad that someone like Vashti had the courage to enforce the First Amendment? Today, the entire law of the land is based, to a large degree, on the precedent set in the McCollum case.

In 1961 Roy Torcaso wanted to become a notary public. He refused to sign the oath that said he believed in God. Should he have lied? Should he have backed off from becoming a notary public? He took his case clear to the Supreme Court and effectively stopped most of the discrimination that countered the constitutional guarantee against a "religious test for public office."

You know I could cite many more examples. It is hard to think of anything more important than defending the First Amendment to the US Constitution. Sure, maybe in time we could educate the world and retire the bible to the mythology section of the library; but that will take a very long time. In the meantime, do we let those who still believe disregard religious freedom and discriminate against those of us who are critical of the bible? Do we sit back and take it? What would you do if the state of Ohio told you to stop publishing Biblical Errancy? The freedoms that B.E. and FFRF share are due to the First Amendment. Would you not use the Constitution to fight back? If you lived in Iran or Iraq you could not publish B.E. If we lived in a Christian theocracy (which many right-wing believers desire) neither of us could engage in religious criticism. We owe an awful lot to our First Amendment, and any efforts to preserve its principles are important. They are what makes America a free country.

If FFRF were not working for state/church separation, we would probably be only 20% of our current size. Legal issues garner publicity. Most of the radio and newspaper publicity about FFRF is due to state/church complaints. I can't tell you how many times I have been invited to do a radio interview because of state/church issues only to have the interview turn into a discussion of the bible. If FFRF were simply a bible criticism newsletter, we would get much less airtime. We would have much less prestige. For example, we are going to sue the governor of Indiana for exclusively placing Gideon bibles in state-owned hotel rooms, denying our request that they also place our material which criticizes the bible alongside the bible. The fact that we are suing a Governor makes this a hot PR issue, and the resultant publicity gives us a chance to tell why we disapprove of the bible. Without the First Amendment and the principle of state/church separation, we could not take this action, and we would lose an opportunity to educate a lot of people. As a matter of fact, Harper's Magazine picked up on the story and they reprinted our noncontract, "Dear Believer," which is a hard-hitting critique of the bible. Otherwise, could we have landed our material in Harper's? Could you?

I think it is wonderful that B.E. focuses on bible contradictions. You have been a valuable resource. I don't see any problem at all with your staying out of the state/church arena. I hope

you don't feel that because FFRF deals with more than one issue we are necessarily less committed to either.

Editor's Response to Letter #420

Dear Dan. It's always good to hear from you but I have a difference of opinion on strategy with some of your members. You say that both church/state separation and biblical criticism are of utmost importance but every issue of Freethought Today places far greater emphasis on the former than the latter. You are realistic and competent enough to tackle the Bible but that is not the general tenor of your paper or the letters and articles to the editor from your membership. Indeed, except for your critiques and an occasional article by Michael Hakeem the Bible is virtually untouched. I think that anyone who reads Freethought Today would agree that its focus is certainly not on the Bible. For the most part Scripture occupies a rather minor role and were it not for your efforts and those of Michael it would not have even that. Your Noncontract "Dear Believer" is very good. But as far as substantive and reasonably comprehensive critiques of the Bible are concerned, *The Born Again Skeptic's Guide to the Bible*, which I bought and read years ago, appears to be the only book available. Annie Laurie's book covers the Bible but only from the perspective of one topic--women's subjugation and liberation. You said that most of the public debates you have had deal with the Bible and most of your media appearances end up with some form of Bible criticism. Although you are carrying a torch in this regard, are others in FFRF doing the same? You say that "a few of them tolerate bible criticism. That's just the problem. They "tolerate" it. They don't promote or propound it. In fact, they generally avoid the Bible as much as possible. And when these members of your organization appear before the religious and "end up with some form of bible criticism" or discussion, is it because they consciously and intentionally went to that topic or were they pulled there by the opposition. The overwhelming number of religious/freethought confrontations I have seen or heard on the media have ultimately dwelled on the Bible because of the benighted's efforts. They want to talk about the Bible; freethought advocates don't. You say that "FFRF also deals with state/church separation...." It doesn't "also" deal with it, Dan; that is the primary area of focus. You say that "we agree with you that it is of utmost importance." You may, Dan, but that is by no means the sentiment of your membership. You say that "most of our 4,000 members feel that state/church separation is at least of equal importance" when the majority feel that it is of far greater importance.

You mentioned the McCollum and Torcaso cases and asked if we should "let those who still believe disregard religious freedom and discriminate against those of us who are critical of the bible." A terrible thought, indeed! But how to win more cases of this nature is of crucial importance. Members of your organization who believe that McCollum and Torcaso won these cases by themselves have been watching too many "John Wayne" movies. Heroes don't make history. I can remember when I taught history decades ago, the text-book ran from one central figure to another as if they were the guiding and motivating force in mankind's evolution. We went from Caesar to Jesus, to Charlemagne, to King John, to Luther, to Washington, to Jefferson, to Napoleon, to Lincoln, to Roosevelt, and to Kennedy with a lot of other well-known individuals inbetween. The focus was always on the individual hero as if he were the spark of history. In truth, history has always been made by large groups, bodies, and classes of people butting heads. Lincoln and his Emancipation Proclamation didn't free the slaves; the result of two clashing armies did. And the assassination of the Archduke Francis Ferdinand didn't cause World War I; competition between the world's industrial powers was the culprit. You mentioned a belief that is very common among most freethought advocates when you said that "the freedoms that B.E. and FFRF share are due to the First Amendment." Actually, we owe very little to the First Amendment or any other laws for that matter. Laws and their interpretation are merely a codification of prevailing attitudes. McCollum and Torcaso won their cases because mass

sentiment had sufficiently shifted in their direction. In former days public opinion was definitely against what they were trying to do and other people who had brought similar or identical suits in former years had lost. One hundred years ago McCollum and Torcaso could never have won their cases anymore than a black could have effectively fought Jim Crow laws in the South. But by 1949 and 1961 millions of people had sufficiently changed their minds that victory was possible. Millions of people shifted to the religious "left" so to speak. Millions had joined the freethought persuasion; other millions became less religiously militant, millions more became neutral, and other millions of a decidedly religious outlook became more tolerant. The latter may not have had the same ideas on religion as McCollum or Torcaso but they, nevertheless, felt that their cause was just. When opinion had sufficiently shifted, the long line of people in the McCollum/Torcaso tradition finally became victorious. The crucial point to note in all of this was that the law never changed. The First Amendment has been on the books from the beginning, since 1791. If "the freedoms that B.E. and FFRF share are due to the First Amendment," then why did it fail to act? Where was it when we needed it most? You say that "we owe an awful lot to our First Amendment." No, we owe a lot to the people and events that worked to change the opinions and theological attitudes of millions of our citizens, who, in turn, caused the First Amendment to become something other than a bunch of words on paper which it had been for hundreds of years in the Jim Crow South and the theological areas of concern to McCollum and Torcaso. Prior to 1949 many people had tried to do what McCollum and Torcaso accomplished. They failed because they didn't have the numbers. They had the law and the Bill of Rights but they lacked what really matters--numbers and money. You probably remember what I said in the February Issue--People Run the Show, Laws Don't. I think you are honestly expressing the attitude of your membership when you say that "It is hard to think of anything more important than defending the First Amendment to the US Constitution." From BE's perspective, however, exposing the nonsense of religion in general and the Bible in particular is more important. The more people you can convert to your side or at least neutralize the greater your chances of seeing your philosophy prevail. Change attitudes and the laws will be reinterpreted and enforced accordingly. If we don't have the numbers, we aren't going to succeed regardless of what the First Amendment says or how hard we fight for its implementation. Having "Under God" in the pledge of allegiance and "In God We Trust" on the currency are classic examples of First Amendment violations. Yet, they remain the law of the land. You say that "maybe in time we could educate the world and retire the bible to the mythology section of the library (Under the Dewey Decimal System, religion and the Bible are classified next to the mythology section); but that will take a very long time." Yet, that is exactly what has been going on behind the scenes. People are becoming increasingly educated and that's why McCollum and Torcaso were victorious. If it were, in fact, to take a very long time that could very well be attributed in large measure to the failure of freethought advocates to do their homework and take it to the other side. Certainly, ministers, priests, and rabbis aren't going to reveal the inadequacies of religion in general and the Bible in particular. That's not what they are paid for. You and I both know that used-car salesmen don't go out of their way to expose defects in their products. Truth-in-advertising has never been a hallmark of Christianity.

Fighting court battles is fine as long as they are put in proper perspective. If they become the primary area of focus, in effect, we are trying to take-on the other side in a dollar-for-dollar, man-for-man encounter. And with their resources and political clout, the outcome is a foregone conclusion in over 90% of the cases. Legal issues garner publicity, but a 30-second spot or sound-bite on local TV is not sufficient to alter views people have held for a lifetime. Moreover, the media are only going to air material relevant to the legal issues per se. They aren't going to provide us an extended forum in which to assail religion or the Bible. In fact, the only reason we are appearing on TV at all is that a sizable number of people are in sympathy with our purely legal argument. That doesn't mean they are freethought advocates or sympathetic to our views on religion in general. It only means that they are in sympathy with our views on the particular point

in dispute. The leader of Ohio Atheists, Frank Zindler, has appeared on TV several times because he has led a movement to restrict the freedom of Christian Scientists to engage in what Frank refers to as "Child Sacrifice." Parents have been committing manslaughter (So determined by the courts) by allowing their children to die through prayer overdose rather than being required to provide responsible medical care. Frank has been allowed media exposure because many people, even those of religious denominations, agree with his position on this issue. He has not been allowed, however, to express his views on religion in general or the Bible in particular. That would not be supported by his community-wide backers or the station upon which he is appearing. After all, reporters and editors have views, too. I realize that FFRF's membership strongly believes that legal issues garner publicity. But, unfortunately, when we win court battles without changing or at least influencing the ideas of our opponents, we often create a backlash that is as bad or worse than the initial problem. A friend of mine recently noted that because a legal suit resulted in a nativity scene being removed from a court house lawn in his town, scores of nativity scenes sprung up all over to express defiance. I have seen similar repercussions in other instances. Like so many towns in America, that community is probably riddled with people who have never heard an indepth presentation of the Bible's inadequacies. If freethought advocates had prepared the ground better, a plethora of nativity scenes might well never have appeared. And although the case should have been fought, primary emphasis should have been on changing beliefs. Unless attitudes are changed, what is to prevent a mere temporary victory? As I noted in a prior issue, with the decidedly anti-intellectual drift of the Nation during the past decade, a reversal of earlier victories is by no means impossible. We both have shuddered at the recent Supreme Court nominations. Some members of the clergy can be expected to take reprisals, and only because there has been a "liberal/left" drift of the clergy in general is there a greater chance of permanent victory. You said that "If FFRF were simply a bible criticism newsletter, we would get much less airtime." That's true because the issues you are addressing are immediate, physical, and emotional. People who plant bombs or engage in other kinds of physically-dramatic acts such as striking, marching, or blocking entrances also get air-time, often more than they desire, but how many minds are influenced, persuaded, or changed. We aren't going to be allowed appropriate air-time under this kind of approach to present any kind of indepth critique of religion in general and the Bible in particular. At best it's going to be superficial and fleeting. After all, we are not being brought-on to critique religion in general or the Bible in particular. We are being brought-on to address a specific issue and any ancillary information will have to be something we manage to slip in.

In any event, I'm glad your organization is having legal successes and hope many more will follow. You come across on the media quite well, Dan, and, as I mentioned in a prior issue, the vast bulk of my comments are directed far more to the membership of FFRF and other freethoughters throughout the country than yourself. I look upon our exchange of letters as a healthy and productive dialogue. Both of us seek to minimize the influence of religious superstition in this Nation as well as all of its attendant negative ramifications. Both of us work with a fine group of sincere, rational, dedicated, hardworking individuals trying to make the world a better place in which to live. We seek the same goal and our only main point of discussion lies in how best to proceed. If you or others feel that greater success can be obtained by the approach currently followed by FFRF, then by all means continue. I'm for anything that works. No doubt there are people who are more easily influenced by state/church issues as well as extrabiblical topics such as God's existence, creation/evolution and the Canon's formation (which I have often been urged to address more extensively) than the biblical approach. In the final analysis, it comes down to which will influence the greater numbers; so ultimately every approach is needed to some degree.

EDITOR'S NOTE: As you have probably already realized, BE has reached a true milestone in its on-going presentation of biblical realities. This month marks our 100th issue; one-hundred issues

and still going strong. It is hard to believe that we have lasted this long with little chance of going under. We would like to salute all of our subscribers and other supporters who have done so much to make BE a greater success than we originally expected. There is undoubtedly a market for the kind of material we present and our only obstacle is widespread publicity and financial backing. Thanks, and stay tuned; baring any unforeseen difficulties, more is yet to come.

Issue No. 101

May 1991

COMMENTARY

Because of the large volume of mail in recent months we have decided to devote an additional issue to letters from our readership.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #421 from Robert Bowman of the Christian Research Institute in San Juan Capistrano, California (Part a)

Dear Dennis. Recently a copy of Issue #90 of Biblical Errancy (June 1990) was sent to me and attention drawn to Steven Overholt's letter and your response. Since I am prominently featured in your response, I would like to answer your allegations.

First, you assert, "Because it was becoming increasingly evident to any objective observer that he (Bowman) was coming out on the short end of the stick, he allowed his subscription to BE to lapse." Apparently anyone who agrees with you is objective, while anyone who agrees with me is not. All I can tell you is that no one here at CRI thought anything of the kind. I did not feel at all that I was coming out looking the loser intellectually. Actually, I felt that I was wasting my time. More on that shortly. By the way, CRI's subscription to BE, which was in my name, lapsed while I was on a two-year leave from CRI to attend school in Philadelphia. I had nothing to do with the subscription lapsing. This illustrates a point which is very relevant in dealing with apparent biblical errors, namely, that lack of information can lead the unwary to draw erroneous conclusions, such as you did about my supposedly letting my subscription lapse. Second, you write, "I suspect that Walter Martin, the Director of CRI, read our correspondence, decided that Bowman was in over his head, and directed him to bow out...." Hardly! No one told me to stop writing to you. At the time I headed the Correspondence Division at CRI and had complete freedom to write to you or not as I saw fit.

Editor's Response to Letter #421 (Part a)

Dear Robert. You picked October 1990 to respond to a June 1990 letter in BE that came about because of an on-going debate between us that was originally aired in the July 1986 and Sept 1987 issues. Surely you must realize that we have all slept since then. In any event, how you felt about how you were looking is quite irrelevant. The fact is that you were coming out on the short end of the stick. Secondly, please note that I said "I suspect" that Walter Martin read our correspondence and told you to bow out. I never stated it as a proven fact since there is no way I could have known for sure. Thirdly, you said, "I felt I was wasting my time." That's correct; you were. Anyone who attempts to "prove" the validity of religion in general and the Bible in particular to those relying upon logic, reason, and rational thought is wasting his time. One might just as well try to prove the validity of alchemy to a chemist or astrology to an astronomer. Anyone who projects faith, and that is what religion boils down to, upon those who require proof and expects success is living in a world of fantasy. Remember! It isn't the Christian Reason or the Jewish Reason. It's the Christian Faith, the Jewish Faith. Christians want people to believe in something, be it a Book, a Church, or a Messiah, merely because some authority says so. That's not how rational thought, the scientific mind, operates my friend. With any rational mind, proof, evidence, and experimentation always have precedence over belief and authority figures. With religion/superstition precisely the opposite is true.

Letter #421 Continues (Part b)

Third, I strongly object to your characterizing me and other apologists as deceptive and hypocritical "confidence men" pushing a "con game." Religious charlatans do exist, but it is just not true that all Christian apologists are con men. I know, whatever you may think, that my motives are love of truth and concern for other human beings.

Editor's Response to Letter #421 (Part b)

Although not always legally indictable, anyone who presents something to other people in a manner that is dramatically different from its real character is a confidence man engaged in deception. When apologists not only claim the Bible is God's Word but inerrant as well, that is a fraud and those so engaged are confidence men. If you sell someone something that is portrayed as flawless that is, in fact, a lemon, you have defrauded that individual even though you honestly believe in your product. And unlike all other frauds, there is no way to rectify your misrepresentation because people could only become aware of their victimization when it is too late. Motives and intentions are secondary in this kind of situation. Whether biblicists deceive by intent or by accident the result is the same--a tremendous injustice that can't be rectified. You gained their confidence and deceived them in the process. That's what I mean by a "con game" and why I call biblicists "confidence men." Webster's Dictionary defines a "swindle" as a trick, a cheat, a fraud and a confidence game is defined as a swindle, i.e., a fraud, effected by gaining the confidence of the victim. You may not have intended to deceive your victim, but that, in fact, is the outcome. Just because you believed in your product and did not intend to deceive the buyer doesn't mean you did him any less harm. If I fire a gun at a rabbit and kill a human being, instead, the person is just as dead as if I had intended to kill him. You are still selling a bogus item, even if you don't know it or honestly believe it's genuine. Your motives are of less importance than the genuineness of the item you are advertising. [TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT MONTH]

Letter #422 from GS of Cranston, Rhode Island

Dear Dennis. I feel I have to respond to your answer to Dan Barker in the #99 issue of BE, since I am one of the people being criticized for concentrating my attack on areas other than the Bible. I specialize in attacking the existence of God, and have done so in books, articles, debates, and radio/TV shows.

While I do not consider it a waste of time to have someone dig into the Biblical texts (in fact I consider it very useful), I do think that you have been far too quick to dismiss the work of other non-believers as less useful than your own. In fact, it is quite easy to turn a number of your own arguments right back upon you. First, the Bible is but one element used by theists to support their belief. You can eliminate Bible-belief and still have a theist. To my way of thinking, the fundamental problem is caused by belief in and reliance upon, the supernatural (i.e., God). If you can destroy the logicalness of that belief, the belief in the Bible and all other tenets of all religions that are God-based will disappear. I am always clear in my debates and media appearances that the Bible cannot logically be used to defend a belief in God. God's existence must be established first in an independent way, then we can see if the Bible is God's Word. Almost all believers can see that this is so, and will abandon their reliance on the Bible to "prove" God's existence. Once they do this, they are left to use strictly logical proofs (which they foolishly feel they can do). When I destroy each so-called proof, they are left with no defense for their theism except "faith." I can destroy that concept's validity with a single "coup-de-grace," leaving them totally defenseless. I bet you can't do that with the Bible, no matter how many inconsistencies, errors, omissions, etc. you provide. The "out" is always there that perhaps the

language used was mistranslated, or that you have to read the text while you are yourself "inspired" in order to properly understand it. Second, it is far easier to use logic on the relatively simple arguments that have been offered as "proofs" of God's existence. They are readily susceptible to logical analysis and logical refutation. That this is so can be seen from the haste with which theists beat a path to the "faith argument" when cornered. They know that they have been bested logically. With Bible arguments, they rarely do.

Third, the fact that belief in God is the most widely held religious position is, contrary to what you said, the great strength in attacking that position. Sure, you will meet more opposition, but your arguments are cleaner and stronger, being strictly logical. I find your comment that those who believe most strongly in the Bible, and not those who believe in God to be the ones most opposed to equal rights and to the improvement of the world's conditions, to be false. Anyone who relies upon a God to improve the world, rather than taking action himself/herself, is the real problem. The Bible has little to do with it, except as a justification for "letting God do it."

Next, although it may be more difficult psychologically for people to get rid of their belief in God, it is also much more beneficial to them and to the rest of humanity when they do. I have met many thousands of people who have been able to get rid of their theism and live healthy and productive lives. On the other hand, although I have also met many thousands who have gotten rid of their belief in the Bible, they do not have the same responsible outlook that the non-theist has about world problems.

Finally, I find your statement that destroying a person's belief in God will not simultaneously eradicate their belief in the Bible, to be false and illogical. I have not seen anyone who could successfully maintain this position, even for a minute. If the Bible is not the word of God because there is no God, then it becomes a mere repository of folktales and primitive superstitions. Who would want to believe in that?

In short, while I feel that those who attack the Bible on its contents have useful work to perform, the work of those of us non-theists who have chosen to concentrate on other areas of the problem, cannot be dismissed or downplayed as you have chosen to do. I think that the best solution is for each to contribute to the best of his or her abilities, while respecting and not denegrating the work of others who have chosen to concentrate upon a different aspect of the same problem.

Editor's Response to Letter #422

Dear GS. I would hope that you would in no way view my response to Dan as a personal criticism of anyone in particular, since that was not the intent. We have more than enough involvement dealing with apologists and other religionists without alienating friends and allies such as yourself. I look upon Dan's letters and my responses as healthy and productive dialogues that allow everyone to have a good view of current thought in the anti-superstitious struggle. No doubt the best approach lies somewhere inbetween and that's what we all seek. I wasn't referring so much to someone who focuses on areas other than the Bible but on someone who concentrates on "one" area exclusively, namely God-belief.

A few of your points need to be addressed, however. When you say that the Bible cannot logically be used to defend a belief in God, many apologists are going to disagree. For a book to be so internally consistent, so correct about world conditions, so prophetically perfect, so moral in its maxims, so concerned about the salvation of mankind through God's willingness to die for humanity, and so beautifully written, it would have to be the product of a divine being. Who else could have written such a masterpiece that tells, and has told, mankind what will happen

hundreds of years before the event? At least that's how their "reasoning" goes. In addition, before you ever contact people, millions will have already been biblically indoctrinated and be convinced the Bible is the word of a perfect being. Even if you cause them to admit God's existence can't be effectively demonstrated, they will still rely on faith in his existence. That faith, along with the Bible's cohesion is sufficient. Don't forget. It's the Christian faith, the Jewish faith, not the Christian Reason, the Jewish Reason. As was mentioned in a prior issue of BE, belief in God is the hardest concept for people to jettison, since millions of terribly-insecure people want the elements to have a heart and tend to see patterns and purpose in everything. You are using a rational approach to combat a desire, a hope, a yearning relevant to one issue. I don't think one issue is sufficient to sway our opposition, no matter what the topic or how strong our arguments. Thirdly, I think your approach would work best with people who already have questions, if not doubts, about the existence of a divine being. Unfortunately, that is primarily limited to the intellectual community many of whose members can be found on the campuses of higher education.

You say that your arguments are cleaner and stronger and I can't do that with the Bible, no matter how many inconsistencies, errors, etc. I provide. You feel that with you they know they have been bested logically, but with Bible arguments they rarely do. Perhaps our experiences are different, GS, but I have had two fundamentalist ministers say "Uncle" to me before audiences in recent months over contradictions I've noted in the Bible. Maybe you are more skilled than I, but I have never gotten that kind of admission from anyone while debating God's existence. One of the ministers had debated an atheist just before meeting me and frankly admitted that my approach was much more difficult to handle. I firmly believe that if you keep problems simple, direct, blatant, crucial and focused on that which is actually written down, escape hatches are kept to a minimum. Chasing apologists is like pursuing greased pigs or nailing jello to boards. Virtually any lawyer will tell his client to, "Get it in writing, if you want to prove your case." When apologists commit themselves to paper, they simultaneously put themselves in a real bind and dramatically cramp their style. Teleological, cosmological, and ontological arguments, on the other hand, just don't lend themselves to that kind of precision and specificity.

Perhaps I am mistaken but I don't think theological arguments are cleaner or stronger. But even more importantly, they just aren't going to influence biblically-indoctrinated people who have been taught to relate and correlate an incredible number of life experiences on nearly every subject imaginable to biblical teachings. When they have been repeatedly shown how the Bible is "right-on," their belief in a God can be easily justified in their minds by faith. Trying to change their beliefs on one topic while hundreds, if not thousands, of biblical comments tend to prove the opposite is just not practical. In the first sentence of the Bible believers are called upon to accept God's existence through faith alone. The Bible does not start by proving the existence of God. Quite the contrary, from the beginning faith and acceptance take precedence over proof and evidence. Knowledgeable theologians will concede as much. That's why they are called the Christian and Jewish faiths. One Jewish apologist aptly stated in this regard, "Christianity is nothing if not a religion of faith. Faith is a virgin giving birth to a child. Faith is that child sharing a trinity with the God of creation. Faith is a resurrection that no one saw. Faith is a 'coming soon' which has never happened after 2,000 years of waiting" (The Light of Reason, Shmuel Golding, Vol. 1, p. 20).

You note that theists beat a path to the "faith argument" when cornered. Yes, but from their perspective that is a more defensible position than reconciling blatant contradictions in which both sides can't possibly be true simultaneously. The Bible provides thousands of examples of the latter while a debate on God's existence is limited to one issue. Moreover, astute theists can always employ the inductive argument that science is ultimately based on faith since you assume a pencil will fall to the floor when dropped based on hundreds of past experiences. They will

allege that you can't be positive it's going to drop the next time. Of course, you and I both know that one would have taken leave of his senses if he assumed otherwise.

You feel that anyone who relies upon a God to improve the world's condition is the real problem rather than those who believe most strongly in the Bible. But I don't think you are allowing for gradations of opposition, GS. It just isn't realistic to throw all Christians, indeed all religionists or all theists, into the same basket. There are significant differences between Robertson and Bultman, Falwell and Fosdick, Swaggart and Briggs, Paine and W. J. Bryan, fundamentalists and the United Church of Christ that can't be ignored. Theists believe in God, while biblicists believe in God and the Bible. That's what makes the latter so anathema. They not only believe in God but an absurd and dangerous book as well. At least many theists have managed to jettison in varying degrees much of the Bible and its preposterous nonsense. Your comment that "anyone who relies upon a God to improve the world's condition is the real problem" seems to imply that only atheists fight for abortion rights, civil rights, and civil liberties. In other words, all who rely upon a God are to be equally attacked and condemned. As much as I am opposed religion in general and the Bible in particular, I tend to see significant gradations of opinion in the religious community and have real problems with a black versus white approach. You say that people have a more responsible outlook when they not only shed their belief in the Bible but God as well. I have no problem with that, but getting rid of a strong reliance on the Bible is a way-station on the way to non-theism. Millions have to walk before they can run.

You say that if the Bible is not the word of God because there is no God, then it becomes a mere repository of folktales and primitive superstitions. You are concentrating on aspects which are of most interest to you, GS, while for millions in that situation it merely becomes a repository of moral teachings and wise philosophical maxims, many of which come from the only "perfect" man who ever lived. It becomes a guide to life. For millions the ethical code found in the gospels, Paul's Epistles, and Proverbs as well as biblical history and the conduct of Jesus Christ in the NT, become central. The book is no longer viewed as perfect or even God's word, but as the most nearly perfect book. People don't have to look upon the Bible as a product of a divine being to accept nearly all of its teachings as an excellent guide by which to conduct one's life. At least, that's how the "reasoning" goes.

In closing, I certainly wouldn't dismiss your work as of no importance GS. Indeed, for some it undoubtedly rings a bell. For some people, especially those who have had little or no biblical indoctrination, God's existence rather than the Bible's validity is the major consideration. Indeed, for some people the scientific inaccuracies in books such as Genesis are sufficient alone to cause rejection of the Bible. The whole question of effectively combating religion is a lot like fitting shoes. No size is right for all but those within a certain range certainly fit far more people than the rest. If you feel comfortable and productive in what you are doing, by all means proceed as usual. I'd certainly prefer that you continue on your normal course than do nothing whatever. We have enough freethought advocates doing that as it is. Please don't feel that I'm denegrating your efforts. If more people were following in your footsteps, we'd be having a greater influence on the kind of people who are most affected by your approach. Hopefully, I conveyed the same message to Dan. More work is needed across the board and you and Dan are of great importance in that effort.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #423 from PD of Mesick, Michigan

Dennis. The first four tapes I ordered were excellent. As you see, I'm back for four more. I wish that I had had them before I started debating with bible-thumpers. Assuming that these

individuals would think and argue in a logical and rational manner, as normal people do, led to several unnecessary "at a loss for words" episodes....

Letter #424 from SS of Winter Haven, Florida

Dear Dennis. You asked for comments on your planned, new "no more Mr. Nice Guy" approach; so here's a comment. You might make yourself feel good that way, but "you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar." Also, if you resort to insults and ridicule, it looks like you ran out of good arguments and have nothing left but insults and ridicule. It's the same as conceding the debate. If someone sent you insults and ridicule and nasty remarks, would that convince you he was correct? Of course not. So why believe others react differently than you to such tactics? On the other hand, no need to be wishy-washy, either. Try to find a happy median.

Editor's Response to Letter #424

Dear SS. Either you misunderstood what I said earlier or I failed to clarify my position. All I meant was that apologists would find me more assertive less deferential, more forceful less reserved, more in-charge less ingratiating than was true before. Insults, pejoratives, and nasty remarks would never become central to our approach.

Letter #425 from RC of Placentia, California

Dear Dennis. May I make a suggestion? If you know ahead of time when you will appear on a radio show, would you please print it in the BE Newsletter? I would have liked to have heard the KBRT debate LIVE and I would have called several friends to ask them to listen too.... I really like your "Editor's Note" in the last issue. Sock it to'em, Dennis.

Editor's Response to Letter #425

Dear RC. You have made an intelligent request and I do try to comply when practical. There are a couple of major problems with publishing my planned appearances in BE. Either the dates are changed by the station at the last minute (I don't like readers to feel they have been misled by me) or the appearance will occur before the next issue of BE is sent. I don't like to jeopardize my integrity because of the fickleness of radio stations. They aren't reliable enough to suit my taste. But I'll do what I can.

Letter #426 from JS of Tulsa, Oklahoma

Dear Dennis.... I am 17, and began reading your newsletter a year ago. It was instrumental in changing the way I look at the Bible. I am now an agnostic, changed from a full fledged Christian. Although I feel that some of the points you bring up are open to rationalization by Christians, the majority of your facts are hard-hitting, unassailable truths that even the most ardent Bible-thumpers have difficulty in explaining away.

In many of your issues, you have printed letters from a Mark Potts. The man who got him started in his trek towards free-thinking and debate is the same man who helped me along and gave me your newsletters.... I was planning on taking your 60 issues and either copying or scanning them to a large text file or a sequence of files to be distributed around the Tulsa community as messages directed at people and/or files to be freely given out. I felt I should ask your permission first.... Good luck with your publication, and write soon.... I'm eager to get all the issues I've missed!

Editor's Response to Letter #426

Dear JS. For your sake, I am glad you crossed over the bridge to rationality and please feel free to distribute copies of BE around the Tulsa area as you desire.

Letter #427 from VS of Lake Worth, Florida

Dear Mr. McKinsey.... I found out about your newsletter at a recent meeting of the South Florida Secular Humanist Society. I met ---....who had a copy of BE; I found it absolutely fascinating! One of the letters in the issue I saw was by someone who has been fighting the Moody Bible Institute. I have been involved in an ongoing battle with the Campus Crusade for Christ group at the public college I attend, especially after they planted a false news release in the college newspaper (of which I am news editor). I am interested in knowing about anyone else who has successfully dealt with this group which seems bent on closing young minds before they have a chance to open.

Editor's Response to Letter #427

Dear VS. It is always a pleasure to hear of someone who is fighting the campus battle, especially when an organization such as the one you named is under scrutiny. Keep up the good work!

Letter #428 from RS of Glendale, Arizona

Mr. McKinsey....I like my first issue of BIBLICAL ERRANCY. Our country suffers because of the general public's incorrect knowledge of the Bible's origins. The public needs accurate information about the Bible, uncolored by ancient traditions and superstition. Unfortunately they will not learn the facts from most media or churches, and certainly not from the televangelists. You and your publication provide a valuable public service.... While fundamentalist beliefs are interesting, they are also potentially dangerous. Among other things, fundamentalists are far too willing to subjugate themselves to authoritarian rule because of their interpretation of a 2,000 year old book. Even worse, of course, is their willingness to impose their beliefs on others, and so doing, abrogate freedoms provided by the Constitution.... By the way, I can confirm one statement you made. It is futile to use outside means like reason, logic, or scientific fact when debating the accuracy of the Bible. I learned that the hard way while discussing things like the Genesis version of creation, and whether the sun (the earth, actually) stopped as described in Joshua 10. The only acceptable proof for a fundamentalist is the Bible itself. Luckily there is plenty of ammunition therein. Keep up the good work, and I hope to hear or see you in a debate soon.

Letter #429 from JW of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma (Part a)

Dear Dennis. Concerning the challenge by the Israeli publication, BIBLICAL POLEMICS, let's split the money. I submit the following on No. 4 which asks who can find any verse in the OT that says, "a virgin," shall bear a child, as is recorded in Matt. 1:23 of the NT? I submit Isaiah 7:14 (KJV), which states: Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." The NT says "child" while the OT says "son," but the emphasis in the question was on "a virgin." If the Israelis are saying it is not in the OT because of the difference between "son" and "child," then they are really nitpicking.

Editor's Response to Letter #429 (Part a)

Dear JW. I would imagine the response from Israel will not involve a distinction between "son" and "child," but between "almah" and "bethulah." Perhaps you are not acquainted with the controversy that has surrounded this issue for centuries. The Hebraic word used in Isaiah 7:14 is "almah" which Christians have interpreted as "virgin." Jewish scholars and many liberal Christians, on the other hand, repeatedly assert that "almah" means "a young woman" not a virgin. They note that there is a perfectly good Hebraic word for "virgin" and that is "bethulah." If the OT author had been referring to a virgin he would have used "bethulah" not "almah." I don't think you can collect any money on this one, but you are welcome to try.

Letter #429 Concludes (Part b)

Also, as usual, your work is remarkable. Keep it up! I would like to share a small story. I work with a nice fellow, who is a Christian. We get along fine, but lately, he believes God has sent him to "save" me. I am generally very tolerant of them, because, I know they believe only they have the truth, and have a command of God to convert the world. So far, I have put up with his proselytizing, but one of these days, I am going to bite back. He already admits that I know the bible better than he does. I do not try to destroy his beliefs, because it would make our working relationship harder. I can just listen to it, or I can button his lip forever. When I get angry enough, I am like a heat-seeking missile. I once took a Jehovah's Witnesses apart with a 45 minute lecture. When I got through, he had nothing to say, no response at all. I guess I am saying to you that I still have trouble with those who want to convert you, because I would rather just along than be contentious. What do you think?

Editor's Response to Letter #429 (Part b)

If you don't show this man the error of his ways, JW, who will? You have been brought a poor lost soul whose only contact with a rational analysis of the Bible could very well be yours. He might never again hear the kind of critique you could provide. Ministers, priests, and rabbis aren't paid to expose the inadequacies of the Bible, even though they may be fully cognizant of same. So to expect objectivity from them is just not reasonable. Don't you feel an obligation not only to illuminate but foster a more rational environment for all concerned?

Letter #430 from JW of Richmond, Virginia

Dear Dennis. One method one can use to wake us the brainwashed is to inform them that the Bible says Jesus is a killer! a killer of children! Then refer them to Rev. 2:18-23. Also refer them to Luke 10:29-37 wherein Jesus teaches that the priest and the Levite are not "thy neighbor." Jesus commands the "certain lawyer" to so judge. (That also takes care of some of that judging trumpery--"judge not" etc.). The irrationals really get giddy and addle-headed when one suggests that Jesus discriminated against the priest and the Levites (you don't have to love them like "neighbor").

Good medical authority informs me that one should not argue with irrational people--just state the cold facts. Apparently they don't remember the facts, and later some finally admit to themselves that they are indeed irrational. That frightening thought scares them and breaks down a lot of conditional reflexes and hypnotic trances. But it takes time. You are probably doing more than anybody to stop mind crippling lies. The wackos are promoting mental illness and destroying lives. Keep up your excellent work! You are the best!

Editor's Response to Letter #430

Dear JW. I think they not only remember some of the facts to which you allude in a biblical discussion but are changed in the process, even if only to a minor degree. It takes many swings of an ax to fell a tree. You have to return to the engagement repeatedly for meaningful results to become evident.

Letter #431 from LD of St. Louis, Missouri

Dear Dennis.... How do you respond to someone who draws a circle and tells you that all of the knowledge of the univers is represented inside this circle. Then they tell you to slice off the part that represents what you know. Then they tell you that God could exist in the part that you have admitted not knowing about. I have to admit I got stung on this one. I know you don't go outside the Bible much, but how can we answer this one. I have been searching all the great freethinkers, so far I haven't an answer.

Editor's Response to Letter #431

Dear LD. You say you searched all the great freethinkers? This is not a particularly difficult problem. The key words are "could exist." God could exist in the unknown void, but, then again, so could a million other things. I am not saying a God is not in the void, but your interrogator is saying He is. He is the one who is claiming superior knowledge, knowledge beyond that of everyday experience. My permanent response to that kind of question has always involved a request for proof. As I have said on numerous occasions, the burden of proof lies on he who alleges. He is obligated to provide some evidence beyond intuition, while I am not required to prove anything in this regard. After, all he is the one who brought up the idea.

EDITOR'S NOTE: (A) Every month's issue of BE has always been mailed on the last day of the prior month. Yet, over the years some people have been gradually receiving it later and later. We attribute this to postal inefficiency rather than Christian conspiracy. The rates go up while the service goes down. I don't know what can be done and we apologize when it arrives more than 3 weeks after being mailed.

(B) The Editor's Note in the Feb. Issue (#98) gave the name and address of an organization in Israel that offered \$10,000 to anyone who could provide an effective response to 10 questions. Although that organization's critique of Christianity resembles our approach, our inclusion of their challenge should not be taken as an endorsement of their general philosophy. They not only promote Judaism but Zionism as well; we only travel the same road when it comes to Christianity.

(C) We haven't altered the subscription rates to BE in over four years but an increase in printing costs and the the recent increase in postal rates leave us no choice. To offset the added costs we hope to give BE a more professional appearance that will begin with this month's issue.

Issue No. 102

June 1991

COMMENTARY

This month's commentary will continue the alphabetical listing of notable quotes that last appeared in the December, 1990 issue (#96).

QUOTATIONS

(PART 6)

PROPHECIES--"I have now, reader, gone through and examined all the passages which the four books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, quote from the OT and call them prophecies of Jesus Christ. When I first sat down to this examination, I expected to find cause for some censure, but little did I expect to find them so utterly destitute of truth, and of all pretensions to it, as I have shown them to be." *The Theological Works of Thomas Paine*. 258

"But there is not a passage in the OT that speaks of a person, who, after being crucified, dead, and buried, should rise from the dead, and ascend into heaven." *Ibid.*, p. 261

"These repeated forgeries and falsifications create a well-founded suspicion that all the cases spoken of concerning the person called Jesus Christ are made cases, on purpose to lug in, and that very clumsily, some broken sentences from the OT, and apply them as prophecies of those cases...." *The Life and Works of Paine*, Vol. 9, p. 269

"...it is immaterial to us, at this distance of time, to know who the person was: it is sufficient to the purpose I am upon, that of detecting fraud and falsehood, to know who it was not, and to show it was not the person called Jesus Christ." *Ibid.*, p. 239

"Were the NT now to appear for the first time every priest of the present day would examine it line by line, and compare the detached sentences it calls prophecies with the whole passages in the OT from whence they are taken. Why then do they not make the same examination at this time, as they would make had the NT never appeared before? If it be proper and right to make it in one case, it is equally proper and right to do it in the other case. Length of time can make no difference in the right to do it at any time. But, instead of doing this, they go on as their predecessors went on before them, to tell the people these are prophecies of Jesus Christ, when the truth is, there are none." *The Life and Works of Paine*, Vol. 9, p. 273.

"The prophecies of the OT can be made to fit anything that may happen, or that may not happen. They will apply to the death of a king, or to the destruction of a people,--to the loss of commerce, or the discovery of a continent. Each prophecy is a jugglery of words, of figures, of symbols, so put together, so used, so interpreted, that they can mean anything, everything, or nothing." *Ingersoll's Works, "Interviews,"* Vol. 5, p. 285.

"The prophecies are rarely read. It is difficult to sustain reader interest in their long and tedious nonsense. Cultured people who have read Gulliver and Atlantis know neither Hosea nor Ezekiel." *Voltaire on Religion by Kenneth Applegate*, p. 120

"Someone has said that the first soothsayer, the first prophet, was the first rascal who encountered a fool...." *Ibid.* p. 117

"The NT rests itself for credulity and testimony on what are called prophecies in the OT, of the person called Jesus Christ; and if there are no such things as prophecies of any such person in the OT, the NT is a forgery of the councils of Nice and Laodocia, and the faith founded thereon, delusion and falsehood." *The Theological Works of Thomas Paine*. 216.

"But if Jesus Christ was the person the church represents him to be, that which would exclusively apply to him, must be something that could not apply to any other person; something beyond the line of nature; something beyond the lot of mortal man; and there are no such expressions in this chapter, nor in any other chapter in the OT." *Ibid.* p. 239-40

[On Isa. 7:14] "This passage is in Isa. 7:14 and the writer of the book of Matthew endeavors to make his readers believe that this passage is a prophecy of the person Jesus Christ. It is no such thing." Ibid. p. 229

[On Matt. 2:23] "Here is good circumstantial evidence that Matthew dreamed, for there is no such passage in all the OT; and I invite the bishop and all the priests of Christendom, including those of America, to produce it." Ibid. p. 235

[On Hosea 11:1] "To make it apply to Jesus Christ, he must then be the person who sacrificed unto Baalam and burnt incense to graven images, for the person called out of Egypt by the collective name, Israel, and the persons committing this idolatry, are the same persons, or the descendants of them. This, then, can be no prophecy of Jesus Christ, unless they are willing to make an idolater of him." Ibid. p. 233.

[On Isa. 53] "This may be said of thousands of persons who have suffered oppressions and unjust death with patience, silence, and perfect resignation." Ibid. p. 240

PUNISHMENT--"They (the clergy--Ed.) must show that misery fits the good for heaven, while happiness prepares the bad for hell; that the wicked get all their good things in this life, and the good all their evil; that in this world God punishes the people he loves and in the next, the ones he hates; that happiness makes us bad here, but not in heaven; that pain makes us good here, but not in hell. No matter how absurd these things may appear....they must be preached and they must be believed." Ingersoll's Works, "Some Mistakes of Moses," Vol. 2, p. 18

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #421 from Robert Bowman of CRI Continues from Last Month (Part c)

Now, why did I stop writing to you? As I said earlier, it is because I felt that I was wasting my time. As evidence, consider the following points. (1) You never did respond to the second half of my letter of September 5, 1986, concerning the alleged circularity of McDowell and Stewart's argument from inspiration to inerrancy. I feel quite confident that you erred on this subject, and I suspect you know it. If you don't know it, then I have little confidence that you could benefit from any further attempts on my part to reason with you.

Editor's Response to Letter #421 (Part c)

I don't avoid any biblical subjects or theological discussions, Robert. Why on earth would a rational philosophy avoid discussing any subject with an irrational ideology? I have nothing to fear, while the opposition most assuredly does. If you honestly thought I was being equivocal, why didn't you write years ago and tell me you thought I was being evasive? As far as your specific question is concerned, if my memory serves me correctly because you a bringing up a topic that was discussed over 4 years ago, your point was so vacuous that it didn't really merit a reply. However, if you still feel slighted, please make your point again. I don't want to omit any "devastating" criticisms. I hope you realize that BE devoted more than 4 1/2 pages to your letters in Issues 50, 56 and 57. Few writers to BE have ever received as much air-time.

Letter #421 Continues (Part d)

In issue #56, your reply to my points about the authorship of the NT writings was condescending and largely irrelevant. I asked you for a list of "authorities" who question the Pauline authorship of the seven undisputed Pauline letters (Rom., 1 Cor., 2 Cor., Gal., Phil., 1 Thess., Philem.). You

gave me one scholar who questioned "the full authenticity" of four of these--Alfred Loisy. It should be noted that Loisy (who died in 1940) was writing mostly in the 1910's and 1920's, and that most of his extreme views (e.g., that Acts was written in the second century) have been completely abandoned by even the most liberal scholarship. (The scholar you quoted as endorsing Loisy, F.C. Conybeare, died in 1924!). In the postwar scholarship it is widely regarded as certain that these seven letters were written by Paul, and their authorship is not even debated. I can supply you with a list of scholarly references several pages long if necessary; but if it is necessary, then, frankly, you don't know anything about contemporary Pauline studies.

Editor's Response to Letter #421 (Part d)

To begin with Robert, my answers were neither irrelevant nor condescending. Yours, however, are quite irrelevant. The fact that you don't like the sources I cited and don't consider them reliable is as irrelevant as your recitation of the dates upon which they died. I have no doubt they consider most of your scholars to be of questionable integrity. As I have said before, when it comes to arguments over history, every man picks the sources he prefers. You asked for some scholars and I quoted two well-known men who are scholars whether you like them or not. For you to say that "these seven letters were written by Paul, and their authorship is not even debated" is absurd. I don't know of any book in the Bible whose authorship is not debated by knowledgeable scholars. You really should stop talking as if biblical conclusions were air-tight and fixed in granite.

Letter #421 Continues (Part e)

I also stated that Donald Guthrie's book *New Testament Introduction* thoroughly answers the arguments of liberal scholars (such as Loisy) whereas they continue to ignore most of Guthrie's arguments. In response you told me that I should devote more study to various scholars that you named. This is no answer. I am familiar with many of those scholars (especially Loisy, Renan, Briggs, Wellhausen, and Conybeare), and my point is that their arguments are answered by Guthrie (and others), but not the other way around. I am not interested in authorities as such but in the reasons they give for their views.

Editor's Response to Letter #421 (Part e)

You quote Guthrie as if he were the fountain of all truth, my friend. Just because you are enraptured with him, carries no weight with others, including myself. I have scholars who say something quite different. And I happen to feel that mine know more about the issue than yours. Even more importantly, you shifted your strategy. Earlier you said I could produce no authorities in support of my position. Now you are admitting there are such beings but contend they are wrong. "I am not interested in authorities as such but in the reasons they give for their views." That's a different issue entirely and a virtual concession that my original contention is valid.

Letter #421 Continues (Part f)

Your comments on the sanity of the author of Revelation show that it is you who are as difficult to pin down as it is to "nail jello to the wall" (as you said about Christian apologists). If you disagree with Ingersoll, Jefferson, and Paine, why did you quote them without qualification and with at least apparent approval? Of course you disavow having absolute certainty about the mental state of the author of Revelation, but so what? You did call into question his sanity, whether or not you "flatly said the author was insane," and you did so on flimsy grounds. That was my point. You say that you don't know anything about the mental state of the biblical

writers, but you feel free to offer the speculations of others. In my opinion, you are not interested in promoting truth, but in sowing doubt.

Editor's Response to Letter #421 (Part f)

Now you are really getting desperate! I said then, and will repeat now, that I don't know the mental state of the author of Revelation. But, that certainly does not prevent me from leaning toward those who have definite positions. And where did I say I disagreed with the individuals you mentioned? "Flimsy grounds" are more applicable to your attempt to push me into a definitive position and abolish my freedom to quote the "speculations," as you call them, of others. You mean I can't quote these people unless I wholeheartedly agree with their analysis? You mean I am like jello unless I endorse them 100%? You are exposing a major problem with religious people in general and Christians in particular. They view everything in terms of black and white and don't allow shades of gray to enter their purview. The "doubt" that is sown lies in your attempt to impugn my integrity. I said I didn't know his/her mental state; that does not prevent me from leaning one way or the other, while quoting those who have definite positions.

Letter #421 Continues (Part g)

In my last letter to you I stated, "I do not believe Jesus ever contradicted Himself," emphasizing "not" because I wanted to make sure the argument of my previous letter was not misunderstood as implying that He did. By failing to underline "not" when quoting me you obscured my point. Thus, your comment, "Again, what you or I believe is irrelevant, Robert," was itself irrelevant and inappropriate.

Editor's Response to Letter #421 (Part g)

Don't you think this is rather petty? Failure to underline the word "not" doesn't change the meaning of your sentence and you know it.

Letter #421 Concludes (Part h)

These are just some of the reasons why I chose not to take the time to continue writing to you. I am extremely busy and have to make hard choices about what I will and will not do. I think three carefully-written letters (and now four) to someone who slanders all Christian apologists as con men, offers speculations as fact and then plays agnostic, and refuses to admit it when he has erred, is quite enough. If I never write to you again (which remains to be seen), it will not be because there is anything to your slanderous accusations and speculative remarks, but because I don't consider answering worth my time.

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #421 (Part h)

To begin with, Robert, don't try to kid us. These aren't "some of the reasons," but the only ones you could dig up after considerable thought. Secondly, you are quite free with the word "slander," which normally pertains to pejoratives and ad hominem arguments. Could you relate some I have employed, especially in regard to you in particular? Thirdly, when have I ever "played" agnostic. My position on the existence of God has been clear from the beginning. The burden of proof lies on he who alleges. How is that "playing agnostic"? Fourthly, in so far as errors are concerned, I'd be glad to concede one's existence when you find one in our debate. And lastly, if your comments in your next letter are no better than those in this, you would, indeed, find answering not worth your time.

Letter #432 from James White of Alpha and Omega Ministries of Phoenix, Arizona (Part a)

Dear Mr. McKinsey. I had decided that your response in the September, 1990 issue of BE could be left to speak for itself, but in light of your willingness to print any and all ad hominem letters you could find in your mail-bag in the December, 1990 issue, I felt that some of your comments should be addressed.

The main thing to be noted in your response of September, 1990 was your continued misunderstanding of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. It is one thing to disagree with the Trinity; but it is obvious that you do not even have a basic understanding of the doctrine itself. You had alleged in the December, 1989 issue of BE that Jesus' statement in John 5:37 ("And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape") is contradicted by visions of Jehovah God in the OT. I pointed out that this is not so; that Jesus is speaking of the Father in John 5:37, and the One who is seen in the OT is the Son, Jesus Christ. Your response was typical of those who refuse to listen to what their opposition is saying. You wrote, "If you can use the Trinity at will, so can I. God and Jesus are identical, remember!" Please feel free to "use" the Trinity if you would like, but might I suggest that you learn what the doctrine is before you commit yourself to print? God and Jesus are identical? What does that mean? The doctrine of the Trinity states that there is one eternal being of God that is shared fully by three eternal persons, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Any person who would even glance at (for example) the Athanasian creed would know that the doctrine differentiates between the terms "being" and "person." One being, three persons. The Father is not the Son, Mr. McKinsey. So, your statement, "God and Jesus are identical, remember" is a meaningless one, only showing an abysmal lack of understanding of the doctrine itself. When you say the "text is guilty of a blatant lie" you are only showing how blatant is your ignorance of that which you seem only overjoyed to attack. When Jesus (the Son) said that no one had seen God's form or heard His voice, He was referring to the Father, and since it was the Son who was seen and heard in the OT, no contradiction exists, since the Son is not the Father.... I don't expect you to admit an error--you seemingly view yourself as being as inerrant as I believe the Scriptures to be--but others read your materials, and for their benefit I point out your error.

Editor's Response to Letter #432 (Part a)

Dear Mr. White. You began your monologue on the Trinity with the comment that I "do not even have a basic understanding of the doctrine itself." That is relatively easy to understand since neither you nor anyone else does either. The only human being who could understand the Trinity would be someone who could also visualize a square circle or a two-sided triangle. There is nothing to understand since the entire concept is preposterous on its face. Yes, Jesus is God; no he is man. Since that makes no sense, it is immediately changed to: No, he is the god/man, man and god simultaneously. And since that makes no sense either, many Christians are candid enough to admit it's a "mystery" that can't be understood by anybody. It has to be taken on faith. You claim that within the Godhead or "being" are three persons, each of which is God, but there is only one God. You have three distinct entities all of whom are God. That's three gods and the word "persons" can't be used to hide that fact. Moreover, you play a shell-game with the word "God," "being," or "Godhead." On the one hand, it represents a general term encompassing the persons within the Trinity and when expediency dictates it is immediately switched to represent an actual being whom you call God. Christians are often accused of being tritheists, believers in three gods--the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. When they try to turn the "Godhead" into a being, they could just as well be called quartheists. The Father is God; Jesus is God; the Holy Ghost is God, and the Godhead, or "being" as you call it, is God. What an absurdity! To make

matters worse, you ignore all the biblical verses that clearly say God is one and indivisible. There is none like him nor is there any beside him. He is a unity.

You say, "learn what the doctrine is before you commit yourself to print," while I suggest you learn what the doctrine is not before you commit yourself to print. The doctrine is not rational in any sense of the term. It is a hopeless muddle that must be taken on pure faith. There is nothing rational or logical involved. And for you to imply there is, only exposes the duplicity to which Christian apologists will go to foster an image at odds with reality. You say that "the doctrine of the Trinity states that there is one eternal being of God that is shared fully by three eternal persons, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit." Stop and think about what you just said, James. What does the metaphysical concept "shared fully" mean? You mean you have a being within a being? How could a being be within another being? Parasites live within other beings but they are still separate and distinct. They are in no sense the same being as you say God and Jesus are. You say that "any person who would even glance at (for example) the Athanasian creed would know that the doctrine differentiates between the terms 'being' and 'person'." No it doesn't. It merely says there is a difference. It doesn't prove it or even attempt to do so. It doesn't define it. It doesn't even quote scripture to prove it or show where scripture makes such a distinction. Even if the Bible made such an assertion, logic is clearly to the contrary. It merely says as much and you are supposed to believe. The Catholic Church wrote that creed and you have swallowed it completely. That's pure, blind faith, my friend. Incidentally, according to your rendition of John 1:18 ("No man has seen God at any time, the unique God, who is in the bosom of the Father...") the Father encompasses God, not the other way around. Consequently, if either one is greater than the other, then the Father must be greater than God.

You say, "The Father is not the son, Mr. McKinsey." There you go again, off into the wild blue yonder. Is Jesus God? According to you, yes. Is the Father God? According to you, yes. Therefore, James, if you will consult a basic logic book you will learn the simplicity of your error. Two things equal to a third are equal to each other. If Jesus is God and the Father is God, then, it logically follows that Jesus is identical to the Father. You say, "The Father is not the Son." Oh, yes he is! Under your line of reasoning, he has to be. I can remember debating several fundamentalists many years ago on this point. They said Jesus is God and the Father is God, but that does not mean Jesus and the Father are the same. An analogous situation according to them is that a cat is an animal and a dog is an animal, but that doesn't mean a cat is a dog. The error of their ways lies in the fact that they failed to realize that "cat" is not equal to "animal." Neither is "dog." Jesus, however, is identical to God and so is the Father. Therefore, Jesus and the Father must be identical to each other. Moreover, the word "animal" does not represent a "being" or "person." Like the word "Godhead" it's nothing more than a general term, a rubric, a category like the words "mankind" or "humanity." It does not refer to a specific, living being or person of some sort. You can talk to the latter; you can't converse with an abstraction. You can talk to a beautiful lady; but you can't converse with beauty.

To put it another way, either Jesus is God or he isn't. If he is God as you claim, then God and Jesus are identical. Otherwise they differ in some respect, in which case he couldn't be God. If they differ in any respect, be it ever so minute, then he lacks a quality possessed by God or vice versa. What you want is for two things to be the same but not be identical. Here, again, your muddle is exposed. If two things are the same, then they are identical. If they differ in any respect, whatever, then they are neither the same nor identical. Plainly put, if Jesus is not the same as God, then he isn't God.

As far as your specific problem is concerned, I thought this was cleared up earlier. Apparently not; so let's go over it again. You say I erred by alleging "in the December, 1989 issue of BE that Jesus' statement in John 5:37 ('And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of

me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape") is contradicted by visions of Jehovah God in the OT. I (James--Ed.) pointed out that this is not so; that Jesus is speaking of the Father in John 5:37, and the One who is seen in the OT is the Son, Jesus Christ." In the first place, why do you have this mind-fix on visions. As I said on page 6 of the 93rd Issue, which was a repeat of what I said in the Dec. 1989 Issue, Jesus said in John 5:37 that nobody had heard the Father at any time. Secondly, there is nothing in the OT text that says that was Jesus with whom they conversed in Gen. 3:8-10, Ex. 19:19 and Job 38:1. That is merely an assumption you are making to escape the dilemma. Thirdly, and most importantly, Jesus, God, and the Father are all identical. So, if he talked to God, and the text clearly says he did, then he talked to the Father in direct contradiction to John 5:37. And fourthly, on page 6 of the Sept. 1990 Issue you referred to John 1:18 when that wasn't even part of the original contradiction.

If there is any "abysmal lack of understanding," James, it lies in your failure to recognize the subtle indoctrination by which you have been victimized. You are living proof of why religion in general and the Bible in particular should be kept away from people in general and children in particular. Metaphysics warps the brain and twists the thoughts. After all, why wouldn't people who believe that persons can rise from the dead, sticks can turn into snakes, individuals can turn into pillars of salt, and donkeys can talk also believe in square circles and two-sided triangles? It doesn't take a great deal of wisdom to see that anyone who would believe in the former would also accept the latter. For them nothing would be too absurd, including the Trinity. [TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT MONTH]

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #433 from JG of Cincinnati, Ohio

Dear Dennis.... Would you please send references of bible verses and/or your issue numbers which list data concerning Jesus' brothers. I have all 100 issues. I spend some nights in motels. Is it all right to leave your pamphlet, "The bible is god's word?" in the gideon bible? Keep up the good work. You are unique in your approach and I hope the future gives you your well deserved recognition for a job well done.

Editor's Response to Letter #433

Dear JG. The verses with respect to Jesus having brothers are Mark 6:3 and Matt. 12:46. A chain reference Bible will give you more. If the Gideon's can leave their Bible's lying around public accommodations, I don't see why you can't leave your literature.

Letter #434 from ET of Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Hello.... Thank you for being out there! I am a volunteer women's health clinic defender and am nose-to-nose with these guys Daily. I'm glad to have some ammo for the offensive for once.

Letter #435 from TS of Edgewood, New Mexico

Dear Dennis. Just a short letter to order back issues 37-48 and to comment on the Adam-as-a-perfect-man theme which surfaced in your pamphlet and in back issues of BE.

Item # 3 in your pamphlet, The Bible is God's Word? states, God created Adam so he must have been perfect. How, then, could he have sinned? Regardless of how much free will he had, if he chose to sin, he wasn't perfect." Your logic has proved devastating to most believers I confront; however, for the few holdouts I continue in the following vein.

The question I ask biblicists is, "How could Adam have been created 'perfect' in the first place if he did not know good and evil?" One might concede, for the sake of argument, that Adam, as originally created, did receive a "perfect" body, that he was "perfectly" obedient (temporarily, at least!), or "perfect" in any number of other ways. However, in terms of knowledge, and more importantly, in terms of Adam's moral nature, he was quite deficient, hence imperfect. The scriptures state as much.

Adam's original ignorant state is strongly implied in Genesis 2:17 ("But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it....") and 3:5 ("For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil"), but blatantly confirmed later in Genesis 3:22 ("And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil...."). In 3:22 we learn that after Adam eats the forbidden fruit, God says, "Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil. My point is that in his previous condition, Adam could not have been perfect since he was oblivious to good and evil. To accept the notion of a "perfect" being not knowing good and evil or right and wrong is much like acknowledging as "perfect" a physician who is oblivious to health and disease! Furthermore, if the scriptures are true and Adam was unaware of the concept of good and evil, or oblivious to the inherent moral polarity of his actions, then biblicists are stuck with a new dilemma. God's perfect creation could not have had a conscience! Like a child, he could not be held accountable. Yet, look at the punishment that followed. Did the punishment fit the crime? Even our mere human courts take into account an accused person's inability to comprehend right and wrong. Young children and mentally defective defendants are granted special consideration so that justice might be tempered by mercy. Not so in the case of Adam.

....I am learning, since reading BE, to be more self-critical in presenting arguments against the biblicists. Your arguments are concise and well reasoned and are a model to emulate. I am deeply appreciative of your efforts and reassured with every issue that not everyone "out there" is plunging into ignorance and darkness. Thanks.

Letter #436 from JG of Ridgecrest, California

Dear Dennis. A note on the "FFRF vs. BE" controversy. Freethought Today is how I found out about you. I discovered FFRF from the media publicity over the Gideon bibles. Their Bible warning label appeared in an illustration in Playboy. I had to use a magnifying glass, but I got the address. I would have joined both BE and FFRF years ago if I had been aware of their existence. Keep up the good work.

Editor's Response to Letter #436

Dear JG. It's good that you found both of us. However, "controversy" is not an appropriate term for one to use in describing the conversations between Dan and myself. I would say "Dialogue" is more applicable and that's why it was included in that section. Dan and I have none of the ill will that is normally associated with the word "controversy."

Letter #437 from RL of Burnaby, British Columbia

Dear Dennis.... my donation comes to ----. It's not a lot but if it helps to defray the cost of your most important publication, then please accept it with my thanks to you for your very, very important work, i.e., trying to bring logic and sanity into a terribly illogical and insane society! I think if there is, or ever was, a supreme being, he or it must be aghast and appalled at the almost total lunacy that goes on here!

God's green earth? No, not if he exists; he must be disgusted!!! Peace on earth; love thy neighbor; love thine enemy! Oh (expletive deleted)!! So continue your work Dennis, and thanks a million.

Letter #438 from BW of Shreveport, Louisiana

Dear Mr. McKinsey. I have received and read your sample issue of Biblical Errancy, and enjoyed it immensely. I've long understood that one can't shake the religious person from his intellectual stupor without first knocking the prop out from under his beliefs. And that prop is the idea of an "inerrant Bible." Until recently, I wasn't aware of any publications devoted to this theme. Luckily, I spotted your advertisement in Freethought Today Your research and effort is appreciated.

Letter #439 from JP of Seattle, Washington

Dennis. I think your new print format is excellent! Good job on B.E. I think your newsletter is the most valuable current resource exposing the errors of the Bible available today.

Regarding letter #431 from LD in Issue #101. The argument he was "stumped" with is a general argument used by apolgists who are ignorant of the consequences of their own position. Little do they know that while they argue that God could exist in a part of reality unknown to a person, it is possible, given their own lack of knowledge, that there is no God and that they are mistaken for believing there is! Simply put, if they admit to not knowing all there is to know, then perhaps there is some unknown aspect of knowledge that undermines their belief that a god is real; for that matter there could be some unknown aspect of knowledge which would undermine their belief in Inerrancy! Of course, if LD were to argue in this way, then the apologists would scream obscenities at him.

LD should not be dismayed by arguments like the one he was presented: Christians are in the habit of believing in those things which they trust can't be known, but their habit is not intelligible since if one can't understand what one believes in, then one hasn't knowledge or truth.

In brief, LD could simply retort to the apologist's "argument from ignorance" that if a god inhabits an aspect of reality not knowable in principle, then no one can know there is a god: including the apologist asserting such absurdities!

Issue No. 103

July 1991

COMMENTARY

This month's commentary will continue the alphabetical listing of notable quotes that was resumed last month.

QUOTATIONS

(PART 7)

REDEMPTION--"Is it a fact that Jesus Christ died for the sins of the world, and how is it proved? If a God, he could not die, and as a man he could not redeem." The Life and Works of Thomas Paine, Vol. 9, p. 85

"If a God, he could not suffer death, for immortality cannot die, and as a man his death could be no more than the death of any other person." Ibid. p. 108

"The Christian religion is derogatory to the Creator in all its articles. It puts the Creator in an inferior point of view, and places the Christian devil above him. It is he, according to the absurd story in Genesis, that outwits the Creator in the Garden of Eden, and steals from Him His favorite creature, man, and at last obliges Him to beget a son, and put that son to death, to get man back again; and this the priests of the Christian religion call redemption." Ibid. p. 295

"The story of the redemption will not stand examination. That man should redeem himself from the sin of eating an apple by committing a murder on Jesus Christ, is the strangest system of religion ever set up." Ibid. p. 86

When men are taught to ascribe all their crimes and vices to the temptations of the devil, and to believe that Jesus, by his death rubs all off, and pays their passage to heaven gratis, they become as careless in morals as a spendthrift would be of money were he told his father had engaged to pay off all his scores. It is a doctrine not only dangerous to morals in this world but to our happiness in the next world, because it holds out such a cheap, easy and lazy way of getting to heaven." Ibid. p. 108-109

"...for if what is called the fall of man, in Genesis, be fabulous or allegorical, that which is called the redemption in the NT, cannot be a fact." The Theological Works of Thomas Paine. 277

RELIGION--"Religion is superstition running away from truth, and afraid of being overtaken"
Anonymous

"Religion is as helpful as throwing a drowning man both ends of a rope." Anonymous

As a rule, religion is a sanctified mistake, and heresy a slandered fool." Anonymous

"So far as religion of the day is concerned, it is a damned fake.... Religion is all bunk." Thomas Edison

"Truth in matters of religion, is simply the opinion that has survived." Oscar Wilde

"Religion is regarded by the common people as true, by the wise as false and by the rulers as useful." Seneca

"The world is my country, and to do good my religion." Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 1, p. 131

"The church is, and always has been, incapable of a forward movement. Religion always looks back." Ibid. p. 151

"...religion is one of the phases of thought through which the world is passing." "The Ghosts," Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 1, p. 322

"No man of any humor ever founded a religion--never. Humor sees both sides." "What Must I Do To Be Saved," Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 1, p. 518

"What has religion to do with facts? Nothing." "Some Mistakes of Moses," Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 2, p. 27

"If the people were a little more ignorant, astrology would flourish--if a little more enlightened, religion would perish." Ibid., p. 25

"The most detestable wickedness, the most horrid cruelties, and the greatest miseries, that have afflicted the human race, have had their origin in this thing called revelation, or revealed religion. It has been the most dishonorable belief against the character of the divinity, the most destructive to morality, and the peace and happiness of man, that ever was propagated since man began to exist." The Age of Reason, Paine, p. 184

"Of all the tyrannies that afflict mankind, tyranny in religion is the worst. Every other species of tyranny is limited to the world we live in, but this attempts to stride beyond the grave and seeks to pursue us into eternity." The Life and Works of Thomas Paine, Vol. 8, p. 311

"Long ago, someone said that fools found religions, but the prudent govern them." Voltaire on Religion by Kenneth Applegate, p. 131

"My principal objections to orthodox religion are two--slavery here and hell hereafter." Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 8, p. 41

"Man has never been at a loss for gods. He has worshipped almost everything, including the vilest and most disgusting beasts." Ingersoll's Works, "The Gods," Vol. 1, p. 25

"Man is the religious animal. He is the only religious animal. He is the only animal that has the True Religion--several of them." Letters from the Earth, Mark Twain

"Some people think that all the equipment you need to discuss religion is a mouth." Herman Wouk

"The absurdity of a religious practice may be clearly demonstrated without lessening the number of persons who indulge in it." Anatole France

"This would be the best of all possible worlds, if there were no religion in it." John Adams as quoted by Thomas Jefferson in The Theological Works of Thomas Paine. IV

RELIGIOUS PROFESSORS--"They are all about the same. The professors, for the most part, are ministers who failed in the pulpit and were retired to the seminary on account of their deficiency in reason and their excess of faith. As a rule, they know nothing of this world, and far less of the next; but they have the power of stating the most absurd propositions with faces solemn as stupidity touched by fear." "Some Mistakes of Moses, Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 2, p. 21

REVELATION--"It is often said in the Bible that God spoke unto Moses, but how do you know that God spake unto Moses? Because, you will say, the Bible says so. The Koran says, 'that God spake unto Mahomet, do you believe that too? No. Why not? Because, you will say, you do not believe it; and so because you do, and because you don't is all the reason you can give for believing or disbelieving, except you will say that Mahomet was an imposter. And how do you know Moses was not an imposter? The Theological Works of Thomas Paine. 162

"As to the people called Christians, they have no evidence that their religion is true. There is no more proof that the Bible is the Word of God, than the Koran of Mohammed is the Word of God." The Life and Works of Thomas Paine, Vol. 9, p. 294

"...you do not see that when you tell people to believe in revelation, you must first prove that what you call revelation, is revelation; and as you cannot do this, you put the word, which is easily spoken, in the place of the thing you cannot prove. You have no more evidence that your Gospel is revelation than the Turks have that their Koran is revelation,...." The Life and Works of Thomas Paine, Vol. 9, p. 133

"It is a contradiction in terms and ideas to call anything a revelation that comes to us at second hand, either verbally or in writing. Revelation is necessarily limited to the first communication. After this, it is only an account of something which that person says was a revelation made to him; and though he may find himself obliged to believe it, it cannot be incumbent on me to believe it in the same manner, for it was not a revelation made to me, and I have only his word for it that it was made to him." The Age of Reason, Thomas Paine, p. 24

"It is impossible to tell where revelations stop and hallucinations begin." Anonymous

[Revelations, The Book of]--"In Revelation, the insanest of all books,...." "The Devil," Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 4, p. 387

[Revelations, The Book of]--"These books, beginning with Genesis and ending with Revelation's (which, by the bye, is a book of riddles that requires a revelation to explain it)...." The Age of Reason, Thomas Paine, p. 32

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #432 from James White of A & O Ministries Continues from Last Month (Part b)

You printed a letter from Mr. Jeff Frankel (#393) in which he writes such things as, "I have never dealt with anyone so arrogant, unreasonable and mean-spirited as White," and this is followed by a comparison between myself and Madalyn Murray O'Hair! What is fascinating about this is that Mr. Frankel has never spoken to me, nor has he ever written to me. We have never had any contact whatsoever. He wrote a horridly flawed article for Steven Overholt's Frontline. I wrote to Mr. Overholt, pointed out the many, many errors in Frankel's article, and asked if I could use the article as a further example of the flawed arguments of critics of the Bible. I assume this is the letter Mr. Frankel mentions in letter #392. How Mr. Frankel could presume to make these character judgments without ever having spoken to me, or even corresponded with me, is beyond comprehension. Christian theists cannot respond to Mr. Frankel in the same way he treats us, but the unreasonableness of his position should be pointed out. Also, Mr. Frankel has not bothered to provide this information to me! Possibly you would be kind enough to provide me with this letter, since Mr. Frankel does not seem willing to actually talk and discuss the issues?

Editor's Response to Letter #432 (Part b)

You say that Jeff has not only never written or spoken to you but you have never had any contact whatsoever. You say, "How Mr. Frankel could presume to make these character judgments without ever having spoken to me, or even corresponded with me, is beyond comprehension." But you admit you criticized an article he wrote for Frontline. Couldn't that be classified as a contact and wouldn't he be justified in making some observations about your accuracy and integrity based upon your three-page critique? As far as the Howard Teeple letter is concerned, I understand that a copy is now in your hands. Since you and Jeff are both subscribers to BE and I am neither directly involved in your dispute nor privy to all that has transpired, I'll withdraw at this point and assume both of you will proceed as you see fit.

Letter #432 Concludes (Part c)

As far as Mr. Sikos' letter (#393) is concerned, which was again little more than character assassination, I will only mention that I attempted to converse civilly with Mr. Sikos, but, upon demonstration that he could not maintain a conversation on any kind of logical, rational or civil basis, I informed him that further time would not be spent responding to his endless ad hominem. Are you going to dedicate further space in BE to this kind of writing? Is BE's purpose to do nothing but engage in name-calling and insults of Christian apologists? Mr. Sikos' letter is a tremendous example of the level of thought and behavior of the common anti-Christian. Is this the future direction of Biblical Errancy?

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #432 (Part c)

For you to talk about character assassination is rather incongruous, James, when your letters are nearly always liberally sprinkled with pejoratives and disparaging personal attacks. You repeatedly denounce ad hominem comments while remaining one of their staunchest proponents. In this letter, alone, you slandered my competency at least six times, and in every instance were wide of the mark. As far as John Sikos is concerned, I'll let him speak for himself. He knows better than I what has transpired between both of you and is quite able to defend his actions. You ask if BE's purpose is "to do nothing but engage in name-calling and insults of Christian apologists." A comment of this subterranean level isn't worthy of a response and only highlights the lack of integrity in your entire defense of the Bible. I challenge you to find another publication of comparable scope and content that exhibits less name-calling and ad hominem argumentation. Indeed, BE has always prided itself on almost rigid adherence to direct quotations, facts, specifics, details, evidence, and proof. We can say without fear of exaggeration that BE has always relegated theories, beliefs, attitudes, suppositions, and conclusions to a secondary status. As in a court of law, we have always sought to let the facts speak for themselves. Unlike apologetic literature, the future direction of BE will always be towards the creation of a more rational and correctly-informed populace.

Letter #440 from Jerry MacDonald, Editor of CHALLENGE, in Sullivan, Missouri (Part a)

[Fundamentalist Christian Apologist Jerry MacDonald inserted the following in his Spring 1991 Issue of CHALLENGE--ED.].

In this editorial we will be addressing objections to the harmony of the Bible which appeared in the Autumn 1990 issue of The Skeptical Review, edited by Farrell Till, and in the February 1983 issue of Biblical Errancy, edited by Dennis McKinsey. We will look at Mr. Till's objections first....

Now to deal with some of the objections raised by Mr. McKinsey in his publication Biblical Errancy.

(1) The Resurrection: On page one Mr. McKinsey points out that many people were raised from the dead, both before and after Christ was. He wanted to know why Christ's resurrection meant more than these other resurrections. One answer is that Jesus was the only one who was raised to die no more. All of these others died again after they were raised.

Editor's Response to Letter #440 (Part a)

I've heard that response on the radio several times, JM. Two major flaws are immediately evident to anyone who is acquainted with the text. First, how do you know they died again? That's an

assumption on your part. Where does the Bible say as much? You are writing your own script, my friend. Elijah (2 Kings 2:11) and apparently Enoch (Gen. 5:22-24) never died at all; they just went straight to heaven. How do you know that the individuals Jesus raised from the dead didn't follow in their predecessor's footsteps? You are making an allegation for which there is not a shred of biblical testimony. Secondly, Paul doesn't rely upon your argumentation. In 1 Cor. 15:14 RSV ("if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain") and 1 Cor. 15:17 ("But if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins") Paul says it is the Resurrection that matters, not the fact that these people died again. Where are you getting your "biblically-based" theology? It's the Resurrection that counts, not what happened afterwards. This point was made by me in the second paragraph of the first page of the second Issue.

Letter #440 Continues (Part b)

Jesus the Imperfect Beacon: On page three Mr. McKinsey tries to show that Jesus was not perfect because of (what Mr. McKinsey calls) false statements and inaccurate prophecies he made.

(a) John 7:8-10 KJV says, "Go ye up to this feast: I go not up yet (emp. added) unto this feast; for my time is not yet full come." Mr. McKinsey used the RSV which left the word yet out of the phrase: "...I am not going up to this feast..." However, even the RSV has the phrase: "...for my time is not yet come" to show that he was not going at that time, but that he would go later.

Editor's Response to Letter #440 (Part b)

You are having trouble reading the text, JM. What does Jesus say in the RSV. He says, and I quote, "Go to the feast yourselves; I am not going up to this feast, for my time has not yet fully come." And what did he do? He immediately went. In other words, he lied. He said he was not going and immediately broke his word. For you to use the phrase in the RSV that 'my time is not yet come' to show he was not going at that time, but later, is no defense at all. He said he wasn't going until his time came, which was later; yet, he went immediately. The text even says he sneaked up; he went up secretly or "in private."

Letter #440 Continues (Part c)

In [E] on page three Mr. McKinsey refers to the fact that Jesus instructed men not to call others "fools" (Matt. 5:22) only to turn around and call the Pharisees "fools" (Matt. 23:17, 19, Luke 11:40). Matthew 5:22 is dealing with anger which leads to murder in the heart. In Matthew 23 and Luke 11:20 he was merely showing them how foolish they were for following their traditions and practices.

Editor's Response to Letter #440 (Part c)

Where are you getting this, JM? There is nothing in the text that justifies such an arbitrary distinction. By creating a rationalization of this nature out of whole cloth, you have only demonstrated your continuing adherence to eisegesis. The fact is that Jesus said don't call other people "fools," period. No provisos, limitations, or restrictions are attached. Yet, later he ignored his own maxim.

Letter #440 Continues (Part d)

In part H on page 3 Mr. McKinsey quoted Matt. 27:46 ("...My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me") and asked how Jesus could be our savior when he couldn't even save himself. This is the same charge the Jews threw at him (Matt. 27:42). Did it ever occur to Mr. McKinsey that Jesus' purpose was not to save himself but to die?

Editor's Response to Letter #440 (Part d)

Did it ever occur to you, JM, that if that were his purpose he never would have made such an inane statement? Why would anyone complain about being forsaken, when they were dying willingly? If that were his purpose, he would have made a statement such as, "I am glad you have not seen fit to save me."

Letter #440 Continues (Part e)

On page four Mr. McKinsey wanted to know how the ark could have rested on more than one mountain at the same time. The mountains of Ararat are a range of mountains like the Rocky mountains. If a person drives up one of the Rocky mountains, that person is said to have driven up the Rocky mountains.

Editor's Response to Letter #440 (Part e)

To begin with, I know of nothing on page 4 of the second Issue that pertains to the mountains of Ararat, JW. In one of our issues, however, I did quote Gen. 8:4 ("And the ark rested in the 7th month, on the 17th day of the month, upon the mountains of Ararat") and asked how one ship could have rested on several mountains at once. I am always amused when fundamentalists resort to the very tactic they decry in liberal Christians. When the going gets tough they, too, shift from literal to figurative interpretations of scripture. This instance is no exception. The Bible is suppose to be precise. Indeed, it is suppose to be the most precise, the most accurate book ever written. It would have to be if it were the word of a perfect being. And what does the Bible say? It says "mountains" plural, not a mountain.

As far as your Rocky Mountain analogy is concerned, when someone says they have driven up the Rocky Mountains they are in error, if one is to be precise. One may have said he drove up the Rocky Mountains but, in fact, he didn't. Are we to expect no more precision from the perfect book, God's word, than one would find in daily slang?

Moreover, when someone says he has driven up the Rocky Mountains, he may very well have driven on more than one mountain as I have done on several occasions. It is rather hard to drive up the Rockies while staying on one mountain alone, while landing a ship on more than one mountain simultaneously is virtually impossible and further demonstrates that your Rocky Mountain analogy is specious.

Letter #440 Concludes (Part f)

Neither Mr. Till, nor Mr. McKinsey have brought up anything that poses any real problem to the Bible inerrancy doctrine. If they care to defend their arguments, Challenge is now open for them to do so.... Mr. McKinsey is now invited to defend his arguments which were answered in the editorial of this issue....

Editor's Response to Letter #440 (Part f)

With all due respect, JM, you addressed my arguments while failing to answer them. I'm not sure you realize how frivolous some of your answers are. Nor do I think you fully realize the magnitude of the tarbabies into which you so amateurishly leaped with glee. As I have often advised new kids on the block in past issues, you should have first consulted more knowledgeable defenders of the Bible who are more aware of the Bible's inadequacies. McDowell, Haley, and Archer are three that come to mind. One can tell from their writings that they have really wrestled with the kinds of problems presented in BE.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #441 from GN of Phoenix, Arizona

Dear Dennis. Always enjoy Biblical Errancy. The December issue was no exception. It was mentioned that Christians often put faith in the Bible because it is inconceivable that those who were supposed to have been eyewitnesses to the resurrection wouldn't have suffered death for something that didn't happen. Is there any evidence that proves that the writers were who they said they were? Was the author of Matthew really an eyewitness to the resurrection? Can we prove that? Can we prove that the Bible writers actually DID suffer death for what they believed or is the method of their death only a tradition of the Catholic Church. The Bible does not mention how the Apostles died. Since the Bible is the source of all Christian truth, the supposed manner of the death of the Apostles is irrelevant. Most of the beliefs about the deaths of the Apostles are simply Catholic tradition and have nothing to do with historical accuracy and truth. It is true that very few if any people would die for a fraud that they themselves had perpetuated, but the truth of the matter is that we cannot prove who actually wrote the gospels, much less how they died. Others, of course, who believed the lie would be very inclined to die for their beliefs, the same as they are willing to do so today, some 2,000 years later. Keep up the good work. I love each and every issue and all the back issues too.

Letter #442 from EB of Wayne, Michigan

Dear Dennis.... I gave one of your "The Bible is God's Word?" pamphlets to a preacher at work in Dec. 1990, and still haven't gotten back an answer. I like to tell them to "correct" it and give me an answer. They really get stumped! Keep up the good work!

Letter #443 from Farrell Till, P.O. Box 617, Canton, Illinois 61520 (Part a)

Dear Mr. McKinsey. Among other things, the material you quoted from JEWS FOR JUDAISM in the December 1990 issue of BE pointed out that the disciples didn't expect Jesus to be resurrected. If they really didn't expect his resurrection, they must have been incredibly dense, because Jesus presumably told them on various occasions that he would rise again. Matt. 16:21 says, "From that time began Jesus to show unto his disciples that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised up."

He told them this again in Matthew 17:22-23 and then again in Matt. 20:17-19. Parallel statements are recorded in Mark 9:31; 10:34 and Luke 9:22; 18:33. Luke's account of the resurrection even had one of the angels reminding the women at the tomb that Jesus had told them of his impending resurrection: "Remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying that the Son of man must be delivered up unto the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again" (24:6-7). Upon hearing this, Luke said that "they (the women) remembered his words" (v. 8). Well, they may have remembered, but the apostles apparently didn't remember, because John claimed that even while they were viewing the empty

tomb "as yet they knew not the scripture that he must rise again from the dead" (20:9). Luke said that Peter stooped, looked into the empty tomb, and then "departed to his home, wondering at that which was come to pass" (24:12).

Editor's Response to Letter #443 (Part a)

Dear Farrell. As I read your letter you began by proving that the JEWS FOR JUDAISM erred when they contended that the disciples of Jesus did not expect the latter's resurrection. But because your last two sentences reveal a textual conflict with verses you quoted earlier, I can only conclude that you started out to expose an error by JEWS FOR JUDAISM and ended up revealing a biblical contradiction instead. I trust I am reading you correctly.

Letter #443 Concludes (Part b)

We have to wonder why the people who had been with Jesus and had been warned to expect his resurrection would not have remembered those warnings, because certainly his enemies did. On the day after Jesus was buried, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate and said, "Sir, we remember what that deceiver said while he was yet alive, After three days I will rise again" (Matt. 27:63). They then requested that the sepulcher be made sure until the third day so that his disciples could not steal the body and then claim a resurrection. Isn't it strange that the enemies of Jesus remembered nothing at all about it? Inconsistencies like these render the Bible text completely unbelievable except to gullible people who will believe anything.

Letter #444 from JW of Richmond, Virginia

Mr. McKinsey. Thank you for your excellent work. You are the best. I have never objected to people believing as they chose--as long as they let me believe as I choose. But recently I found there is more. Several people close to me have been adversely affected in their lives by the beliefs of the apologists. I am distressed. And I am ashamed that I have been relatively passive. You are my champion....

Editor's Response to Letter #444

Dear JW. You are correct. There is more, and that is why we have always stressed an active "missionary" agenda for freethought by people of our persuasion. The live and let live approach just won't suffice. Even if we were not adversely affected to a major degree, which is false, loved ones often are.

EDITOR'S NOTE: (a) Have you ever wondered where a certain piece of information was located in BE; I have. Over the years we have had many people ask us where a topic was covered or mentioned and, frankly, I've been at a loss for words. Unfortunately, I don't have BE memorized. But some help has finally arrived. An enterprising subscriber in Texas decided to create an index to nearly all of the topics we mentioned in our first 8 years of publication. The result is a 13 page, single-spaced, summation with nearly 1,000 entries that can now be purchased for whatever you deem appropriate. We'll let your conscience be your guide. How is that for an offer you can't refuse!

(b) Please let us know if you move to a new mailing address. The post office does not forward bulk mailings. Several subscribers have moved recently and failed to receive several of our latest issues.

(c) The recent change in the format of BE has not only given it a more professional appearance but generated two additional improvements. Several readers have noted that it is considerably easier to read. In addition, we have increased the amount of information contained therein approximately 10 to 30% depending on the font and spacing used, even though the amount of white-space has also increased.

Issue No. 104

August 1991

This month's commentary will resume the exposure of Accommodations that was last discussed in the March 1991 issue. As was noted in March, Accommodations can be divided into three major categories: Misquotations, Nonquotes, and Misinterpretations. All of our misquotations were aired in Parts 1, 2, and 3 in the January, February, and March issues, respectively. This month's Part 4 will cover our Nonquotes, which are defined as NT quotes of non-existent OT passages.

ACCOMMODATIONS

(Part 4)

Nonquotes--(34) MATT. 2:23 ("...that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, He shall be called a Nazarene") does not refer to any OT passage. Judges 13:5 ("...for the child shall be a Nazarite") is not relevant because: (a) Judges 13:5-7, 16-17 clearly show that Samson is the Nazarite referred to; (b) A Nazarite was not an inhabitant of Nazareth, and (c) Nazarenes are a sect as Acts 24:5 ("...a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes...") shows. They are not residents of Nazareth. (35) MATT. 12:5 says, "...have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless?" Yet, nowhere does it state in the OT that the priests in the temple profaned the sabbath and were considered blameless. Numbers 28:9-10 says nothing that is relevant. (36) MATT. 23:35 says, "That upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel unto the blood of Zacharias son of Barachias, whom ye slew between the temple and the altar"). Yet, the name, Barachias, is not in the OT. Zacharias is actually the son of Jehoida as is shown in 2 Chron. 24:20-22 ("And the spirit of God came upon Zechariah the son of Jehoida the priest, which stood above the people...."). (37) MATT. 26:56 says, "But all this was done, that the scriptures of the prophets might be fulfilled." But no quotation from the OT is provided nor is the name of the biblical author given. (38) MARK 1:2 says, "As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, 'Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, who shall prepare thy way.'" But there is no such statement in Isaiah. (39) MARK 9:13 says, "But I say unto you, That Elias is indeed come, and they have done unto him whatsoever they listed, as it is written of him." But there are no prophecies in the OT of things that were to happen to Elias. (40) LUKE 13:4 says, "...or those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them...." It should be noted that there is nothing in the OT about a tower in Siloam falling on anyone. (41) LUKE 24:46 says, "And said unto them, Thus it is written, And thus it behooved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day...." Nothing is written in the OT about Christ rising from the dead. Hosea 6:1-2 ("Come, and let us return unto the Lord; for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up. After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight") does not apply for several reasons. (a) It is referring to several beings as is shown by verse one ("and let us return unto the Lord"). (b) The Lord never tore and smote Jesus as is stated in verse 1. (c) Verse 2 says, "After two days will he revive us: in the third day he will raise us up." Nowhere does the NT say Jesus was revived after two days. (d) Verse 3 says, "let us press on to know the Lord." How could Jesus learn anything additional about the

Lord when he allegedly is the Lord? (e) "He will raise us up" shows that the resurrection of several beings is being referred to. (42) JOHN 1:45 says, "...We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." To begin with, Moses did not write the law or the Torah (See: Moses and the Pentateuch in Issues #19 & #20). Therefore, he could not have written about Jesus of Nazareth. In fact, none of the OT prophets wrote of Jesus, which would include Moses, who supposedly wrote the Pentateuch. (See: Messianic Prophecies in Issues #76-80). (43) JOHN 7:38 ("He that believeth in me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water") is not in the OT. None of the following verses is applicable: Isa. 44:3 ("For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon thy dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring...."), Isa. 55:1 ("every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters...."), Ezek. 47:1 ("...And, behold, waters issued out from under the threshold of the house eastward...."), Isa. 58:11 ("And the Lord shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose water fail not"), Zech. 13:3, 14:8, Prov. 18:4, or Isa. 12:3. (44) JOHN 20:9 says, "For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead." Two problems showing the inapplicability of this verse are: (a) There is no OT statement that he (Jesus) must rise from the dead nor is there a suggestion anywhere in the OT of a 2nd Coming or a rising again from the dead. (b) "Again" means that he rose from the dead more than once and since Jesus allegedly rose only once, it could not be applied to him regardless. (45) ACTS 20:35 says, "...ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'." At no time did Jesus ever say, "It is more blessed to give than receive." Matt. 10:8 ("...freely ye have received, freely give") has no relevance since neither giving nor receiving is considered to be more blessed than the other. (46) ROM. 2:24 says, "For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written." But, nowhere in the OT, including Isa. 52:5 and 2 Sam. 12:14 does it say that the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you. The former says it is God's people who are doing the blaspheming while the latter attributes it to David. (47) ROM. 10:11 says, "For the scripture saith, 'Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed'," even though there is no such statement in the OT. Isa. 28:16 ("...he that believeth shall not make haste"), Jer. 17:7 ("Blessed is the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is"), and Joel 2:32 ("...whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be delivered...") just don't apply. (48) FIRST COR. 15:4-6 says, "...that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the Scriptures: and that he was seen of Cephas (Peter), then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once...." Yet, no gospel says that Peter saw Jesus before the twelve. Moreover, nowhere in the gospels does it state that 500 people saw Jesus at one time after the Resurrection. Five hundred people never, at any time, stated that they saw Jesus alive after the Crucifixion. Paul said 500 people saw as much. We only have his word for this. (49) FIRST COR. 15:7 says, "After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles." No gospel says James saw Jesus. (50) EPH. 5:14 says, "Therefore it is said, Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give you light." This statement is not to be found in Scripture and neither Isa. 26:19 nor Isa. 60:1 apply. (51) FIRST TIM. 1:18 says, "This charge I commit unto thee son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee...." There are no OT prophecies pertaining to Timothy. (52) In 2 TIM. 3:8 ("Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses...") Paul refers to two individuals who are never mentioned in the OT and there is no evidence that they are the Pharaoh's sojerers in Ex. 7:11 as some have alleged. (53) Contrary to HEB. 9:3-4 ("And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all; Which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the covenant...."), verses such as Ex. 25:16, Deut. 10:2,5, 2nd Chron. 5:10, & 1 Kings 8:9 show there was nothing in the OT about a golden pot or Aaron's rod being put in the ark. (54) In HEB. 10:5-6 ("Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared

me: In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure") Paul distorted Psalm 40:6 ("Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required"). To begin with, "but a body hast thou prepared me" is not in Psalm 40:6. It is a product of Paul's imagination. Secondly, "mine ears hast thou opened" is in Psalm 40:6 but Paul omitted it. It should also be noted that Psalm 40:12 ("For innumerable evils have compassed me about: mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head...") was written by the same person who wrote Psalm 40:6 which Paul says was Jesus. How could the author of Psalm 40:12 be Jesus when he admits to having committed many sins? And finally, nowhere in the Gospels did Jesus say what Paul attributed to him in Heb. 10:5-6. (55) While listing the injustices suffered in the OT by his ancestors Paul said in HEB. 11:35 (RSV) that, "Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, that they might rise again to a better life." Yet, nowhere does the OT say that people suffered torture in order to expect a resurrection. (56) And lastly, JAMES 4:5 says, "Do you think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?" Yet, no such statement can be found in the OT, although apologists occasionally allude to Gen. 6:5, 11, 8:21, Prov. 21:10, & Eccle. 4:4.

That concludes our listing of Nonquotes and clearly demonstrates that NT writers often let their imaginations do their walking through OT pages.

REVIEWS

Several months ago a kind Floridian sent us a copy of *When Skeptics Ask, A Handbook of Christian Evidences* by apologists Geisler and Brooks. The work appears to be 333 pages put together to justify one's continued presence on the faculty and is replete with points so vapid as to invite critical commentary. This month's REVIEW, as well as that which will follow in September, will be devoted to an examination of some of the more glaring examples.

(1) On page 60 the authors address the nature of evil and state rhetorically, "if God made all things, then that makes God responsible for evil. The argument looks like this (a) God is the author of everything; (b) Evil is something; (c) Therefore, God is the author of evil. The first premise is true. So it appears that in order to deny the conclusion we have to deny the reality of evil. But we can deny that evil is a thing, or substance, without saying that it isn't real. It is a lack in things. When good that should be there is missing from something, that is evil.... Evil is a lack of something that should be there in the relationship between good things."

To begin with, the authors fail to note that the question is whether or not evil is real, not whether or not it is a substance or thing. It either exists or it doesn't. Mental legerdemain of this nature is typical of Christian apologists. That's what they get paid for. Holes and vacuums indicate the absence of things and substance, too, but they exist, nevertheless. In effect, Geisler and Brooks are trying to refute the second premise (Evil is something) of their own syllogism. They are trying to prove it doesn't exist in any form, be it material or the absence of something material. Actually, how it exists or in what form is entirely secondary to the fact that it does exist. They have tried to shift the focus of attention from "does it exist" to "how does it exist."

(2) On page 61 they inadvertently addressed the problem of evil presented by the 3rd question in our pamphlet, *THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD?* Geisler and Brooks opened up by stating that, "In the beginning, there was God and He was perfect. Then the perfect God made a perfect world. So how did evil come into the picture? Let's summarize the problem this way [Geisler is a philosophy professor of logic and inclined toward syllogisms]: (a) Every creature God made is perfect; (b) But perfect creatures cannot do what is imperfect; (c) So, every creature God made cannot do what is imperfect. But if Adam and Eve were perfect, how did they fall? Don't blame

it on the snake because that just backs the question up one step; didn't God make the snake perfect too?... One of the things that makes men morally perfect is freedom. We have a real choice about what we do.... But in making us that way, He also allowed for the possibility of evil.... He created the fact of freedom; we perform the acts of freedom. He made evil possible; men made evil actual. Imperfection came through the abuse of our moral perfection as free creatures."

Geisler and Brooks conveniently ignore the fact that they strangled themselves with their own syllogism. The 2nd premise states that "perfect creatures CANNOT do what is imperfect. Now they are saying they can do what is imperfect because they have freedom of choice. So which is it? Are they free or aren't they? When they used the word "cannot" in the 2nd premise, they slammed the door shut on any escape and entangled themselves in an airtight syllogism. I don't care how much freedom they have; the 2nd premise says they can't do it.

(3) One of the common propensities of nearly all apologists for the Bible and Jesus in particular is to embellish the story. For example, we constantly hear about the apostles and disciples dying for the cause in pangs of martyrdom. Yet, except for the stoning of Stephen and possibly the killing of John the Baptist, there is no record in the Bible of anyone dying for Jesus or willingly giving their life for Christendom. Following in the martyrdom tradition, on page 120 Brooks and Geisler say of Jesus that, "He had been beaten and whipped repeatedly the night before His crucifixion with a Roman scourge (a three-lash whip with pieces of bone or metal on the ends) which tore the flesh of the skeletal muscles and set the stage for circulatory shock.... Then He suffered five major wounds between nine in the morning and just before sunset. Four of these were caused by nails used to fix Him to the cross.... When His side was pierced with a spear...the spear entered through the rib cage and pierced His right lung, the sack around the heart, and the heart itself, releasing both blood and pleural fluids.... The wounds in both His wrists and feet would have severed the major nerves."

To such elaboration one can only say, where on earth are you getting all this stuff? Certainly not from the Bible. Where, for instance, does the NT say his feet were pierced?

(4) On page 124 while answering those who claim that the disciples of Jesus stole his body and there was no resurrection, Geisler and Brooks state, "This does not fit with what we know about the lives of these men. These were not dishonest men. They all taught that honesty was a great virtue." To this one can only say, "Oh Brother!" Nixon, Agnew, Swaggart, Bakker, North, a well-known singer, and thousands of other people portray themselves as paragons of virtue. But that is certainly no reason they are to be believed. Now who is being naive! The authors continue, "If this hypothesis (of deception--Ed.) were true, then we must also believe that the apostles persisted in this hoax and died for what they knew to be false." Again, where does the Bible say they died for the cause? Moreover, only one thief would be required to remove a body. Why would all the Apostles have to be involved in the plot? Eleven of the 12 could very well have continued living under a delusion.

(5) On page 125 the authors make one of the most common errors committed by those in support of the Resurrection. They state, "The most outstanding proof that Jesus rose from the dead is that He was seen by more than 500 people on twelve different occasions." They are relying on Paul's statement in 1 Cor. 15:5-6 ("And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that he was seen of above 500 brethren at once...."). This ruse needs to be put to rest once and for all. At no time did 500 people ever say that they saw Jesus after the Resurrection Paul says 500 people saw Jesus, the same Paul who says in Rom. 3:7, "For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner?" Five hundred people never so testified.

(6) After discussing other world-famous religious leaders, such as Moses (p. 128-130), Mohammed (p. 130-132), Hindu Gurus (p. 132-134), Buddha (p. 134-135), Socrates (p. 136-137), and Lao-tzu (p. 137-138), Geisler and Brooks state, "So Jesus can be found to be superior to other teachers for many reasons. (a) No other teacher has made the claims to be God that Jesus has. (b) Even when the followers of some prophet deified their teacher, there is no proof given for that claim that can be compared to the fulfillment of prophecy, the sinless and miraculous life, and the Resurrection. (c) No other teacher offered salvation by faith, apart from works, based on what they had already done for us. (d) Most notably though, no religious or philosophical leader has displayed the love for people that Jesus did in dying for the sins of the world."

As far as (a) is concerned, biblical apologists need to realize that "claims" prove nothing. Many people have claimed many things throughout history. Charles Manson "claimed" he was Christ reincarnated. Are we to believe him? In fact, a claim of this nature could easily be read in reverse. People could easily come to the conclusion that he had taken leave of his senses. With respect to (b), that has been covered at length throughout BE. Messianic prophecy simply won't withstand critical analysis as was shown in Issues #76-80; Jesus' character was by no means immaculate as we clearly demonstrated in Issues #2, 3, 24, 25, 27, & 28; miracles are not to be used to prove anything as we showed in Issue #90, and the occurrence of many resurrections prior to that of Jesus removes any importance that can be attached to His comeback. In regard to (c), one could easily conclude that Christianity condones rather than condemns bad behavior by claiming one is saved by faith rather than works. No matter how rotten your behavior, you are going to Heaven if you accept Jesus as your savior, and no matter how good your behavior you are going to Hell if you don't accept him. A concept of this nature can't help but give Christianity a negative image, since it conflicts with common sense. Religions teaching that one's behavior determines one's status in the next world are going to have a decided advantage. Moreover, to say that no other teacher offered salvation by faith runs counter to many biblical verses which say the opposite (See Issue #3). And lastly, point (d) proves nothing not only because millions of people have willingly died for others but, even more importantly, because we only have the Bible's word for the fact that he was dying for the sins of the world. How do you know he died for the sins of humanity? Because the Bible says so? How do you know the Bible is telling you the truth in view of its track record? The answer is, You Don't.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #445 from LC of Fairfax, Virginia

Dennis. I love your publication and would like to get some of your pamphlets. Please send me 20 of each. I can't wait to pass them out! Even better--put them on cars with fundamentalist bumperstickers!! [A good idea, LC--Editor]

Letter #446 from DL of Ipswich, Mass.

Dear Dennis. I placed an ad for BE in the Ipswich Chronicle. It is a weekly newspaper with a circulation of over 5,000.... The paper also carries the news from the small town of Rowley.... There is a total of 17 churches within the two towns and many of them offer Bible study classes for adults. I should think there would be at least a few people with inquiring minds who will write in to you for a free sample of BE.... I made a copy of your wonderful sample issue and left it with the advertising department of the North Shore Weeklies along with the lists of prior issues and audio tapes.

Editor's Response to Letter #446

Dear DL. Once, again, I'd like to extend my sincerest thanks to you for your continuing assistance to our cause. You have been a diligent worker on our behalf from the beginning and this marks an additional contribution. Too bad you are not cloneable.

Letter #447 from HT of Mt. Vernon, New York

Hi Dennis. I received my copy of Biblical Errancy and it was great. I am subscribing to it. I have been an atheist since I was eighteen and this is the best publication I have seen so far that really shows up the bible for what it is, a fraud, a joke and an insult to humanity. I would also like some back issues and I enclose a list below.

Editor's Response to Letter #447

Dear HT. Thanks for the compliments. We need everyone's support.

Letter #448 from RL of Burnaby, British Columbia in Canada (Part a)

Dennis.... I have been "debating" a minister of an evangelical protestant persuasion and he's a "nice guy" and very bright. But Oh! so devastatingly dogma-bound. And through it all he wants to maintain that god is holy, just, and supreme.... I think we have been thru this 3 or 4 times and I have even called god a dictator for promising people "free will" and then making a complete farce of "free will" by making it conform to his version of "free" which doesn't make you "free" at all. We have "debated" the illusion of god's "justice" within the context of god choosing his "chosen people" from several different groups, thus making "justice" a mockery since the "others" automatically assume second or third class status--or worse.

What I would like from you Dennis is for you to list the issues of BE that outline this problem and also the problem of god's general "justice" in the context of taking sides in conflicts, etc. I seem to remember reading this all in BE but I haven't been able to locate it again.

Editor's Response to Letter #448 (Part a)

Dear RL. First let me congratulate you on your urge to "take it to the other side." Even if you aren't as successful as you would like, it still has an effect. As far as God's inadequacies are concerned, that was covered rather extensively in Issue #3.

Letter #448 Continues (Part b)

You suggested a "study plan" for going right through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. I am starting to acquire the necessary equipment. I have Strong's Exhaustive Concordance and Westminster's Historical Maps of Bible Lands. I also have the RSV and a large-print KJV. And I have ordered the Layman's Parallel Bible in the Version that you recommended. When I have acquired all of the necessary tools I am going to seriously embark on a program of study and analysis in an attempt to learn the Bible well enough to find verses and additional data so that perhaps I can begin to write intelligently and comprehensively in an attempt to do something to combat religion and the mess it has gotten us into.

Editor's Response to Letter #448 (Part b)

I'm tempted to say, "Go get'em tiger," although I think the current vernacular is, "Go for it." You will find the outline of my suggested study plan in a speech that is contained in Issues #58 and

#59. You will need to make far more than a week-end effort to succeed, however; so be prepared to put in a lot of time and energy.

Letter #449 from JW of Richmond, Virginia

Dennis. Regarding my letter (#430) in the May issue (#101). I intended to write: "Apparently they REMEMBER the facts, and later some finally admit to themselves that they are indeed irrational." I did not mean to say, "Apparently they don't remember the facts...."

Editor's Response to Letter #449

Dear JW. Having made a few grammatical errors in the past, I know the feeling. Incidentally, we would like to thank you and others who have passed out scores of BE's pamphlets.

Letter #450 from Dan Barker of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, P.O. Box 750, Madison, Wisconsin 53701

Dear Dennis.... I have noticed that some readers of B.E. have been using the phrase "ad Hominem" incorrectly. It is an ad hominem to notice that someone has a bad attitude. It is not ad hominem to point out that someone is using bad logic. It is not ad hominem to mention that someone has bad character traits. It is not ad hominem to warn others that a certain person habitually bases arguments on faulty premises, or on a lack of evidence. It is not ad hominem to say that "so-and-so is a jerk." It is only ad hominem when you base an argument on another person's character. To say, "Mr. Smith's conclusions are wrong because Mr. Smith is an alcoholic (wife beater, drug addict, bad attitude, stupid person, etc.)" would be a true ad hominem argument, and therefore illogical. To accuse a person of using "ad hominem character attacks" is only valid if those attacks take the place of logical premises. There is nothing illogical about complaining about a person. The only time character attacks become irrelevant is if the whole question of "character attacks" is being debated. For example, if a Christian claims that following Jesus causes one to become more peaceful and tolerant, then that person's use of character attacks can be introduced as evidence to the contrary. The same is true of any other trait which believers claim to possess. If Christians say that they are more loving, then it is not ad hominem to attack their character where it is vulnerable. Christians should deal with the perceived "ad hominem attacks" by either 1) becoming more loving or 2) giving up the claim that belief leads to morality. They can't skirt the issue by simply claiming that we are engaging in the despicable practice of "ad hominem." Robert Ingersoll dealt with the same issue in his day when he said, "And here, it may be proper for me to say, that arguments cannot be answered by personal abuse; that there is no logic in slander, and that falsehood, in the long run, defeats itself. People who love their enemies should, at least, tell the truth about their friends. Should it turn out that I am the worst man in the whole world, the story of the flood will remain just as improbable as before, and the contradictions of the Pentateuch will still demand an explanation." (Some Mistakes of Moses, 1979)

Letter #451 from BJ of Douglasville, Georgia

Dear Mr. McKinsey. Thank you for the back issues of BE. I had very little religious indoctrination in my life and never wanted it. The religious fundamental type I've come in contact with are always ready to change that. Your work has given me the ammunition that I needed to do combat on their own turf. With your permission I would like to excerpt some of your work and have packets made up for Bible toters to study. Your name, address, and telephone number will be shown on all the excerpts in hopes of generating interest to read all of your work. I think that your approach to education on the Bible is an excellent one. Considering

the recent shift on the U.S. Supreme Court--education on the errors and mis-information on the Bible seems the way to go. Every public school Bible Club should have your material and study it....

Editor's Response to Letter #451

Dear BJ. Please feel free to make up any packets you deem desirable as long as the recipients are made aware of the source. We are more than glad to provide you with needed information when you advertise BE. It's interesting that you mentioned your contacts with the fundamentalists since we were visited recently by some Jehovah's Witnesses. We invited them in but were unable to maintain their presence longer than half an hour. Clearly my questions were disturbing and they yearned to exit. Their leading spokesman didn't know the Bible very well since he cited Isaiah as a source for a messianic prophecy that actually is to be found in Micah. When this was brought to his attention, he seemed rather perturbed. They were wholly unreceptive when I suggested additional meetings and further discussions. Near the end of our encounter, their leading spokesman said he didn't feel like he was getting anywhere and his time could be better spent elsewhere. Translated, that means, although I'm not influencing you, you are shaking my own beliefs; so I had better get out of here while the getting is good. These people feed on the ignorance and depression of others like leaches. That becomes all too evident when they are confronted by someone who knows their material better than they. As the JW's were going out the door their leading spokesman turned to me and said, "You know, everyone at our Kingdom Hall knows about you." I asked how he knew that and he said others had been here before, including himself. Perhaps he was, but I certainly don't remember him. I suspected something was afoot several days earlier when one of their scouts, who are usually less knowledgeable, came to my door and said, "We are willing to come here and tell you why the Bible is the word of god but we are not going to come here to discuss any contradictions." How she knew I was interested in biblical contradictions was rather puzzling to say the least. Apparently those people keep track of their visitations, compare notes, discuss encounters, and retain mental images of houses to avoid. Talk about snake oil salesmen! As they were leaving I told them that if I had a book that I was sure was the perfect word of God, I would be willing to discuss it with anyone at anytime of their choosing and answer any questions for as long as they desired--5 hours if necessary. In any event, they weren't going to endure any anti-biblical data no matter how correct or logical it may be. With reference to his refutation of the Trinity, their main spokesman must have said it was important to be logical at least 10 times. Yet, he carefully avoided the very logic which he claimed to practice. Every time he was stumped on a biblical imbroglio, he would fall back on faith in the Bible as the ultimate truth. In essence, their position was quite clear: Our minds are made up, don't confuse us with any facts. They bear out a truth that was stated in BE many months ago; namely, it is vital to get people indoctrinated when they are young, vulnerable, and incapable of critical thought. Years ago I was told that the Catholic Church says, "Give me a child until he is 8 and you can have him for the rest of his life because he is now mine." Makes one shudder!

As far as your comments on the Supreme Court are concerned, we noted some time ago that numbers are what count, and there is nothing to prevent a regression of progressive decisions except numbers. Regardless of what the Constitution or the Bill of Rights say, numbers, wealth, influence, and power are going to determine the outcome. And for more than a decade the trend has been in a regressive direction.

You said, "every public school Bible Club should have your material and study it." Correction! There should not be any public school Bible Clubs to begin with. Atheists, agnostics, humanists and others of a freethought persuasion are required to pay taxes. It is not voluntary; it is mandatory. Much of this money is spent on public schools. When the school is used by a

religious/superstitious group to propagate their ideas, the money of freethinkers is being used to spread religion. It is bad enough being forced to pay money to the government in the first place, but it becomes abominable when that money is used to pay for a building that is being used by superstitious people to expound their ideas at no financial cost to themselves. If taxes were voluntary and you could stop paying anytime you desired or religious people were forced to pay taxes to schools in which material exposing the fallacies of religion in general and the Bible in particular were actively propagated, I might be more sanguine about the whole matter. But there is very little chance of that happening. Imagine what would occur if material such as that found in BE were actively disseminated in the schools! What would occur if atheists, agnostics, or BE supporters were allowed to distribute material exposing religion or the Bible to elementary or Jr/Sr. high school students? Were this to occur to any meaningful degree, the uproar would be tremendous. The fact that it is an after-school club is irrelevant. The meetings are still occurring on property paid for by freethoughters as much as anyone. I don't send my children to school to be religiously indoctrinated or made available for those who seek prey on them because attendance is mandatory, and I don't send my taxes to the government to pay for buildings that are used gratis by religious groups to spread superstition, especially when ideas such as those found in BE would never be allowed an equal hearing.

September 1991

Although BE does not normally go outside the Bible to critique other writings which are alleged to be divinely inspired, exceptions are made. Having analyzed the book of Mormon in the 23rd and 54th issues, we now feel equal treatment should be accorded the Koran or Quran as Moslems call their primary source. Having studied the Book from cover to cover, one can't help but note that it is even more boring than the Bible. The book is a veritable miasma of imprecise allusions, vague generalizations, and constant repetitions. It is a good antidote for insomnia and would be a prime candidate for those with masochistic tendencies. The constant use of pronouns (e.g., we, us and they) with indeterminate antecedents, for instance, is not worthy of any writing claiming to be "God's Word." Indeed, the constant use of "us" and "we" when referring to God, himself, could easily lead one to believe that Muslims are trinitarians. The Book has fewer contradictions than the Bible, but that arises more out of propensity for less specificity, more generalities and symbolism, fewer topics, less prophecy and more repetition than any adherence to consistency.

In his voluminous translation and commentary entitled, *The Holy Koran, Muslim A. Yusuf Ali* concedes that, "the same things are repeated over and over again in the Quran" (p. xxx). Because Ali is acutely aware of the fact that the Koran is much more chaotic and dissonant than Muslims would like to admit or others to know, he also concludes that, "a stranger to the Quran, on his first approach to it is baffled when he does not find the enunciation of its theme or its division into chapters and sections or treatment of different topics and separate instructions for different aspects of life arranged in a serial order. On the contrary, there is something with which he has not been familiar before and which does not conform to his conception of a book" (p. xxi). Yes, there is. And that something is a tremendous amount of disorganization and metaphysical meanderings. Ali's confession goes even further when he states that, "The same subject is repeated in different ways and one topic follows the other without any apparent connection. Sometimes a new topic crops up in the middle of another without any apparent reason. The speaker and the addressees, and the direction of the address change without any notice. There is no sign of chapters and divisions anywhere. That is why the unwary reader is baffled and puzzled when he finds all these things contrary to his pre-conceived conception of a book. He begins to feel that the Quran is a book without any order or inter-connection between its continuity of its subject, or that it deal with miscellaneous topics in an incoherent manner." (p. xxi & xxii). Of course, all of the above is pure rationalization, reminiscent of that employed by biblical apologists. The real reason objective readers feel that the Quran is a book without any order or systematic connection is that it is, and that's pretty good reason.

Our analysis will be confined to the Koran specifically rather than a comprehensive discussion of the Muslim religion in general and will only focus on that which is of interest or concern primarily to those of a freethought persuasion.

For purposes of categorization and easy future reference, topics will be addressed in alphabetical order. While the Bible is divided into book, chapter and verse, the Koran is divided into Sura and Ayat. There are 114 Suras and thousands of Ayats. If one saw 3:67 he would know he was dealing with Sura 3, Ayat 67 or the 67th Ayat of the 3rd Sura. The Suras have considerably less Ayats as one moves through the book.

KORAN

Part 1

ABRAHAM-- "Abraham was not a Jew nor yet a Christian...." [3:67]

ADULTERY-- "The woman and the man guilty of adultery or fornication,--flog each of them with a hundred stripes: let not compassion move you in their case, in a matter prescribed by God.... Let no man guilty of adultery or fornication marry any but a woman similarly guilty, or an unbeliever...." [24:2-4]

Unlike Christians, Muslims can't claim this is only under the Old Law--Ed.

ARABS--"The Arabs of the dessert are the worst in unbelief and hypocrisy, and most fitted to be in ignorance of the command which God hath sent down to His Apostle...."[9:97]

CHRISTIANS-- " From those, too, who call themselves Christians, we did take a covenant, But they forgot a good part of the message that was sent them.... And soon will God show them what it is they have done." [5:14].

Muslims view their message as superior to that of the Christians--Ed.

"Strongest among men in enmity to the Believers (read:Muslims--Ed.) wilt thou find Jews and Pagans; and nearest among them in love to the Believers wilt thou find those who say, 'We are Christians'." [5:82]

DAY--"Verily a Day in the sight of thy Lord is like a thousand years of your reckoning." [22:47]

"...in the end will (all affairs) go up to Him, on a Day, the space whereof will be (as) a thousand years of your reckoning." [32:5]

Sounds familiar!--Ed.

DEBATE-- "Invite (all) to the Way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious for thy Lord knoweth best...." [16:25] (also see: 18:56)

DIVORCE-- "A divorce is only permissible twice...." [2:229] "If a wife fears cruelty or desertion on her husband's part, there is no blame on them if they arrange an amicable settlement between themselves; and such a settlement is best...." [4:128] "O ye who believe! When you marry believing women, and then divorce them...so give them a present, and set them free in a handsome manner." [33:49] How could they be set free if they weren't in some kind of bondage. Yet, Muslims claim that men and women are treated equitably under Islam--Ed.

"Oh Prophet. When ye do divorce women, divorce them at their prescribed periods...and turn them not out of their houses, nor shall they (themselves) leave, except in case they are guilty of some open lewdness...." [65:1] What kind of divorce exists when both parties nearly always must continue to live together?--Ed.

EXCLUSIVISM-- "And they (Jews and Christians--Ed.) say: 'None shall enter Paradise unless he be a Jew or a Christian.' Those are their (vain) desires. Say: 'Produce your proof if ye are truthful.' Nay,--whoever submits his whole self to God and is a doer of good, --he will get his reward with his Lord.... The Jews say: 'Christians have naught (to stand) upon; and the Christians say: 'The Jew have naught (to stand) upon.' Yet they (profess to) study the same book.... But God will judge between them in their quarrel on the Day of Judgement." [2:111-113] Muslims need a course in biblical theology, since Jews give no credence to the NT. By no means do they study

the same book--Ed. "Never will the Jews or Christians be satisfied with thee unless thou follow their form of religion. Say: 'The Guidance of God,--that is the only Guidance.' Were thou to follow their desires after the knowledge which hath reached thee, then wouldest thou find neither Protector nor Helper against God." [2:120] "And they say: Be Jews or Christians, then ye will be rightly guided. Say: Nay, but (we follow) the religion of Abraham the upright, and he was not of the idolaters." [2:135] Muslims are not only failing to note Abraham also holds a position of great importance in Judaism but implying that Judaism and Christianity are attached to idolatry--Ed. "This day have I perfected your religion...and have chosen for you Islam as your religion." [5:3] "Both the Jews and the Christians say: 'We are sons of God, and His beloved.' Say: "Why then doth He punish you for your sins?" [5:18] For Muslims to allege others are being punished for their sins is not worthy of serious consideration in light of conditions in Muslim areas of the world today. They are among those most steeped in agony, ignorance, superstition, and deprivation--Ed. "Take not the Jews and Christians for your friends and protectors: They are but friends and protectors to each other." [5:51] If this verse does not contradict 54:82 which was mentioned earlier, then it displays an insolent ingratitude on the part of Muslims towards Christians. Moreover, for Muslims to assert that Jews and Christians are friends and protectors of one another is to reveal an appalling ignorance of historical events. All too often they have been barely able to stomach one another's presence--Ed. To those who reject our Signs and treat them with arrogance, no opening will there be of the gates of heaven, nor will they enter the Garden, until the camel pass through the eye of the needle," [7:40] There is no salvation outside of Islam. This, too, sounds familiar--Ed.

FAVORITISM-- "God has bestowed His gifts of sustenance more freely on some of you than on others...." [16:71] The Koran, like the Bible, degrades their supreme being, God by alleging he plays favorites--Ed.

FIGHTING-- "They ask thee concerning fighting in the prohibited Month. Say: 'Fighting therein is a grave (offence.). [2:217] "Those who believe, fight in the cause of God, and those who reject Faith fight in the cause of Evil." [4:76] "The punishment of those who wage war against God and His Apostle, and strive with might and main for mischief through the land is: execution, or crucifixion, or the cutting off of hands and feet from opposite sides....and heavy punishment is theirs in the Hereafter." [5:33] Intolerance of this magnitude that of the NT. Unlike the NT, the Quran openly advocates the execution of all those who oppose the key figure--Ed. "Those who believe, and adopt exile, and fight for the Faith...for them is the forgiveness of sins and a provision most generous." [8:74] "...then fight and slay the Pagans wherever ye find them and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every strategem (of war)...." [9:5]. This is clearly a call for an unrelenting slaughter of non-Muslims and demonstrates an intolerance reminiscent of the OT in such books as Joshua and Judges--Ed. "Fight those who believe not in God nor the Last Day...nor acknowledge the Religion of Truth..." [9:29] "...fight the Pagans..." [9:36] "...wherever they are found, they shall be seized and slain (without mercy)." [33:61]. Believers in the Koran are urged to be no more open-minded than OT Hebrews. A clear and present danger to non-Muslims would arise in the United States if strict adherents to the Quran were to assume positive of national importance. The Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini is more representative of Quranic Islam than liberal Muslims and PR agents who appear in the media--Ed. {Also note: 4:74, 4:95, 8:15-17, 8:59-60, 9:111, & 9:123}

HEAVEN-- "...those who obey god and his Apostle will be admitted to Gardens with rivers flowing beneath, to abide therein (for ever) and that will be the Supreme achievement." [4:13] "We shall soon admit to Gardens, with rivers flowing beneath--their eternal home." [4:57] "Who will inherit Paradise: they will dwell therein (for ever)." [23:11] "For those who believe and do righteous deeds, will be Gardens, beneath which Rivers will flow: That is the great Salvation..." [85:11] (See also: 4:77,127, 5:12, 85, 119, 6:32, 7:42, 44, 9:38, 72, 89, 100, 10:9, 26, 11:23, 108,

12:57, 109, 13:22-23, 14:23, 15:45, 16:30-32, 41, 18:2-3, 20:76, 22:9, 23, 23:11, 25:75, 35:33, 40:8, 47:12, 54:54, 68:8, 98:8). Muslims clearly believe in an idyllic Heaven akin to that of the Christian Paradise in which eternal gardens of perpetual bliss and beautiful mansions have rivers flowing beneath--Ed..

HELL--"But those who reject Faith and belie Our signs,--They shall be companions of Hell-fire." [5:86] "The fire be your dwelling-place: You will dwell therein for ever." [6:128] "The Companions of the Fire will call to the Companions of the Garden...." [7:50] "Taste the Penalty of the Blazing Fire." [8:50] "...for those who oppose God and his Apostle, is the Fire of Hell?" [9:63] "...and caused their people to descend to the House of Perdition?--into Hell? They will burn therein...." [14:28-29] The Muslim concept of Hell is almost the same as that of Christians--Ed. (See also: 4:14, 37, 115, 121, 145, 6:27, 7:18, 36, 47, 8:14, 9:17, 35, 49, 68, 81, 109, 113, 10:27, 11:16, 17, 106-107, 113, 119, 13:5, & 55 additional citations)

HEREAFTER--"But best is the Home in the Hereafter." [6:32] "This life of the present is nothing but (temporary convenience: it is the Hereafter that is Home that will last." [40:39] (See also 6:135 and 29:64)

Reviews

This month's Review will continue last month's enumeration of the failings of a book entitled, *When Skeptic's Ask* by Geisler and Brooks.

(7) On page 142 they state, "We know that the Bible came from God for one very simple reason Jesus told us so. It is on His authority, as the god of the universe, that we are sure that the Bible is the Word of God."

And how do we know about Jesus; from the Bible, of course. How's that for circular reasoning! The Bible is the Word of God because Jesus says so: Jesus existed and was God because the Bible says so. Talk about a self-contained system! The validity of the Bible rests on Jesus; the validity of Jesus rests on the Bible.

(8) More circular reasoning is evident on page 153 when the authors address the question of how the Bible was put together by saying, "was it written by a prophet of God? Deut. 18:18 tells us that only a prophet of God will speak the word of God. This is the way that God reveals Himself (Heb. 1:1). Second Peter 1:20-21 assures us that Scripture is only written by men of God."

In other words, only a prophet of God speaks the word of God. And how do we know he is a prophet of God? Because the word of God says he is. More self-containment in action! How do we know he is a prophet? Because scripture says he is. And how do you know Scripture is the truth? Because the Prophet says it is.

(9) In regard to the formation of the canon the authors say on page 154, "But what about the books that were left out? This question has the wrong perspective on this issue. No other books were ever accepted and there is no reason to believe that most of them were ever in the running. For both the Old and New Testaments there are certain books that were accepted by everyone, some books that were later disputed, and some that were rejected by all. There is no category of books initially accepted and later thrown out."

How the authors presume to know that there were no books that were accepted and later thrown out one can only surmise. Moreover, upon what possible basis could they conclude that most of them were not even in the running. Indeed, evidence would tend not only to lead one to the

conclusion that a great deal of horse-trading occurred at such councils as Nicea, Laodicea, Hippo, and Carthage but that nearly everything was scrutinized. (10) In regard to the different renderings by manuscripts of the alleged original manuscripts which no longer exist, the authors state on page 160, "In fact, there are only 10,000 places where variants occur and most of them those are matters of spelling and word order. There are less than 40 places in the NT where we are really not certain which reading is original, but not one of these has any effect on a central doctrine of faith. Note the problem is not that we don't know what the text is, but that we are not certain which text has the right reading."

To begin with, the authors admit that there are at least 10,000 places in which manuscripts supposedly duplicating the alleged originals contradict one another. That's a lot of conflict for what is supposed to be God's perfect word. Secondly, since the alleged originals no longer exist and with so much disagreement among the allegedly accurate copies, there is no way scholars can ever know for sure what the originals actually said. Any version on the market must be a product of educated guesses, consensus, and weighing the validity of manuscripts. Thirdly, apologists repeatedly contend that although there may be many "variants" among manuscripts none effects a central doctrine of faith. Wrong! Undoubtedly one of the most important of all Christian doctrines is that the Bible is the Word of God. And if one were asked to show where the Bible says as much, nearly every apologists would turn to 2 Tim. 3:16 KJV ("All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine...."). But the ASV says, "Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching...." The ASV does not say all scripture is inspired; it says "all scripture that is inspired" which clearly implies some scripture is not inspired. Thus, the manuscript or manuscripts from which the ASV was derived either contradict the manuscripts from which the KJV was derived on a major doctrinal point or there is no consensus on the correct translation which has the same effect. Lastly, for authors to say that, "the problem is not that we don't know what the text is, but that we are not certain which text has the right reading" is a masterpiece of obfuscation. That's like standing in front of the state lottery numbers and saying, "it's not that I don't know what the correct numbers are or I don't have them in front of me, it's just that I am not certain which combination provides the right reading." If you don't know which is the right text, if you don't know the right combination, then you don't know which is the right reading. You are guessing! And that is the basis upon which every version on the market has been put together. (11) As far as resolving contradictions and accepting what the Bible says, the authors state on page 163 that, "the burden of proof rests on the critics. As long as we show that there is a possible solution--that their objection ain't necessarily so--then the conflict has been resolved. Like any American citizen, the Bible should be presumed innocent until proven guilty. Like a reliable friend, it should be given the benefit of the doubt."

There is no failure to presume the Bible is innocent. The problem is that conviction is so easy because the evidence is so overwhelming. Creating "possible solutions" by ignoring, rewriting, or perverting the script is by no means sufficient. Critics are no more obligated to accept "solutions" based on ignoring, rewriting or perverting the text than they are required to disprove the existence of miracles, god angels, and the supernatural. As we have said so often: The burden of proof lies on he who alleges.

Geisler and Brooks continue by saying, "A scientist always assumes that there is an explanation when faced with some unexpected and unexplored anomaly. In the same way, a Bible student assumes that there is harmony in the Bible in light of what appears to be contradictions." True. A scientist assumes there is an explanation for the unexpected, but he is operating on the track record of past scientific involvements and is required to prove whatever explanation he provides. A Bible student, on the other hand, should not assume the very point in dispute, namely, that he has a book in his hand that is just as reliable and predictable as the sciences. Apologists must first prove the Book's validity before they are justified in assuming harmony is always present. A

proven track record must first be created; otherwise, every statement in every book in the library is true until critics demonstrate otherwise. Any Bible student who "assumes that there is harmony in the Bible" is making a grave mistake and proceeding in the face of numerous facts. Instead of making assumptions, one should go where the evidence leads.(12) On page 165 under the heading Don't Confuse Error with Imprecision the authors state, "First Kings 7:23 says that the laver, a huge basin for washing was ten cubits in diameter with a circumference of 30 cubits. Now any schoolboy who's taken geometry knows a circle with a diameter of 10 cubits has a circumference of 31.4159 cubits (circumference is diameter times pi). So some critics have mentioned this as a possible problem, but round numbers are not the same thing as error. Pi rounds off to three quite nicely and that would give an answer of 30 cubits."

There is no "possible problem" here but a blatant mathematical error in a supposedly inerrant book. Error is error and this is one of the most obvious. Trying to hide it under the subterfuge of "imprecision" is intellectual duplicity. (13) With respect to God's OT slaughters the authors say on page 170, "Is it possible that God could have commanded these massacres. First, we must recognize that the reason for asserting that there is an error here is a subjective one--personal moral sentiment. Second, it is misplaced sentiment. True, it is wrong for men to kill innocent people, but it is not necessary wrong for God. As the Giver of life, he has the right to take it as He wills. If the above critic's thinking were carried out consistently, wouldn't one have to repudiate the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the flood in Noah's time too? It is presumptuous to think that our own moral standards should judge God and tell Him what is right and wrong."

This is pure rationalization. All Geisler and Brooks are saying is that God is above morality and can do anything he wants. He is answerable to no one or any standard. If he lies, kills, steals, rapes, pillages, murders, and tortures, that's OK; he is God. Anyone with a reasonable degree of decency knows that the issue is not one of moral sentiment; it's a question of justice and injustice. For God's supposed defenders to say that it is not necessarily wrong for him to kill innocent people is to stand morality on its head. Proponents of this position would no doubt contend that if Jesus had murdered his parents and raped Mary Magdaline that would be OK also. After all, he is God and all of his deeds are above reproach. Those who contend that he would never commit acts of that nature should have their attention directed toward the OT and see what God, I.e., Jesus, did. Perhaps they might wish to read the 3rd Issue of BE? For Geisler and Brooks to say, "True, it is wrong for man to kill innocent people, but it is not necessarily wrong for God" is folly. God is supposed to be the example that man is to live by. Your explanation will never be accepted by the rational mind.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #452 from JW of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Dear Dennis you are doing a great job. However, you should put out a book on what you have done before you take on the Book of Mormon. I would buy a bunch of your books.

I am now working as a staff writer for the (name withheld) newspaper. I am on a investigative team and one of my fellow reporters is an avid Christian. I've been tolerant, which Christians never are. The other day at lunch, he started in and I said, "Why does not God just give us all the faith and make us into believers, and stop this guessing game?" He replied on cue, "Because God gave us a choice." I said, "What's the choice? Live in heaven, walk on gold streets, float on clouds, play the harp and listen to cherubins, seraphims and angels sing or burn in a lake of fire and brimstone for all eternity. Is that a choice?" I then said, "Sounds like the Mafia to me. Sounds like God is giving you an offer you can't refuse." Of course, it stopped him dead in his

tracks. I am preparing to have a stopper every time he opens his mouth from now on. I believe it will soon shut him up permanently.

Letter from Ken Bonnell, Box 65706, Los Angeles, California 90065

Dear Dennis. #103 was in the mail today. Concerning the Rev. James White of Alpha and Omega Ministries: In his A & O newsletter he reprinted and commented on my article "THE RESURRECTION of JESUS: FACT or FICTION?" which was in THE FRONTLINE, (May 1989) as an "example of atheist writing" on the Bible. He made detailed comments on it, much of which were distortions, misquotes, and misinterpretations of what I had written. I responded, answering most of White's points. I appealed to White's readers to compare what I had written to what he had written. Since I did not receive any acknowledgment of my response nor a complimentary copy of its appearance in his newsletter, I must conclude that he decided to ignore it completely, to give the impression to his readers that I was completely squashed, and to avoid being made to look foolish. So much for James White's integrity!...

Editor's response to Letter #453

Dear Ken. I have no way of knowing what has transpired between you and White so I'll confine myself to merely registering your protest about his behavior. Several people lately have sought to use BE to express complaints that they felt were being excluded from other publications. We have no problem with that as long as we are not drawn into the fray. Without knowing the background, we can't take a stance.

Letter # 454 from VS of Lake Worth, Florida

Dear Dennis.... I've listened twice to the tapes I ordered from you and have found them interesting and instructive. It's a shame that so few people really want to debate your arguments; they'd rather try to find fault with you as a person. But, as I've learned over time, that's the typical fundamentalist tactic when engaging in "soul-winning."

Since I'm a relative newcomer to Biblical Errancy, I don't know if you have ever covered this specific problem with the Flood. I'll tell you about it anyway. We are aware that there is a contradiction over how many animals took on the ark. Genesis 6:19-20 says that he should take all beasts by twos while Genesis 7:2 says he should take clean beasts by sevens and unclean beasts by two.

Now, after the earth dried (Gen. 8:14), Noah and the crew leave the ark. The first thing Noah does is to build an altar and sacrifice of every clean beast and every clean fowl (Gen. 8:20). Would this be a wise thing to do? I would limit the gene pool if he had taken the clean beasts from reproducing if he took them by twos.

I told this co-worker who is a born-again Christian and he promised to look it up and read it over the weekend. I also gave this fellow your little tracts, which he admitted he found interesting. He also admitted that what I had told him disturbed him a little.

Keep up the good work with your newsletter and I'll keep you posted on my adventures with Campus Crusader for Christ....

Letter #455 from DM of Pasadena, California

Dear Mr. McKinsey. The trinity doctrine can be summed up in two lines. To the extent that the words "father" and "son" have intelligent meaning, the doctrine is absurd. To the extent that the doctrine is not absurd, it says nothing intelligible. The rest is commentary, useful extension of the above.

Letter #448 Concludes from last month (part C) was inadvertently omitted.

...I am also sending you a donation of \$20.00 in American money and I am very relieved to see that you have raised your rates--not enough I would say but at last you are trying to carry the load all alone--very, very good!!

In closing, let me say, thank you ever so much for the work you are doing!! It is through the efforts of you, your staff, and the people like you that "freedom"--whatever that glorious word will one day mean--will someday, long after "religion" has vanished from the earth and "politics" has changed significantly, emerge.... If ever you think that I could help in your important work, please DO NOT hesitate to ask. I'll do my best!!....

Letter #456 from Culver City, California

Dear Dennis. A member of my local group (Atheist United) introduced me to BE. In your answers to letters in issues #98 & 99 I found more plain common sense than I've seen in volumes of other literature. What hit me the hardest was the point most of us, including myself, have overlooked: the Bible is the main problem and should be attacked first. It has my been my observation also that we non-believers are too splintered, not well organized to make the best use of our meager resources. After years of doubt and uncertainty, I recently realized I could not continue living a lie. So I began reading what atheists really had to say, not the lies I had always heard. I started reading the Bible but stopped after the first 10 chapters because I had already found all of our major evils sanctified by the Christian God I had been admonished to worship. I was appalled to learn how well the brainwashing had done its job; I now have trouble containing myself when people start talking religion.

Our President tells us that the non-religious should not be considered citizens. Our chief justice says the separation of state and church should be abolished. Unless we get our act together and stop spinning our wheels, there may not be much liberty in our future. Thank you for your efforts to get the message out....

Editors Response to Letter #456

Dear JB. Your comments are most appreciated; however, I do have trouble with one point. You admit that the Bible is the main problem and should be attacked first, but later stopped reading it after the first 10 chapters because of the material contained therein. How are you going to adequately critique and expose a book you can't stand to read? If I had followed that philosophy, Be would never have gotten off the ground. I am probably more repelled by its contents than you, but that is no reason to be deterred. The stakes are too high. Personal contentment must be curbed to some extent for the good of others.

EDITOR'S NOTE: (a) If you want to be contacted by people associated with BE, let us know and we will insert your name, address, and phone number in a coming issue. We won't give you the names of others but we are willing to give your name and address to our readership. You might have some compatriots nearby and be able to organize something.

(b) Several people have wanted to contact the individuals who graciously compiled our 13 page index. Ernie Brennaman told me he would be glad to talk to anyone and can be reached at 6810 Heaven's Gate Drive, Corpus Christi, Texas, 78413-4517. Phone (512)991-2180.

Issue No. 106

October 1991

This month's commentary will continue our alphabetical analysis of Koranic topics that was begun last month.

KORAN

(Part 2)

JESUS--"That they said (in boast), 'We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary, the Apostle of God';-
-But they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them...for of a surety they killed him not." [4:157]

Muslims do not believe Jesus died on the Cross.--Ed.

"Christ Jesus the son of Mary was (no more than) an apostle of God, and His Word, which he bestowed on Mary...." [4:171]

"And behold! I (God--Ed.) did restrain the Children of Israel from (violence to) thee (Jesus--Ed.)when thou didst show them the Clear Signs, and the unbelievers among them said: 'This is nothing but evident magic'." [5:110]

In light of the fact that God did not protect Jesus from the Jews, this statement is false--Ed.

"But she pointed to the babe. They said: 'How can we talk to one who is a child in the cradle?' He said: 'I am indeed a servant of God: He hath given me revelation and made me a prophet.... Such (was) Jesus the son of Mary: (it is) a statement of truth....' [19:29-30].

Christian miracles are matched by Koranic miracles. Imagine a baby speaking in the cradle right after birth!--Ed.

"When (Jesus) the son of Mary is quoted as an example, behold! the folk laugh out,...he is nothing but a slave on whom We bestowed favour...." (The Glorious Quran by Marmaduke Pickthall [43:57, 59]

"We sent after them Jesus the son of Mary, and bestowed on him the Gospel...." [57:27]

"And remember, Jesus, the son of Mary, said, 'O Children of Israel! I am the apostle of God (sent) to you, confirming the Law (which came) before me, and giving Glad Tidings of an Apostle to come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad.'" [61:6].

(See Also: 2:253, 23:50, 33:7)

It would be interesting to know where one could find a statement by Jesus that he would be followed by Ahmad, whom Muslims consider to be Mohammed--Ed.

JEWS--"But God hath cursed them for their Unbelief; and but few of them will believe." [4:46]

"To the Jews We prohibited such things as We have mentioned to thee before...." [16:118]

"These (Israelites) are but a small band.... So we expelled them from gardens, springs, treasures, and every kind of honourable position...." [26:55, 58-59]

"Say: O ye that stand on Judaism! If ye think that ye are friends to God, to the exclusion of (other) men, then express your desire for Death, if ye are truthful." [62:6]

JUDGMENT DAY--"He will gather you together against the Day of Judgment, about which there is no doubt." [4:87]

"That He will gather you together for the Day of Judgment, there is no doubt whatever." [6:12]

"On the Day of Judgment we shall bring out for him a scroll, which he will see spread open." [17:13]

"...there can be no doubt about the Hour of Judgment." [18:21] "Fear your Lord! For the convulsion of the Hour (of Judgment) will be a thing terrible." [22:1] "Those who believe (in the Quran), those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), and the Sabians, Christians, Magians, and Polytheists,--God will judge between them on the Day of Judgment...." [22:17] "He will gather you together for the Day of Judgment about which there is no doubt...." [45:26] {See Also: 4:109, 10:60, 14:41, 44, 15:35, 16:25, 27, 16:124, 17:34, 36, 58, 61, 18:105, 38:53, 78, 70:26} Muslims, like Christians, believe in a Day of Judgment--Ed.

KORAN or QURAN--"It is He Who sent down to thee (step by step), in truth, the Book, confirming what went before it; and He sent down the Law (of Moses) and the Gospel (of Jesus) before this, as a guide to mankind...." [3:3] "He it is Who has sent down to thee the Book: in it are verses basic or fundamental (of established meaning); they are the foundation of the Book: others are allegorical.... We believe in the Book; the whole of it is from our Lord: and none will grasp the Message except men of understanding." [3:7] "Do they not consider the Quran (with care)? Had it been from other than God, they would surely have found therein much discrepancy." [4:82]

"Those who believe (in the Quran), those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), and the Sabians and the Christians,--any who believe in God and the Last Day, and work righteousness,--on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve." [5:69] "This Quran hath been revealed to me by inspiration." [6:19] "Those who believe in the Hereafter believe in this (Book)." [6:92] "Shall I seek for judge other than God?--When He it is who hath sent unto you the Book, explained in detail. They know full well, to whom We have given the Book, that it hath been sent down from thy Lord in truth." [6:114].

Notice how so many of these comments resemble those made by biblical apologists!--Ed. "This Quran is not such as can be produced by other than God; on the contrary it is a confirmation of (revelations) that went before it, and a fuller explanation of the Book...." [10:37] "in the life of the Present and in the Hereafter: no change can there be in the Words of God." [10:64] "They said: 'O Shu'aib! Much of what thou sayest we do not understand!" [11:91]. No doubt that describes much of the Koran for many people--Ed. "If there were a Quran with which mountains were moved, or the earth were cloven asunder, or the dead were made to speak. (This would be the one!)." [13:31] "Say, the Holy Spirit has brought the revelation from thy God in Truth, in order to strengthen those who believe, and as a Guide and Glad Tidings to Muslims." [16:102]

"We sent down the (Quran) in Truth, and in Truth has it descended...." [17:105]. Notice it says "We" not "I." Sounds like trinitarianism!--Ed. "Praise be to God, who hath sent to His Servant the Book, and hath allowed therein no Crookedness. (He hath made it) straight (and clear)...." [18:1-2] "So have We made the (Quran) easy in thine own tongue...." [19:97]. How can one statement be so utterly false! And there is that "We" again--Ed. "We have not sent down the Quran to thee to be (an occasion) for thy distress, but only as an admonition to those who fear (God),--A revelation from Him Who created the earth and the heavens on high." [20:2-4]

"That the (Quran) is the Truth from thy Lord, and that they may believe therein...." [22:54] "...talking nonsense about the (Quran), like one telling fables by night. Do they not ponder over the Word (of God)...." [23:67-68] "The (Quran) was sent down by Him Who knows the Mystery (that is) in the heavens...." [25:6] "Truly my people took this Quran for just foolish nonsense." [25:30]. Now why would anybody do that!--Ed. "Verily this is a Revelation from the Lord of the Worlds: with it came down the Spirit of Faith and Truth...." [26:192-193] "As to thee, the Quran is bestowed upon thee from the presence of One Who is Wise and All-knowing." [27:6] "These are Verses of the Book that makes (things) clear." [28:2]. If there is anything the Koran does not do it is make things clear--Ed. "We believe in the Revelation which has come down to us.... And thus (it is) that We have sent down the Book to thee." [29:46-47]. There is that "We" again. If it is not God, why is it capitalized every time?--ED. "(This is) the revelation of the Book in which there is no doubt,--from the Lord of the Worlds." [32:2] "By the Quran, full of Wisdom.... It is a Revelation sent down by (Him), the Exalted in Might...." [36:2, 5]. "The revelation of this Book is from God, the Exalted in Power, full of Wisdom." [39:1] "God has revealed (from time to time) the most beautiful Message in the form of a Book, consistent with itself, (Yet) repeating (its teaching in various aspects...." [39:23]. To say the book engages in repetition is the understatement of the month.--Ed. "The revelation of this Book is from God, exalted in Power, full of Knowledge." [40:2]. Christians claim to have the Word of God and Muslims claim to have it. Either there are two Words of God or somebody is lying and living a lie--Ed. "...And indeed it is a Book of exalted power. No falsehood can approach it from before or behind it. It is sent down by one Full of Wisdom, worthy of all Praise.... Had We sent this as a Quran (in a language) other than Arabic, they would have said: 'Why are not its verses explained in detail? What! (a Book) not in Arabic and (a Messenger) an Arab?' [41:41-42]. Muslims can no more claim that falsehood is absent from their holy book than can Christians. They have to believe in an inerrant Book--Ed. "I believe in the Book which God has sent down." [42:15] "It is God Who has sent down the Book in truth...." [42:17] "By the Book that makes things clear." [43:2].

Surely, not that ridiculous comment again--Ed. "We have made this (Quran) easy, in thy tongue, in order that they may give heed." [44:58]. Easy?? Perhaps I'm using the wrong tongue--Ed. "The revelation of the Book is from God the Exalted in Power...." [45:2, 46:2] "those who believe and work deeds of righteousness, and believe in the (Revelation) sent down to Muhammad...." [47:2] "Only those are Believers who have believed in God and His Apostle...." [49:15] "And We have indeed made the Quran easy to understand and remember...." [54:17, 22, 32, 40]. In fact, it is neither--Ed. "(God) most gracious! It is He Who taught the Quran." [55:1-2] "...read ye, therefore, of the Quran as much as may be easy for you...." [73:20]. Which for many isn't much--Ed. (Also Note: 2:177, 212, 4:136, 6:155, 7:2-3, 10:90, 11:1, 14, 14:1, 27, 15:2, 17:9-10, 20:113, 21:106, 22:9, 25:52, 27:1-2, 31:2, 20, 34:6, 31, 37:170, 38:1, 39:18, 39:28, 39:41, 41:2-4, 42:7, 52, 43:43-44, 46:30, 56:77-80, 61:8-10, 64:10, 69:50-51, 76:23

MARRIAGE--"Do not marry unbelieving women (idolaters), until they believe." [2:221] "...Marry women of your choice, two, three, or four...." [4:3]. Islam allows you to have up to 4 wives simultaneously.--ED.

MARTYRS--"Those who have left their homes, or been driven out therefrom or suffered harm in My Cause, or fought or been slain--verily, I will blot out from them their iniquities, and admit them into Gardens with rivers flowing beneath...." [3:195]

MUHAMMAD--"Muhammad is no more than an Apostle: many were the Apostles that passed away before him." [3:144] "Those who annoy God and His Apostle--God has cursed them in this world and in the Hereafter, and has prepared for them a humiliating Punishment." [33:57] "Muhammad is the Apostle of God...." [48:29]

NOAH'S SON--"So the Ark floated...and Noah called out to his son, who had separated himself (from the rest).... The son replied: 'I will betake myself to some mountain; it will save from the water'.... and the son was among those overwhelmed in the Flood." [11:42-43]. One would certainly be hardpressed to find this in Genesis--Ed.

PREDESTINATION--"To every People is a term appointed: when their term is reached, not an hour can they delay, nor (an hour) can they advance (it in anticipation)." [7:34, 10:49].

PUNISHMENT--"As to the thief, male or female, cut off his or her hands...." [5:38].

Sounds like the Old Law--Ed. "If Allah took mankind to task by that which they deserve, he would not leave a living creature on the surface of the earth...." [35:45] "I will instill terror into the hearts of the Unbelievers: smite ye above their necks and smite all their finger-tips off them." [8:12]. Tolerance has never been one of Islam's strong points.--Ed.

RESURRECTION--"As to the dead, God will raise them up; then will they be turned unto Him." [6:36] "From the (earth) did We create you, and into it shall We return you, and from it shall We bring you out once again." [20:55]. Once again we have the use of "We" in reference to Allah--Ed. "And verily the Hour will come: There can be no doubt about it, or about (the fact) that God will raise up all who are in the graves." [22:7] "It is He Who gave you life, will cause you to die, and will again give you Life...." [22:66] "One Day will God raise them all up (for Judgment)...." [58:18] (Also note: 2:174, 15:36, 23:16, 100, 26:87, 30:8, 56, 37:144, 38:79, 43:11, 53:47, 58:6, 71:18, 80:21-22)

[To BE Concluded Next Month]REVIEWS

This month's Review will conclude our enumeration of the failings to be found in *When Skeptics Ask* by Geisler and Brooks that absorbed the commentaries in the last two issues.

(14) On page 173 the authors provide one of the most, if not the most, common defense for the existence of biblical contradictions, namely, "...there is nothing to prove that the discrepancy existed in the original manuscripts (and inerrancy only refers to these).... Suffice it to say that transmissional errors seem to be the cause of these problems" This is analogous to their proof for the existence of God in which the burden of proof is deceptively shifted from their shoulders to ours. The fact that the existing manuscripts, which are supposedly exact copies of the non-existent originals, contradict one another creates two immediate problems for biblical apologists. First, when two manuscripts contradict one another on a particular point, how can you ever know which is an accurate reproduction of the original when the original has been lost forever. Second, how do you know that one or the other is an accurate reproduction. Perhaps neither is correct. Perhaps a third is correct. Or then, again, perhaps no manuscript in existence is correct and an accurate reproduction of an original verse has been lost in antiquity. In any event, the burden of proof lies with the biblicalists. The contradiction remains until they provide a resolution of substance. In light of the thousands of contradictions to be found in their alleged copies, one just

doesn't assume willy-nilly, without proof, that the original manuscripts don't conflict with one another. Terminology in this matter also needs to be more precise. There are no original "manuscripts," unless there are separate manuscripts for each book of the Bible or parts of same. There can be only one original. All others can only be reproductions of the original which all apologists admit no longer exists. Because it no longer exists and because there is no way of knowing for sure which existing manuscripts, from which today's versions are derived, are accurate reproductions, the contradictions remain in tact. If a biblicist admits there is a contradiction but denies it exists in the original, he is required to prove its absence in the original, while freethinkers are under no obligation to prove its presence. We have reproductions which say there is a contradiction, and that contradiction will remain until apologists can prove otherwise. For one to say that "Transmissional errors seem to be the cause of these problems" is to base one's argument on pure guess and guessing is not proving. In addition, apologists are obligated to prove an original manuscript really existed at one time. Afterall, as in the case of God, we only have their word for the existence of this alleged original. As a word of advice, biblical apologists would be wise to avoid discussing the non-existent "original manuscripts" because the inability of anyone to examine them unavoidably brings into question the accuracy of every existing manuscript and every derivative version on the market. Because there is simply no way to definitively compare what we have with what no longer exists, biblicists can never be positive they have the "real Bible."(15) On page 202 the authors state that, "One of the popular misconceptions about Jesus is that there is no mention of Him in any ancient sources outside of the Bible. On the contrary, there are numerous references to Him as a historical figure who died at the hand of Pontius Pilate." Adequate refutation of this assertion can be found in the commentaries of Issues 32 & 33 and need not be repeated here.(16) While attempting to distinguish the Resurrection of Jesus from that of all prior resurrections, the authors state on page 247 that, "The differences show that the raisings of Lazarus (John 11:1-44) and the widow's son (Luke 7:11-17) were not resurrections, but only revivification of their mortal bodies (since they both died again)." Explanations of this nature are little more than a manipulation of words. Both Lazarus and the widow's son died and they both came back to life. That constitutes a resurrection. If the authors choose to view this as a revivification rather than a resurrection, then so be it; Jesus was revivified too. There is no difference. And where does the Bible say that Lazarus and the widow's son died again? That is an extrabiblical assumption. Elijah went straight to heaven without dying. They could have followed suit. Moreover, Paul says it is the Resurrection that counts, not the fact that Jesus never died again.(17) On pages 246 and 247 the authors state, "...resurrection is the belief that after death the same physical body is made incorruptible.... resurrection makes alive forever the same body that died.... It surprises a lot of Christians to learn that we will have a real physical body in the afterlife, but why shouldn't we? Jesus did!... The body is perfected, not by doing away with it, but by removing its imperfections." The authors have not thought through their theology very well because the physical bodies of millions are nothing short of appalling. For them to be kept in the same body in the next world would turn Heaven into Hell. Many bodies are grossly deformed, often without extremities, even grotesque. What text are they citing to prove that bodies will be emptied of imperfections prior to entry into the next world, especially when they themselves used the phrase "the same physical body." Adding arms, legs and reconfigurations would not keep it the same. Moreover, one can only speculate how you would rise in a body that has been cremated or how one would rise in a body that was eaten by cannibals who now have the molecules and atoms of the consumed body in their structures.

(18) On page 248 Geisler and Brooks state that, "The Bible speaks of two resurrections: one to life and the other to judgment. ...the first resurrection occurs when Jesus returns at the Second Coming and involves only those who will be resurrected to eternal life; but the second resurrection occurs later and involves those who will be judged."

Why fundamentalists constantly talk about a judgment is a mystery when their theology obviates any reason for its existence? According to fundamentalists, you are saved by accepting Jesus and that is that. Behavior and deeds are irrelevant. Consequently there is no need for a Judgment Day since there is nothing to judge. Sentence is pronounced the day you die. If you accepted Jesus, you are in; if you didn't you are out. So there is no need to weigh, quantify, and judge the number of good and bad deeds one has accumulated. Incidentally, this theology flies in the face of numerous biblical statements that say you are going to be rewarded according to your deeds.(19) On page 250 the authors say that, "The NT teaches that Jesus was punished for the sins of the whole world in His death. Our sins were not simply ignored or swept under the rug. Jesus 'satisfied' God's demand for justice by bearing our guilt as our substitute."

Point #21 on our pamphlet, *Jesus Christ is the Answer?*, states that, "For Jesus to be executed for our sins makes about as much sense as my son telling a judge that he would accept execution for my crimes. Although a nice gesture it has nothing to do with justice. What judge would agree to such an absurd arrangement?" Yet, we are to believe that God found it acceptable. This is not indicative of a God demanding justice, but denotes a being who simply wants blood, who wants vengeance. He doesn't really care who pays as long as someone hangs.

(20) And finally, while discussing various philosophies on page 266 the authors state, "The big problem with rationalism is that it is a castle built in the air that has no link with reality. It assumes--but does not prove--that the rationally inescapable is the real. In fact, in all of its logical rationalizing, it never proves that anything real even exists.... There is nothing in my existence that even suggests that I, or anything else, must exist...."

Why on earth would one need to prove something that is real exists? By definition, if it is real it exists. And when I can see, hear, feel, smell, and taste a cow that's pretty good evidence cows exist. If the authors feel cows do not exist, then they are obligated to prove as much. Again, the burden of proof lies on he who alleges. When they say that "nothing in my existence" even suggests that I or anything else must exist, they are conceding the very point in dispute. By saying "in my existence," they are admitting they exist. One can't help but be amused when he sees people of an essentially superstitious/supernatural philosophy trying to use rationality to disprove the validity of rational thought. This really came home to me when I read a thick volume several years ago by arch-fundamentalist Peter Ruckman entitled *Science and Philosophy*. He used every rational argument he could think of to prove faith in the Bible was superior to rational thought. He used rationality to prove faith was superior. When push came to shove, he relied upon reason, not faith, to prove his arguments. If he really believed faith were superior, why didn't he rely upon that and discard rational argumentation? It was not because he was writing for those of a rationalistic persuasion but because, he too, subconsciously recognized its superiority.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #457 from Professor John George, University of Central Oklahoma, 100 North University Drive, Edmond, Oklahoma 73034-0182

(John, a longtime supporter and subscriber to BE, wrote a book entitled, *They Never Said It* which was published in 1989 by Oxford Univ. Press and was reviewed in "The Living Arts" section of the New York Times on Thursday, August 31, 1989. He called us by phone and later sent the following excerpt from his book regarding a quote we used from President John Adams. We quoted Adams as saying, "This would be the best of all possible worlds if there were no religion in it." To this Professor George says the following--Ed.).

Although atheistic organizations like to make use of this no-religion remark in order to portray the second President of the United States as a freethinker, they are quoting out of context. Adams did indeed make the statement, but only to repudiate it. In a letter to Thomas Jefferson about religion on April 19, 1817, he mentioned reading some polemical books that reminded him of the way his boyhood minister, Lemuel Bryant, and his Latin schoolmaster, Joseph Cleverly, used to argue ad nauseam about religion, and he told Jefferson: "Twenty times, in the course of my late reading, have I been on the point of breaking out, 'this would be the best of all possible worlds, if there were no religion in it!!!' But in this exclamation, I should have been as fanatical as Bryant and Cleverly. Without religion, this world would be something not fit to be mentioned.... (The Works of John Adams, 10 Vols., X, p. 254, Boston, 1856).

Editor's Response to Letter #457

Dear John. If what you say is true, I stand corrected. That's the risk you take when you rely on someone else's research. Now we can understand why Adams was one of our more nondescript presidents. Incidentally, I noticed in the San Diego Union of 7/17/89 which you sent me that you said, "Fundamentalists try to make Abraham Lincoln look like he believed in fundamentalism." I have encountered the same distortion on several occasions.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #458 from John Sikos, P.O. Box 4179, Center Line, Michigan 48015-4179

Dear Dennis: In his recent letter #432, "Reverend" James White of A&O Ministries claims that my letter #393 about him was nothing more than character assassination. He also says that when we corresponded back in 1988 I was unable to "maintain a conversation on any kind of logical, rational or civil basis." As usual, White has his facts backward, and I am willing to prove it with photocopies of our exchanges to anyone who sends me one dollar for postage/duplicating costs. I strongly urge committed BE readers to write to me.

In May 1988 White sent me a small booklet titled "Letters to an Anti-Theist" which purported to expose Dennis McKinsey as some sort of lost soul who's not educated enough to comment on the Bible. I read it through and chuckled because all the little tract proved is how naive, cocky and grandiose James White actually is. Incidentally, I never requested White's two-cents worth; he sent it to me for no apparent reason.

About a month later I read in the June 1988 issue of BE (#66) that White did not send you a copy of his tirade until you had seen it in White's catalogue and requested it yourself! This implies that you would never have seen the thing had you not chanced upon it in the A&O catalogue. Given that I, a mere mortal, had been blessed with an unsolicited copy, the truth is obvious: James White would have preferred that Dennis McKinsey never see the alleged "refutation" of Dennis McKinsey.

Since I thought this was extremely disgusting behavior, even by the lower standards of most Christians, I wrote White my first letter on June 2, 1988 and stated, "I think it is unethical behavior on your part to claim that Mr. Dennis McKinsey did not receive a copy...simply because he hadn't requested one. I think it would only have been professional courtesy to send him one of the first copies off the press. I hope your antics are not representative of all Christian apologists."

So what do you think James White did next? He wrote me a letter dated June 7, 1988, in which he said: "(Y)our letter was missing some very important facts, sir. First, we have yet to 'publish'

[those are White's quotation marks--JS] the little booklet 'Letters to an Anti-Theist'. The copy you received, and the copy Mr. McKinsey received, are simply photocopies of the master material....Hence, may I suggest, sir, that 'unethical' is the wrong term to utilize..." White was actually conceding that photocopies were available to the public; the booklet had already been listed in the A&O catalogue; John Sikos had been sent an unsolicited photocopy but Dennis McKinsey had not; yet all this is perfectly "ethical" because the material had not yet been "published"! Ha ha ha ha. Why Dennis McKinsey had not been sent an advance "photocopy" too, just like I had been (the central issue here), is something White conveniently ignores; not one shred of remorse can be detected for this unethical unscholarly behavior. (By the way, the "photocopy" of "Letters to an Anti-Theist" had a green cover and looked like standard, published Christian material to me. Obviously, White invented this published/not-published dichotomy only after I caught him with his hands in the cookie jar, much like apologists invent explanations to Bible "difficulties" only after thinking people bring them to the attention of the public.)

So, on June 22 I responded to White: "Your assertion that the booklet was never 'published' in no way defeats my above statement that your antics are unethical....If your booklet was not published, why did you send me a copy unsolicited? Why did you list it on your order form, and then fill the order when a request (i.e. Dennis McKinsey's) was sent to you? If the booklet is, as you claim, a photocopy of the master material, why did you choose to copy the cover page on green paper?...I suppose in all honesty, that a person [like you] might really be deluded into thinking that the tract in question was 'not published'--but instead was placed on an order form and sent to those who requested it....in a form that resembled a published booklet...Wow, the devil is tricky, isn't she?"

So what did White do then? Did this Christian apologize or at least repent for having been so unethical? No! His June 29, 1988, response simply wails "One could search this letter [John Sikos] for eternity to find so much as one modicum of objectivity or scholarly respect." (Scholarly respect!!!) Since he could find none of that, he opines that the "expenditure of time [on me, John Sikos] would not be wise." Ha ha. The guy is deserving of no respect whatsoever, yet thinks he has the right to demand it because he puts a "Rev." in front of his name. And rather than try to earn some respect (perhaps by making a few good, logical arguments, or simply admitting that he had been wrong and saying he's sorry), he condescendingly wimps out and stops corresponding with me. Some apologist.

And after all that, three years later, James White has the nerve to tell Biblical Errancy readers (letter #432) that I, John Sikos, was the one unable to maintain a logical, rational or civil conversation! Give me a break. Unlike some Christian apologists, who deserve at least a small amount of credit for the Herculean effort to fight their uphill battle, James White deserves none. He refuses to say Uncle even when everyone except his mother can see he has been defeated, and for this he demands "scholarly respect." I think Biblical Errancy should ignore White and concentrate on those Christians who at least appear to want to let the evidence determine the truth. White has wasted way too much space in Biblical Errancy over the years.

For those subscribers who wish to experience for themselves White's cocky attitude, his grandiose "I cannot lose this debate so I'll ignore the scoreboard" mentality, I've compiled this index (issue/pages): #44/3-6, #46/2-6, #47/3-5, #52/2-5, #63/1-3, #64/1-3, #65/2-6 (including my Letter #262); #66/4-6, #67/3-4, #68/2-6, #69/5-6, #70/4, #88/5-6, #89/4-5, #93/2-6, #96/3-4 (Letters #392 and #393), #102/3-5, and #103/3. See also the tangentially-related #43/2-3. And I highly recommend White's own "Letters to an Anti-Theist"; it pounds itself into the ground!

Editor's Response to Letter #458

"Verily Satan is an enemy to you: so treat him as an enemy. He only invites his adherents, that they may become Companions of the Blazing Fire." [35:6]

Muslims as well as Christians believe in satan or a devil--Ed.

SCIENCE--"Your guardian-Lord is God, Who created the heavens and the earth in six Days...." [7:54]

"He it is Who created the heavens and the earth in six Days...." [11:7]

"We made from water every living thing." [21:30]

There is that "We" again--Ed.

"The flimsiest of houses is the Spider's house." [29:41]

This is accurate science? Pound for pound a spider's home is a powerhouse--Ed.

"And God did create you from dust; then from a sperm-drop...." [35:11, 40:67]

"Doth not man see that it is We Who created him from sperm?" [35:77]

"We created the heavens and the earth and all between them in Six Days...." [50:38]

SEXISM--"And women shall have rights similar to the rights against them, according to what is equitable; But men have a degree (of advantage) over them." [2:228] "God directs you as regards your children's (inheritance): to the male, a portion equal to that of two females...." [4:11] One can't help but notice the degree to which Islam and Christianity are in agreement on the importance of keeping women subordinate--Ed.

"Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made the one of them to excel the other, and because they spend of their property (for the support of women). So good women are the obedient.... As for those from whom ye fear rebellion, admonish them and banish them to beds apart, and scourge (beat--Ed.) them. Then if they obey you, seek not a way against them." in The Glorious Koran by Marmaduke Pickthall [4:34] Talk about male chauvinism! You can beat women when you merely fear rebellion. It doesn't have to occur--Ed. "...if there are brothers and sisters, (they share), the male having twice the share of the female." [4:176] (See also: 33:50)

Clearly Muslims put no stock whatever in equality between the sexes--Ed.

SINNERS--"But never will prosper those who sin." [10:17] This is the same ridiculous statement the Bible has. If only it were true!--Ed. "And thou wilt see the Sinners that day bound together in fetters.... their garments of liquid pitch, and their faces covered with Fire." [14:49-50]

"The Sinners will be in the Punishment of Hell, to dwell therein (for aye): Nowise will the (punishment) be lightened for them...." [43:74-75] "And the wicked--they will be in the Fire, which they enter on the Day of Judgment...." [82:14-15] (See Also: 55:43, 59:17)

SLAVERY--"...If one kills a Believer, it is ordained that he should free a believing slave...." [4:92] "Who abstain from sex, except with those joined to them in the marriage bond, or (the captives) whom their right hands possess...." [23:5-6] "Marry those among you who are single, or the virtuous ones among your slaves, male or female...." [24:32] "And if any of your slaves

ask for a deed in writing (to enable them to earn their freedom for a certain sum), give them such a deed...." [24:33] (See also: 58:3) The Koran supports slavery as much as the Bible--Ed.

TRINITY--"...to set up partners with God is to devise a sin most heinous indeed." [4:48]

"God forgiveth not (the sin of) joining other gods with Him." [4:116] "Say not 'Trinity': desist: It will be better for you: for God is one God...." [4:171] "In blasphemy indeed are those that say that God is Christ the son of Mary." [5:17]

"They do blaspheme who say: 'God is Christ the son of Mary'...Whoever joins other gods with God,--God will forbid him the Garden, and the Fire will be his abode.... They do blaspheme who say God is one of three in a Trinity: for there is no god except One God. If they desist not from their word (of blasphemy), verily a grievous penalty will befall the blasphemers among them.... Christ the son of Mary was no more than an Apostle." [5:72-75]

"And behold! God will say: 'O Jesus the son of Mary! Didst thou say unto men, Worship me and my mother as gods in derogation of God'? He (Jesus--Ed.) will say: 'Glory to Thee! Never could I say what I had no right (to say).'" [5:116] "And be not thou of the company of those who join gods with God." [6:14] "How can He have a son when He hath no consort?" [6:101] "There is no god but He: turn aside from those who join gods with God." [6:106] "...the Christians call Christ the son of God. That is a saying from their mouth; (In this) they but imitate what the Unbelievers of old used to say. God's curse be on them: how they are deluded away from the Truth!... And (they take as their Lord) Christ the son of Mary; Yet they were commanded to worship but One God: There is no god but He." [9:30-31]

"What do they follow who worship as His 'partners' other than God? They follow nothing but fancy, and they do nothing but lie." [10:66] "Praise be to God, who begets no son, and has no partner in (His) dominion...." [17:111]

"Further, that He may warn those (also) who say, 'God hath begotten a son'. No knowledge have they of such a thing, nor had their fathers. It is a grievous thing that issues from their mouths as a saying. What they say is nothing but falsehood." [18:4-5] "It is not befitting to (the majesty of) God that he should beget a son." [19:35] "They say: (God) had begotten a son! Indeed ye have put forth a thing most monstrous! At it the skies are ready to burst, the earth to split asunder,...for it is not consonant with the majesty of (God)...that He should beget a son." [19:88-92] "Is it not that they say, from their own invention, 'God has begotten children'? But they are liars!" [27:151-152, 37:151] "He is God, the One and Only;...And there is none like unto Him." [112:1, 4] (See also: 6:100, 163, 10:68-69, 16:2, 22, 51, 20:14, 98, 21:98, 108, 23:91-92, 25:2, 28:70, 88, 38:65, 39:4, 6, 40:3, 62, 64-64, 47:19, 50:24-26, 73:9)

Muslims repeatedly assert their allegiance to monotheism and promise damnation for those who believe in a Trinity. Yet, "we," "us," and "our," are repeatedly used in the Koran with respect to God--2:50, 57, 59, 60, 5:44, 46, 48, 7:138, 10:23-24, 73, 11:69, 19:21, 19:38, 40, 51:47. The implication that Muslims are something other than monotheists, if not trinitarians, is very strong--ED.

UNBELIEVERS--"As to those who reject faith, I will punish them with terrible agony in this world and the Hereafter, nor will they have anyone to help." [3:56]

"They but wish that ye should reject Faith, as they do, and thus be on the same footing as they.... But if they turn renegades, seize them and slay them wherever ye find them...." [4:89]

"Seize them and slay them wherever ye get them...." [4:91]

Again we see that tolerance is not one of Islam's strong points. If the Muslims ever gain control of this country and abide by the Koran, one can only shudder at the prospect of what will occur--Ed.

"For the Unbelievers are unto you open enemies.... The unbelievers wish...to assault you in a single rush...." [4:101]

I would say this comes under the heading of paranoia--Ed.

"For God will collect the Hypocrites and those who defy Faith--all in Hell...." [4:140]

"We have prepared for those among them who reject Faith a grievous punishment." [4:161]

"Those who reject Faith and do wrong,--God will not forgive them nor guide them to any way--except the way of Hell, to dwell therein for ever." [4:168-169]

"Those who reject faith and deny Our Signs will be Companions of Hell-fire." [5:10]

It is important to note that this includes all Christians and Jews--Ed.

(See Also: 4:93, 137, 144, 151, 5:5, 6:70, 116, 150, 7:51, 8:36, 37, 9:73, 74, 95, 10:4, 8, 13:35, 14:2, 17:8, 19:37, 21:98, 33:8, 64-65, 38:27, 39:71, 57:15, 19, 64:7, 66:9, 84:21-24)

VIRGIN BIRTH--"She said: 'Oh my Lord! How shall I have a son when no man hath touched me? He said:...When He hath decreed a Plan, He but saith to it, 'Be,' and it is!" [3:47]

"She said: 'How shall I have a son, seeing that no man has touched me, and I am not unchaste?'" [19:20]

ZODIAC--"It is We Who have set out the zodiacal Signs in the Heavens...." [15:16]

Muslims believe in signs of the Zodiac but contend their Book is scientifically precise. How's that for turning logic on its head--Ed.

In conclusion, the last three commentaries have shown quite well that Islam in general and the Koran in particular deserve no more respect than Christianity or the Bible. Both are composed of superstitions, contradictions, hypocrisy, deception, intolerance, and inaccuracies.

REVIEWS

Although we do not normally become involved in the "Does God Exist" debate, an exception is in order. A couple of months ago we received one of the most vacuous pamphlets imaginable from Alpha and Omega Ministries. Entitled A Few Thoughts on Atheism and written by A & O's director, the tiny tome ignores the very point that has been made so often in BE; namely, the Burden of Proof Lies on He Who Alleges. Theists keep bringing up the idea of God and don't want to admit that it is up to them to provide evidence for His existence which the author failed to do. Freethought advocates are under no obligation to disprove the existence of anything. Theists are the ones who keep coming up with the idea, so it is up to them to prove their case. And, as was said many issues ago, that's the Achilles Heel of religionists. They can't! And that's

primarily why religions are called "Faiths." Many of the pamphlet's comments are jewels of disinformation.

For instance, White states, "I cannot join you on your foundation, on your starting point, because it automatically, from the very beginning, denies the existence of God ." When will the religionists ever learn that the scientific, rational mind doesn't ipso facto deny the existence of anything, period. All we have is one simple request: Please provide evidence, provide proof, provide something beyond hope and intuition for your creations. That's all we ask, nothing more, nothing less. Is that too much to ask? Don't ask us to believe something simply because you or a book say it's valid or you would like it to be true. The problem lies not in the fact that we deny the existence of God but that you have failed to prove his, her, or its existence.

In the first paragraph the author says, "I believe that there is not only sufficient evidence to demonstrate the existence of God, but there is an over-abundance of such evidence. I do not believe in God without evidence. I do not live in a dream world, disconnected from reality." Yet, not one shred of evidence for God's existence is provided in the pamphlet. As an excuse for this obvious oversight, the author states near the end, "that if you (the freethought advocates--Ed.) were to allow into evidence anything that would demonstrate the existence of God, you would, by default, be letting go of the thing you hold most dearly--your autonomy, your independence from God. You would have to step down from the judgment seat and take your proper position as the created being rather than the independent judge. So, to avoid this plight, you simply dismiss any and all evidence that could in any way cause you to have to recognize the existence of God. Despite my providing you a lengthy list of evidences for God, my efforts would be in vain. 'Case dismissed for lack of evidence' would be your verdict."

How's that for convoluted thinking! In essence, White is saying he believes God exists and has more than enough evidence to prove as much, but will not furnish the requisite data because our autonomy and independence from God would cause us to ignore it. He assumes something exists, refuses to provide any kind of real proof because our alleged ego can't stand the strain and, then, criticizes us for not believing it. If we were to give credence to "logic" of that variety, a Greek believer in Zeus would be well within his rights to say that he has mountains of evidence for the existence of Zeus, but will not make them available to critics because the latter will not surrender their skepticism and feelings of superiority and accept the information. In fact, anyone with any kind of crackpot, off-the-wall, screwball concept could say he could furnish more than enough data to prove his belief but will not comply because of the ego of others. It's little more than a cop-out by another name, a disingenuous subterfuge.

White states, "But this is all circular!" you might say. 'You (White--Ed.) begin with the existence of God!' Yes, that's right. And I'm up front about it. I admit it. But my friend, you too are in the same boat! I have my particular set of unprovable presuppositions. But so do you! I assume my createdness. You assume your non-createdness! I assume my dependence upon God. You assume your independence from God! Any system of thought has to have, at its foundation, a set of unproven and unprovable assumptions, presuppositions if you like that give form and substance to all that follows." In the first place James, rational people don't assume their non-createdness; they go where the evidence leads them and that is toward non-createdness. Religionists are the ones who assume; they assume despite the evidence. They assume their createdness despite mountains of data to the contrary, not because of it. Evidence should be primary, assumptions or beliefs secondary. With religionists precisely the opposite is true. The scientific mind collects data, notices regularity, formulates concepts and laws accordingly, and then operates upon those concepts as long as they are reliable. Religionists, on the other hand, formulate the theory and either gather no evidence for substantiation or gather only that which tends to substantiate while ignoring all that doesn't. Both philosophies make assumptions but

there is a tremendous qualitative difference in how their assumptions come into being. The scientist's assumption that he will have an explosion when he drops sodium into water is not even in the same category as a religionist's assumption that he will rise from the dead or alter reality by prayer. One learns from experience, while the other experience is either irrelevant or viewed tendentiously. One factors in all of his known experience, while the other only factors in that which buttresses his preconceived notions. Which is primary, material conditions or ideas, is the most fundamental concept in all of philosophy. All philosophers, all thinkers, are fundamentally in one of two camps, either the materialists or the idealists. Do ideas have to conform to the material conditions of the outside world or does the outside world have to conform to ideas. Which is primary; which is secondary? How you answer that question dominates your view of every question in life and puts you into one of the two major camps.

White states, "May I suggest that if what I believe is right--if you really are the creation of God--Then you might do well to consider the wisdom of your demand for evidence of the existence of God, as well as your disbelief therein? What I mean is this: if you owe your very existence to God, then it becomes obvious that the creature is not wise to reject the existence of its creator." This kind of argument is nothing more than a variation on Pascal's Wager; namely, you had better believe it; you never know, it might be true. Don't take a chance. Of course, virtually anyone who has been exposed to more than just one religious philosophy, anyone who has had his horizons broadened beyond just the narrow confines of his limited locale and not lived his entire life in a religious myopia, knows that the major problem with a ruse of this nature is that it suffers from ethno/religiocentrism. Working on this logic, I had better believe in every religion and every god imaginable because, you never know, they might be the real McCoy. And, of course, that is impossible since many beliefs are in direct conflict. White compares critics of Christianity to computers that see only their "own little universe of chips, disks, and programs," when that describes his narrow universe precisely. He accuses freethinkers of taking a chance when that describes his position exactly. According to Sura 5:73 in the Koran ("They do blaspheme who say: God is one of three in a Trinity: for there is no god except One God. If they desist not from their word (of blasphemy), verily a grievous penalty will befall the blasphemers among them") he is going to Hell because of his belief in the Trinity. You had better "desist" James, and do so promptly, or don't you put any credence in the Koran. Apparently you put as much stock in the Koran as I do the Bible.

White states, "I believe the answer lies in the starting point of our thinking. You and I don't start at the same place. If God exists, then I simply cannot begin with myself as the starting place of my thinking. And why not? Does one start with the created.... If God exists, then any system of thinking must be predicated upon Him, not on something less. On the other hand, you do consider yourself as a sufficient starting place. In fact, you assert that there cannot possibly be any other foundation of thought outside of yourself." How many false steps can one take in so few words? First, he says, "If," if God exists. But that assumes the very point in dispute and puts us back to point zero and proves nothing. Second, he says that nontheists view themselves as a sufficient starting place, which is utterly false. The outside world is the real starting point. We must conform to its dictates and learn its rules and laws if we are to survive and prosper, and not the other way around. White, on the other hand, like all superstitious people, concocts or accepts a theory and then tries to force the outside world to fit his mold. That's a recipe for disaster. One can only ignore the external world to his or her own peril. It's not going to fit you; you have to fit it. It's not going to adapt; you have to. White, however, has chosen to ignore the real world in large measure and make himself the supreme arbiter. In effect, he deems himself to be the starting place. Christians talk about heaven, hell, salvation, resurrection, eternal life, the devil, angels, spirits, god, and untold numbers of other supernatural entities without providing a shred of tangible evidence for anything. That's why it is called the Christian Faith: faith, not proof.

And finally, one can't help but note that White used the phrase "I believe" at least 10 times at major intersections in his rather short pamphlet. After completing the pamphlet, you can't help but wonder why you bothered to read it at all in view of the amount of hope, speculation and guesswork dominating the scene.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #459 from Anonymous of Santa Anna, California

Dear Biblical Errancy. I was so thrilled to find your bookmark entitled "Alleged Problem Verses of the Bible," in a Christian book I purchased in a bookstore. It is such a shame that you have to draw at such straws to try to prove that the Bible is false.... My church and I are committed to finding all of your Bible errancy bookmarks and replace them with one of our own, in all the New Age books. Thank you for your wonderful idea!

Editor's Response to Letter #459

Dear Anonymous. You not only don't have enough courage to print your name on your letter but enough integrity to address even one point made on the pamphlet. Your addiction to escapism, delusion, and superstition, along with a liberal sprinkling of censorship, is your only real commitment my friend. No wonder you are a Christian.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #460 from A & E W, Fort Myers, Florida

Dear Dennis.... We're wondering why you don't ask for "donations," as the preachers do, for your audio tapes, pamphlets, and other items you offer, rather than state that they can be "purchased." Anyhow, we're looking forward to the new index since we have all the back issues of BIBLICAL ERRANCY, everyone of which is a GEM!

Editor's Response to Letter #460

Dear A and E. Asking for money is hard for me to do. I can't help but feel I am petitioning. When people give me something I feel obligated to return the favor. However, in order for some of the projects I have in mind to come to fruition, I am willing to bite the bullet. Fortunately, many people have already been kind and generous and for this I am most grateful.

Letter #461 from JS of Tulsa, Oklahoma

Dear Dennis. Recently I was invited to a Baptist youth camp in southwestern Oklahoma called Falls Creek. Perhaps you've heard of it. It is reputed to be one of the largest youth camps in the world, with an attendance the week I was there at well over 6,000. I have seen first-hand the programming that goes on at these things. Thrice a day everyone gathered under a large open-air "tabernacle" and listened to the various preachers propound their version of the truth. Usually the sermons were rather tame, but a few of the sermons were directed at the "atheists, agnostics, pagans and infidels," and they blasted everything from Thomas Paine to the Big Bang theory. I was quite troubled that the youths there have no alternate information to refer to, and so I stood helplessly as hundreds marched down each night to be saved, simply on the word of a preacher and the Bible. I did manage to talk some sense into a few witnesses who tried to convert me once they found out my agnosticism, but I am afraid that many of them will never get to hear the other side of the coin. Because of this, I would ask that, whenever possible, BE readers should attempt

to at least explain alternatives of the infallible Bible concept and Christianity to youths or adults who attempt to witness to them. Otherwise many will never see what is wrong with their theology....

Editor's Response to Letter #461

Dear JS. Your point is well taken. As you probably know, BE has always advocated a strong program of "taking it to the other side." That is a major reason why letters in which people are relating encounters they have had with biblicists have always received priority in BE. Proselytization is of utmost importance. You either grow or bow.

Letter #462 from BJ of Douglasville, Georgia

Dear Mr. McKinsey. I've been contacting Christian Bulletin Boards by computer (modem) and posting some of the Bible contradictions listed in Biblical Errancy. The response I usually get is: "You are taking the verses out of context" or "you must have faith to understand the Bible" then go on to tell me what the verses mean. One SYSOP (Computer Systems Operator) told me that it makes him uncomfortable having a nonbeliever on a Christian BBS, asking questions and quoting Bible text. I think he wanted me off his BBS. My response was - what is a better place for me to ask questions about the contradictions and errors within the Bible, than to take them to Christians for answers. I'm still on that bulletin board, and still active....

Editor's Response to Letter #462

Dear BJ. Fantastic! You are right in among them and scoring where it hurts. You can be pretty sure you are striking home when they want you off the air. Keep it up, develop your style, improve your tactics and learn what works. We need hundreds of people following your lead.

Letter #463 from JC of South River, New Jersey

Dear Dennis. ...Your publication continues to be a valuable educational research source, as well as highly entertaining. Just reading the letters by apologists and fanatics is worth the price of admission, and your logical, precise responses to them is added bread and butter. (Cliche's are great).

I may have asked you this before but once again I would like to know if you have a list of projected radio appearances, especially in the Northeast. If you do I would appreciate a schedule of them. Keep up your very important work. The world needs more like you.

Editor's Response to Letter #463

Thanks for the encouragement. We don't have a schedule of our appearances, since, unfortunately, they are too erratic.

Letter #464 from AH of Sonoma, California

Dear Dennis. ...Your publication is showing people how to be objective and impartial about many more things than all the contradictions and stupidities with the bible. In fact, I recall a letter in BE where someone said exactly this same thing, that they were more observant, objective and impartial in many other areas as a result of your publication. This is also true of myself. The benefits I have received from reading BE help me in more areas than the bible....

Dennis, you are doing a fabulous job! I just wish that I could write better letters, and get more of them published....you are doing a wonderful job, and I look forward to BE more than any other mail that I receive. Best wishes and continued success.

Letter #465 from GM of Delta, Utah

Dear Dennis. I received the June issue of BE, and as usual I enjoyed it immensely. I cannot understand why people won't renounce the horrible Bible, when you are trying to enlighten them on the many errors of that book of drivel. I believe it would be easier to thread a needle with boxing gloves on while riding a bucking horse in an 80 mph sand storm than to get the utterly pigheaded Christians to understand that the Bible lunacy is nothing but erroneous nonsense. If the Bible said that a ravenous micro-plankton swallowed five full grown blue whales in 15 seconds, some Bible-carrying individuals would believe it without question.

Editor's Response to Letter #465

Dear GM. When it comes to the Bible, you are correct. There is nothing so preposterous that Christians won't believe it if the Bible says it occurred. Talking donkeys, sticks turning into snakes, floating ax-heads, people rising from the dead. How much more absurd can you get! Anybody who will believe in these will believe in anything.

Letter #466 from TD of Morgantown, West Virginia

Dear Mr. McKinsey.... Hope you will get back to more details regarding biblical errors in future issues of BE. We out here in the trenches are always in need of ammunition.

Letter #467 from PG of Gadsden, Alabama

Dear Dennis.... I have thoroughly enjoyed your publication. Please don't stray too far from chapter and verse examples of Biblical errancy. (I enjoy quotations and letter answering but there is nothing quite like the proof positive!). Thanks again, I truly appreciate your efforts.

Editor's Response to Letter #467

Dear PG. Valid point! TD, whose letter precedes yours, seems to agree with you. But then, KN, who wrote the letter preceding TD's, says his favorite parts are the letters. Hopefully, I can maintain the right balance.

Letter #468 from RN of Moscow, Idaho

Dear Dennis. ...I tried a new tactic recently. I sent a local columnist who had attacked the ACLU on school prayer a photocopy of Matt. 6 with verses 5-6 ("...But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly") highlighted. On the verses I wrote: "On the other side is something you obviously have never seen before. I ask only two things of you: 1. Please read it, 2. Please don't spit on it. Yours truly... A few days later, on a Sunday evening, he phoned me and apologized! He had obviously discussed it with his fundie pastors the same day. Idaho's congressional delegation has also received it....

Editor's Response to Letter # 468

weeping,...and they shall come again from the land of the enemy....thy children shall come again to their own border'." The quote in Matthew does not come from Jeremiah for several reasons. (a) Jeremiah's statement has nothing to do with Jesus. Jeremiah is referring to some Israelites who are crying because they have been taken captive out of Israel and their children are dying. (b) There is nothing in the verse that would justify its application to the children killed by Herod. (c) "Was heard" shows that Jeremiah was speaking of an event that had already occurred. He quotes Yahweh as speaking in the past tense. (d) How were the children Herod killed going to return from the land of the enemy? (e) Why wasn't Leah rather than Rachel represented as the grieving mother, since it was from her that Herod's victims were descended? Leah was the female ancestor of the inhabitants of Bethlehem. The actual prediction of this entire prophecy is that the Israelite children taken captive to Babylon will return to Israel. (60) MATT. 8:17 says, "That it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying, 'Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses'" and is supposedly a reproduction of Isaiah 53:4 which says, "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted." The obvious dissimilarities to be noted are: (a) When did Jesus bare the diseases he cured. (b) When was Jesus smitten by God. (c) And "hath borne" and "smitten" are past tense verbs which shows that an event prior to the time of Isaiah is under discussion. (61) MATT. 27:5-10 says, "And he cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed, and went and hanged himself. And the chief priests took the silver pieces, and said, 'It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, because it is the price of blood'. And they took counsel, and brought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. Wherefore that field was called, The field of blood, unto this day. Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, 'And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value; And gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me'." Although supposedly taken from the Book of Jeremiah, the quote from Matthew is nowhere to be found therein. Some apologists have conceded as much and alleged it is actually to be found in the Book of Zechariah. Zechariah 11:12-13 says, "And I said unto them, If ye think good, give me my price; And if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said unto me, Cast it unto the potter: A goodly price that I was prised at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the Lord." But Zechariah is wholly inappropriate for several reasons. (a) In Zechariah the 30 pieces of silver were called a goodly price; yet in Matthew the 30 pieces were the price of blood. (b) In Zechariah the deal was approved by the Lord; while in Matthew it was condemned by Him. (c) In Zechariah the money was given to the potter in the house of the Lord; while in Matthew the money was refused admittance to the treasury, and the priests used it to buy a potter's field. (d) In Zechariah "I," one man, gave the 30 pieces to a potter; while, in Matthew "they," a group, took the 30 pieces of silver and gave them for a potter's field. Moreover, Zechariah nowhere mentions a field. (e) And lastly, "to the potter" in the KJV in Zechariah should have been translated "into the treasury" as was done in the RSV. Thus, it would have no relation to the potter mentioned in Matthew. (62) MATT. 27:35 says, "...that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots" and was supposedly taken from Psalm 22:18 which says, "They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture." Apologists conveniently ignore the fact that: (a) Psalm 22 uses present tense verbs and is referring to events contemporaneous with Isaiah. (b) The writer of Psalm 22 is speaking of himself, not Jesus or anyone else, and (c) The writer of Psalm 22 is not prophesying anything. (63) ACTS 1:16 says, "Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus." In the first place, David never said anything about Judas. Psalm 41:9 to which the author of Acts is referring says, "Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me." It is decidedly inapplicable because the same speaker says the following five verses earlier in Psalm 41:4, "I said, Lord, be merciful unto me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against thee." If Jesus is the speaker in Psalm

41:9 then he is also the sinner in Psalm 41:4. But the Bible repeatedly states in such verses as 1 John 3:5 ("...and in him is no sin") and 1 Peter 2:22 ("Who did not sin...") that Jesus is sinless. (64) ACTS 2:30 says, "...God had sworn with an oath to him (David--Ed.), that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne." It is supposedly taken from Psalm 132:11-12 which says, "The Lord hath sworn in truth unto David; he will not turn from it; Of the fruit of thy body will I set upon thy throne. If thy children will keep my covenant and my testimony that I shall teach them, their children shall also sit upon thy throne for evermore." Apologists fail to note that all of David's descendants who keep God's covenant will sit upon David's throne not just one man. There is no hint whatsoever that only one man received the promise. Moreover, Psalms does not mention Christ. Why assume he is the specific person under discussion? (65) ACTS 13:30-33 says, "But God raised him from the dead and for many days he appeared to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people. And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the Second Psalm (2:7): 'Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee'." Where does Psalm 2:7 say that in some distant day I will raise Jesus of Nazareth, Joseph's son, from the dead? Nowhere does the 2nd Psalm contend that: (a) anyone will rise from the dead, (b) he who is the Son of God must rise from the dead, (c) Jesus of Nazareth is the son of God, (d) or anyone risen from the dead shall be the son of God. (66) Lastly, ROM. 4:5-8 says, "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." This was supposedly a recreation of Psalm 32:1-2 which says, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile." The quote from Psalms is irrelevant to Paul's arguments for several reasons. (a) Just because God forgave iniquities does not mean one is saved by faith. (b) There is no mention in Psalms of believing "on him." (c) Psalms says nothing about "belief." (d) And in no sense does Psalms imply that a man's sins are forgiven because he believed or accepted something. (TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT MONTH)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #469 from JP of Seattle, Washington

Dear Dennis. I enjoyed your review of *When Skeptics Ask* by Geisler and Brooks and wish to add one comment to your fine review found in issue #105. On page 4 you quoted Geisler and Brooks concerning the assumptions of science as they relate to the critics fairness to the doctrine of inerrancy. For the scientist, all knowledge of matters of fact, as distinct from purely logical relations, is based upon experience. Geisler and Brooks would be hard pressed to demonstrate how we know the Bible is inerrant based upon experience; especially, since no original inerrant biblical documents exist for us to test! Their association of the doctrine of inerrancy with the empirical methods of research is misleading. The assumption that anomalies concerning matters of fact have an explanation can be justified based upon the coherence of the assumption within the particular theory in question. Considerable weight can be given to such assumptions because they are not "empty," i.e., they agree with (cohere) a broad number of matters of fact.

On the other hand, the doctrine of inerrancy is laden with assumptions which cannot agree with a broad number of matters of fact. What physical evidence can the apologist present which would support the assumption that the original documents were inerrant? The claim of inerrancy is extraordinary and no amount of fallible-errant biblical texts will justify the assumption that we can know the original biblical documents were inerrant.

In sum, Geisler and Brooks mislead their readers into thinking it is unfair to require the inerrantist to provide an inerrant Bible when in fact, no one requires an inerrant science. The absurdity in their thinking is understood when it is realized that the scientific method does not include an assumption of inerrancy for theories constructed from matters of fact. In fact, the scientific method requires that a theory be such that it is open to being disproven. Could you imagine the inerrantist setting out to disprove their doctrine? No. Geisler and Brooks are clearly misleading in asking us to assume the truth of the claim of inerrancy, an extraordinary claim, as if it were identical to an assumption based upon claims grounded in matters of fact.

Editor's Response to Letter #469

Dear JP. In essence, I think your argument is that biblicists can't prove with any kind of empirical or tangible evidence that the "originals" are inerrant and until they do so we would be foolish to take their word for it. No number of errant copies or secondary issues can demonstrate or substantiate the existence or textual composition of an inerrant original. I would agree.

Letter #470 from DC of Phoenix, Arizona

Dear Dennis. I'm including some papers I gave to a Bible believing Christian. He works as the book manager at one of the largest Christian bookstores in the Phoenix area. He's also associated with one of the largest fundamentalist churches in the Phoenix area. In August 1991 his church sent him out of state to attend an evangelism conference. In his office at his church we discussed the prophecy of Ezekiel 26. The main point he brought out was his theory that most of the original island (upon which Tyre was built) is now underwater. He had absolutely nothing to support his theory except statements by Gleason Archer in the Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties. He also made the careless statement that the word "they" in Ezek. 26:12 refers to Alexander the Great and his soldiers. The papers I'm sending you are my response to his claims. I thought you might enjoy reading them.

After our discussion, he suggested we should discuss the resurrection of Jesus in our next meeting. I took the time to write a short paper on that subject. I also gave him some information on the subject of "faith"....

I'm also debating two Jehovah's Witness members on a regular basis (about once every two weeks). One is in his early 30's and the other in his late 20's. They're both very interested in discussing the Bible.

Dear Dennis, your hard work, careful research, and clear thinking shines through brightly in your newsletter. Your goal "towards the creation of a more rational and correctly-informed populace" is to be applauded and encouraged. You have greatly motivated me to do my part in helping to achieve the same goal. Thank you!

Editor's Response to Letter #470

Dear DC. Your eagerness to confront them on their own turf is tremendous! Your efforts are to be congratulated and your kind sentiments are much appreciated. Letters of this kind in which freethinkers are engaging the other side in verbal repartee' have always had the highest priority in BE. After all, if we don't enlighten Christians in regard to the errors of their ways, who will. We must go to them because there is little chance of them coming to us. Why would they seek out our views when they are convinced they already have the truth. Only when they are convinced their mountain is not worth the climb, will they be willing to give ours a hearing.

Letter #471 from RM of St. Charles, Missouri

Dennis.... I just recently passed out a lot of your pamphlets at a KSIV picnic here in St. Louis. KSIV is a national "Christian information radio station" headquartered in California. I had dozens of people surrounding me asking me questions. I was also asking them questions, showing them scriptures, answering their questions, showing them biblical errors, etc. I had 5 people pray for me, and I ended up giving my phone number to 3 people. These people can really come up with some interesting/superficial/dumb answers to your biblical errors. For example, with Lev. 11:6 they said there used to be a hare that chewed its cud and it is now extinct. As far as Jer. 19:9 is concerned "God caused them to be in a situation where they were forced to be cannibals. He didn't actually cause them to be cannibals." What difference does that make? And finally, one guy told me the answer to Ex. 32:14 vs. Num. 23:19 is that it depends on what the word "repent" means. I told him, no it doesn't. The fact that the Book says that God does not do something and then he turns around and says he does is sufficient for a contradiction. It doesn't matter what that something is. I just hope I got some of them to think. There were also a lot of children around listening to me. Maybe they got something out of it.

Editor's Response to Letter #471

Dear RM. Your's is the kind of activity in which far more people in the freethought movement should be engaged. Don't underestimate your influence. Your willingness to go in among them definitely has an effect, even though it may not be immediately apparent. Those who heard you will spend time later thinking about what you said, even though they may not want to admit as much. And with children present, that makes your efforts all the more worthwhile.

Letter #472 from EB of Wayne, Michigan

Dear Dennis.... I went on a two week vacation and left your pamphlets all the way from Michigan to Massachusetts. At Gettysburg, Pennsylvania a fundie handed me a Jesus pamphlet and I handed him one of yours. I always carry 3 or 4 for that purpose.

Reading your periodical has done the one thing that has made me a "completed" atheist at last! You have done something that no other freethought group or freethinker has done. You have taken away the preachers and apologists' "MAGIC". They are nothing but PURE CONMEN. Your reasoning, logic, and style are PURE SUNSHINE. Please! Keep up the GREAT WORK.

Editor's Response to Letter #472

Dear EB. You have not only been one of BE's staunchest supporters but a model to be followed. Your eagerness to take it to the opposition, distribute scores of pamphlets, and confront them on their own grounds with their own material is exemplary. When we met at a convention in Detroit, you presented a good program for proselytization. Isn't it nice to have something to give the other side when they distribute their wares. But, remember, no pamphlet or written material can replace personal contact. Questions will invariably arise that can only be addressed by someone on the scene.

Letter #473 from Stephen M. Barr, 6425 Old Redwood Highway, Santa Rosa, California 95403

Dear Dennis. I first read the Bible when I was between the ages of 10 and 12. My first reaction after reading it then was that it was ridiculous--and since then I have been anti-Bible and anti-religious. I suffered the epithet of "heathen" in the Navy, especially in boot camp when all were required to attend church services Sunday morning.

My father even disliked and complained about my "irreligiousness." Nevertheless, in college, I quickly became a member of Madalyn O'Hair's "Society of Separationists" that she had just organized. We wrote letters to the Supreme Court and various senators and representatives to have the (property and income) tax exemption of churches and clergy rescinded. Church taxation is a subject I still heartily support - it is long overdue.

My fervor against religion and the Bible has not abated. In the 40 years since first reading the Bible, I have collected many contradictions and inconsistencies. These I have assembled into a book that I was just about to publish when Biblical Errancy was introduced to me. Needless to say, the book has been put on hold as additions and refinements due to your excellent scholarship are being made. In reading through all of the back issues that I have collected, I notice an increasing desire by your correspondents for a book such as the one I am assembling. I detect, also, a need for some method of indexing this information - a project I plan soon to begin. I hope to have this "Bible Study Book" ready to publish next year.

If any of your readers have any suggestions on what form the index should take, I would like to hear from them.... Keep up the good work! I look forward to BE every month!

Editor's Response to Letter #473

Dear Stephen. I think one of our subscribers in Texas has already assembled the kind of index you feel is needed. We started distributing it in the July 1991 Issue. But, then, perhaps you are referring to an index of your own book?

Letter #474 from John Sikos of Center Line, Michigan

Dear Dennis. Just wanted to let you know that the November issue (#107) arrived today, November 12. I do not know if you mailed it out earlier than usual, or if the postal service is merely being inconsistent (I doubt it's that they're actually improving!), but I definitely like receiving BE earlier than the last day of the month.

About a dozen people have requested copies of the James White material. Most also stated that they enjoyed my letter to you as published in Issue #106. Only a few requested the material without any supportive comment.

Your review of A Few Thoughts on Atheism is right on the mark, although I would have been a bit more scathing if I'd been you. My personal opinion is that James White knows damn well his arguments (on the burden of proof and everything else) ain't cuttin' it, but that neither he nor his followers care. His job and income depend on his continuing on -- and he will. This is why we must work at reaching a bigger share of the public directly -- not through other people's television and radio shows, but our own. Only then will the charlatans effectively be exposed. As always, I love BE. Keep up the good work.

P.S. Letter #468 was an absolute inspiration.

Editor's Response to Letter #474

Dear John. I mailed the November issue, like all issues, on the last day of the prior month. You are no more perturbed about the erratic mail delivery than I. It can only be described as ridiculous and there is nothing I can do. Your comments with respect to the media reflect my views quite well and that is why I am planning to develop some comprehensive audio tapes and public-

access video programs. Unfortunately, diversions that sidetrack my central thrust keep arising, but I'll get there eventually.

Letter #475 from BW of Shreveport, Louisiana

Dear Dennis.... I must express my appreciation for your efforts in scuttling the "inerrancy" doctrine: Once Christians realize that they can't really trust the Bible as "God's Holy Word", the way opens to talk some sense to them. Facts and evidence don't matter, if they believe that every word in the Bible is literally true!

I will try to build up a collection of back issues and even some tapes, as resources permit. Already, the few issues I have come in handy in debates on computer bulletin boards. With Farrell Till's Skeptical Review, I've got an arsenal to back me up.... Looking forward to every issue.

Letter #476 from RN of Moscow, Idaho

(On pages 17 and 18 of the Sept./Oct. 1991 issue of the magazine, Free Mind, can be found the following comments by RN under the title "Toss the Book at 'Em." RN sent BE a copy--Ed.)

I started writing letters to the editor against creationists six years ago and soon found out that telling them what scientists say is like pouring water on a duck's back. The only way to reach them is to tell them what the Bible says. Or, in other words, throw "The Book" at them!

I have found the biblical approach extremely effective. I have knocked out several dozen fundamentalists, including two preachers and a local columnist. Whenever possible, I try to make my letters funny, so that the general public will laugh at the fundies. Recently, an evangelical acquaintance informed me that the better known of the preachers no longer has any credibility in Christian circles. And I keep bumping into businesspersons and professors who appreciate my efforts. And, best of all, only newcomers dare to write letters to the editor about school prayer or creationism. The rest of them are silent except, no doubt, for daily prayers for my demise.

Make no mistake about it: the worst enemy of the fundamentalists is the Bible. For us Humanists, however, it is indeed a "good book." Let us use it more often....

Editor's Response to Letter #476

Dear RN. You are asserting what we have been saying for years. The Bible is its own worst enemy and the most effective means by which to combat the largest number of religionists in this nation is to expose the Bible for the fraud that it is. If you bring any kind of outside data to the Bible to prove its inaccuracy, such as scientific information, biblicists are simply going to say, "I don't care what kind of data you have; if it disagrees with the Bible, then it is wrong and that is that." So, I don't go outside the Bible to find information saying the Bible is false; I use internal information that says so. I don't have outside evidence saying the Bible is false; I have the Bible saying the Bible is false. And that is far more difficult to counteract. When something in Mark contradicts something in Luke or something in Proverbs conflicts with something in Exodus, in effect, I have one part of the Bible saying another part is a lie. Of course, an approach of this nature requires a tremendous amount of homework in a book that is often monotonous, inconsistent, vague, petty, silly, superstitious, inaccurate, repetitious, and boring. Because these traits are quite prominent, it is generally eschewed by those of a more rational frame of mind. Unfortunately, the latter often fail to realize that because it is the people's placebo avoidance is

With this month's commentary we will conclude our analysis of ACCOMMODATIONS and the large number of Misquotes, Nonquotes, and Misinterpretations that permeate the NT. This, our final installment of Misinterpretations, will continue the numbering of prior issues.

ACCOMMODATIONS

(Part 6)

Misinterpretations--(67) ROM. 15:3 says, "For even Christ pleased not himself: but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me." Paul misinterpreted Psalm 69:9 which says, "For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me." The "me" referred to in Psalm 69:9 is David. He is the person who is speaking, not Jesus. (68) GAL. 3:6-9 says, "Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham." Yet, Gal. 3:10 which follows says, "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is everyone one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them." One should note that verse 10 does not logically follow verses 6-9. Verses 6-9 stress faith while verse 10 stresses the importance of following the law. Verse 10 was taken from Deut. 27:26 which says, "Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them...." and is a strong statement to follow, not ignore, the law. The curse is on those who do not follow the law. Paul twisted Deut. 27:26 in such a manner as to imply that those who follow the law are cursed. The reverse is true. (69) GAL. 3:13 says, "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree." It was taken from Deut. 21:22-23 which says, "And if a man commits a sin worthy of death, and he be put to death, and thou hang him on a tree: his body shall not remain all night upon the tree, but thou shalt bury him that day; (for he that is hanged is accursed of God)...." Paul used Deut. 21:22-23 to serve his own ends. (a) Deut. 21:22 is talking about a sinful man which would exclude Jesus because he is sinless according to 1 Peter 2:22. (b) Jesus was not hanged nor did he die on a tree. (c) Paul would actually be calling the alleged "Savior" cursed, if this verse were applicable. (70) GAL. 3:16 says, "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many, but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." Paul tried to make it appear that the seed referred to and the one who received the promise was Christ. This is a blatant distortion of the OT for many reasons. (a) The word "seed" in the OT always refers to many people, not one person. One need only read Gen. 13:15-16, 15:5, 13, 26:4, and 32:12 to see that seed always refers to one's descendants. (b) Gen. 12:7 which says, "And the Lord appeared unto Abraham, and said, unto thy seed will I give this land: and there he built an altar unto the Lord...." would mean God gave Jesus, the creator of heaven and earth, the land of Canaan as an inheritance. How absurd! Moreover, Jesus never received the land. (c) The following verses would make Jesus as numberless as the dust of the earth. Gen. 13:16 says, "And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered" and Gen. 22:17 says, "...I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore." (d) Gen. 15:13 which says, "And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them for four hundred years...." would mean Jesus would serve Egypt 400 years and be afflicted for 400 years. Yet, he lived only 33 years and was never

afflicted in Egypt. "Theirs" and "They" clearly show that many persons, not one, are being referred to. (e) Gen. 17:9-10 says "And God said unto Abraham,... This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised." If Jesus were the "seed" referred to in this case, it would mean the covenant of circumcision was established with Jesus. Are we to believe God established a covenant with Jesus? Why would God make a promise to Christ, since Jesus is co-existent and co-equal with God; he is one of a triumvirate. (71) HEB. 1:5 which says, "...I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son." is in opposition to apologetic beliefs and, contrary to apologetic propaganda, was not taken from 2 Sam. 7:14 which says, "I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the stripes of the children of men." Several factors show the verses are not related. (a) In 2 Sam. 7:14 God is saying he will call Solomon, not Jesus, his son. (b) Because Jesus could not commit iniquity, it must be referring to a mortal like Solomon. (c) And certainly God would not beat Jesus with a rod and cause stripes to be put on him. Would God even threaten to chasten Jesus with stripes? (72) HEB. 1:9 says, "Thou has loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy god, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows" and is supposedly taken from Psalm 45:7 which says, "Thou lovest righteousness, and hatest wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee...." If Jesus is God or co-equal with God, would the Psalmist address him with "thy God." How could Jesus, who is God, have a God? Psalm 45:8 and 9 which follow 45:7 say in reference to the same person, "All thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes and cassia, out of the ivory palaces, whereby they have made thee glad. King's daughters were among thy honorable women: upon thy right hand did stand the queen in gold of Ophir." Yet, Jesus' garments never smelled of myrrh, aloes, or cassia and King's daughters were never among his "honorable" women. Or, perhaps Christian apologists know something of which others are not aware. (73) According to the Living Bible Paul says in HEB. 2:6-9, "...in the book of Psalms David says to God. 'What is mere man that you are so concerned about him? And who is this Son of Man you honor so highly? For though you made him lower than the angels for a little while, now you have crowned him with glory and honor. And you have put him in complete charge of everything there is. Nothing is left out. We have not yet seen all of this take place, but we do see Jesus--who for awhile was a little lower than the angels--crowned now by God with glory and honor because he suffered death for us. Yes, because of God's great kindness, Jesus tasted death for everyone in all the world.'" Paul took this from Psalm 8:4-6 which says in the Living Bible, "I cannot understand how you can bother with mere puny man, to pay any attention to him! And yet you have made him only a little lower than the angels, and placed a crown of glory and honor upon his head. You have put him in charge of everything you made; everything is put under his authority...." Paul misused the Psalms quote in several respects. (a) The Psalmist stated that God made man, not Jesus, to have rule over all God made and God made man, not Jesus, a little lower than the angels. What the Psalmist stated has no relation to Jesus as Paul implies in Hebrews 2:9. (b) Why would Jesus have been worshipped by the angels if he was made a little lower than them? (c) And a crown of glory and honor was never put on the head of Jesus. (74) HEB. 5:6 and 6:20 say, "...even Jesus, made a high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec" and are mistakenly taken from Psalm 110:4 which says, "The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec." The quote in Psalms is not referring to Jesus. The "thou" in Psalms 110:4 is referring to David who is the Lord of the Psalmist. Paul has wrongfully applied Psalm 110:4 to Jesus when it actually refers to David. (75) HEB. 10:30 says, "For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord." This was taken from Deut. 32:35 which says, "Vengeance is mine, and recompense...." The comment in Deut. was made by someone who felt he was God's agent; it was not said by God and should not be deceptively attributed to God. (76) HEB. 12:21 says, "...and so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake...." and is taken from Deut. 9:19 which says, "For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure, wherewith the Lord was wroth against you to destroy you." Deuteronomy 9:19 is actually referring to Moses' fear of the Lord's

anger at the time he found them worshipping the Golden Calf. Heb. 12:21, on the other hand, is referring to the fear Moses felt when he stood at the base of an untouchable mountain and witnessed blazing fire, gloom, darkness, trumpets sounding and audible words. (77) And lastly, 1 PETER 2:8 says, "And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient...." and is unjustifiably taken from Isaiah 8:14 which says, "And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to both houses of Israel...." (a) The verse prior to Isaiah 8:14 says, "Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself; and let him be your fear, and let him be your dread" and shows that the "he" in Isaiah 8:14 is not referring to Jesus but to God. (b) Isaiah 8:14 says he is only a rock of offence to both houses of Israel, not to all those who are disobedient.

In sum and substance, the commentaries in six issues of BE have provided more than enough evidence to prove that NT writers have misquoted, misinterpreted, twisted, distorted, perverted, misapplied and misunderstood a sizable number of OT verses. They have even gone so far as to manufacture OT verses that don't even exist. Anyone who looks for objective scholarship in the field of biblical apologetics has embarked upon a journey into the realm of myth and fantasy in which people search for the nonexistent. Nothing is so biased as someone whose heart precedes his head, whose desire precedes his discretion, whose wish precedes his wisdom.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #477 from James White of Alpha and Omega Ministries in Phoenix, Arizona (Part a)

Dear Mr. McKinsey.... The majority of your attempted response to my discussion of the Trinity takes the form of nothing but ridicule. You claim that no one understands the Trinity (seemingly, since you don't understand it, then no one else does, either). You state, "The only human being who could understand the Trinity would be someone who could also visualize a square circle or a two-sided triangle." This, of course, assumes your conclusion: that the Trinity is self-contradictory. But asserting what you wish to prove accomplishes nothing (though it will certainly impress some).

Editor's Response to Letter #477 (Part a)

Dear James. You are at it again. When will you ever learn? In the first place, your comment that my discussion of the Trinity takes the form of nothing but ridicule is utterly without merit and completely specious. The fact of the matter is that I deal in logic and you think of that as ridicule. I can't help but paraphrase Harry Truman who said, "I don't give them hell; I just tell them the truth and they think it is hell." Secondly, your comment that "this, of course, assumes your conclusion: that the Trinity is self-contradictory" is completely without standing. There is no assumption involved. It is contradictory and that is a fact. Thirdly, you fancy yourself well-read in apologetic literature but are apparently unaware of the fact that most of your own compatriots don't deny that the Trinity is a concept that defies logic and must be taken on faith alone. One can only assume that you are suffering under the laughable delusion that you are superior to those who have gone before. Many apologists not only admit there are no proof texts for the doctrine but freely admit the entire concept is incomprehensible. Support for this assertion is not hard to find. On page 168 in 508 Answers to Bible Questions apologist M.R. DeHaan states that, "The Trinity, that is, three persons in one is a mystery which is revealed in the Bible but cannot be understood by the human mind. Since man is finite, and God is infinite, this is one of those things which must be accepted by faith, even though it cannot be reasoned out. The Trinity cannot be explained but it must be believed because the Bible teaches it throughout." On page 55 of Basic Theology professor Ryrie of Dallas Theological Seminary alleges that, "Even with all the discussion and delineation that we attempt in relation to the Trinity, we must acknowledge

that it is in the final analysis a mystery. We accept all the data as truth even though they go beyond our understanding." On page 25 in Essential Christianity apologist Walter Martin says, "No man can fully explain the Trinity, though in every age scholars have propounded theories and advanced hypotheses to explore this mysterious Biblical teaching. But despite the worthy efforts of these scholars, the Trinity is still largely incomprehensible to the mind of man." On page 19 in The Bible Has the Answer apologists Morris and Clark state that, "the mystery of the Trinity is beyond the capacity of our finite and limited minds to comprehend." Later, on page 41 in the same book Morris and Clark state that, "the mystery of the divine-human nature of Christ is beyond our finite understanding.... The Bible simply presents as fact the great truth that Jesus Christ was both God and man. It does not try to explain how this could be, because it is inexplicable. It must be apprehended on faith alone,...." If you'll note, James, your fellow fundamentalists make no attempt to defend the concept rationally. Believers are told to believe it without understanding simply because the Bible says so. On pages 112 and 113 in Almah or Young Woman apologist Lawlor says, "All the difficulties and problems surrounding the mystery of the person of Christ will never be solved. The great difficulty is that of understanding how the Lord could have but one personality when he possessed two real natures, divine and human. How can these natures be united in the one Person? This is the "mystery of godliness.... There are some matters that are beyond us, which we shall never totally comprehend." "Totally comprehend"! Any Christian would be happy to be able to comprehend even a minute part thereof. Lawlor concludes, "we must finally fall upon our faces before the mystery of the eternal, almighty god in Christ, having come in flesh, and confess that we cannot explain Him." "Explain him"! Any Christian would be happy to even understand the Trinity, much less explain it. Talk about blind, unquestioning faith! The concept makes no sense; they admit it makes no sense, but we are to believe it, regardless. The problem lies not in the fact that it can't be understood by me but that it can't be understood by anyone, period. In the thick tome entitled Catholic Dogma, the catholic apologist Ludwig Ott says on page 75, "The dogma of the Trinity is, in fact, beyond reason.... Human reason cannot fathom the mystery of the Blessed Trinity even after the dogma has been revealed by God." So, you see James your incessant argument that I deny the Trinity because I can't understand it is pure Christian propagandistic rubbish and I wish to hear it no longer. You have prated that prattle long enough. If you can't come up with anything better, I suggest that you come up with nothing at all. Enough is enough. My patience in teetering on the edge of incivility. You'd do well to remember what Abe Lincoln said about keeping your mouth closed?

Letter #477 Continues (Part b)

Then, you engage in a campaign of misrepresentation of the doctrine you wish to attack.... You write, "Yes Jesus is God; no he is man. Since that makes no sense, it is immediately changed to: No, he is the god/man, man and god simultaneously. And since that makes no sense either, many Christians are candid enough to admit it's a "mystery" that can't be understood by anybody." Of course, this is all smoke and mirrors with no substance. In Christ, God and man are not contradictory terms, so saying He is the "God-Man" is not nonsensical. Furthermore, anyone familiar with the use of the term "mystery" both in the NT as well as in historical theological usage is aware of the fact that "mystery" does not equal "not understandable." This is another example, Mr. McKinsey, of your unfamiliarity with the issues you attempt to discuss. You will later accuse me of attacking you by pointing out the many instances where you show ignorance of the issues. This is not a personal attack, sir, it is simply a statement of fact.

Editor's Response to Letter #477 (Part b)

Being factual has never been one of your strong points, James, and if there is any misrepresentation or smoke with mirrors, my prior quotes from your own compatriots have

shown from whence it emanates. The only smoke and mirrors involved is that in which you enwrap your followers. You allege that for one to say that "He is the 'God-Man' is not nonsensical." Don't be absurd. Of course it is. God is perfect and man is not. Man errs; God does not. How could you have a being who is perfect and not perfect simultaneously? How could a being be infinite and finite at the same time. How could a being be both ignorant of some facts and omniscient? How could a being be morally corrupt and the personification of moral rectitude at the same time? Unless you are able to repeal the law of contradiction, James, you are entangled in a hopeless quest for a phantasy.

You say, "anyone familiar with the use of the term 'mystery' both in the NT as well as in historical theological usage is aware of the fact that 'mystery' does not equal 'not understandable'." It's not that I'm so unfamiliar with biblical and historical usage of the word "mystery" as it is your unfamiliarity with Webster's Dictionary. According to the latter, the theological definition of mystery is "any religious truth known to man only through divine revelation and to be accepted on faith." That is rather definitive, don't you think? Notice it says that it is known only through divine revelation, not logic, reason, or science, and it is to be accepted on faith, not as the result of discovery, experimentation or rationality. Secondly, you say that a "mystery" does not equal "not understandable" according to the Bible and historical usage. You need to reread your own book, my friend. Col. 2:2 and Rev. 10:7 refer to the "mystery of God." And 1 Cor. 4:1 refers to the mysteries of God. You mean God is understandable, that you know the mystery of God? First Tim. 3:16 says, "...great is the mystery of godliness." You mean you understand this mystery? First Cor. 14:2 says, "For one who speaks in a tongue speaks not to men but to God; for no one understands him, but he utters mysteries in the Spirit." You mean you, unlike all others, understand him and his mysteries? If so, then you are calling the Bible a liar, because it just said no one understands him. (TO BE CONTINUED)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #478 from GK of Minneapolis, Minnesota

(GK sent the following article to the Minnesota Daily Newspaper--Ed.)

The Opinion piece "Reflections on Rushdie and Images of the Moslem World" attempts to present Islam as a just, fair, and humanitarian religion. Opinions aside, one need only scan the Koran to reveal its cruel, punitive, undemocratic, puritanical, anti-intellectual, intolerant, and arbitrary nature. It is surely one of the world's most oppressive religions. Examples can be taken directly from the Koran (The A. Yusuf Ali version which I will use) itself and include the following: Sura 2:178--The only penalty for murder is to make compensation to the victims relatives. Sura 2:216--Fighting is prescribed and good for men. Sura 2:223--Wives are the property of their husbands. Sura 2:228--Men are a degree above women. Sura 4:15--Women are to be immured for the rest of their lives for "lewdness." Sura 4:16--Homosexuals must be punished unless they repent and mend their ways. Sura 4:25--Women can be bought and sold. Sura 4:34--Women can be beaten by their husbands. Sura 5:36--Crucifixion is required for anyone making war against Allah and his messengers. Sura 5:41--Both hands of thieves are to be amputated. Sura 5:76--The belief that Jesus is the Son of God is blasphemous. Anyone believing that will go to Hell. Sura 8:41--A "revelation" from Allah permits Mohammed to keep one-fifth of all spoils from towns or caravans that are raided. Sura 9:28--Pagans are unclean. Sura 9:29--Fight those who disbelieve in Allah. Sura 9:5--Fight and slay the pagans wherever you find them. Sura 9:51--All things are predestined. Sura 24:2--One hundred lashes are to be given for adultery or fornication. Sura 24:31--Women are required to wear the veil. Sura 33:50--Men may use captive women for their sexual amusement. And Sura 47:4--Those who won't accept Islam are to be killed. And on and on.

After tallying the above, it struck me how similar these absurd "revealed" words are to the Old and New Testament of the Bible. For that matter, all Holy Books, whatever their origin are really nothing more than the imaginative writings of their founders. None stand up to any kind of critical or scientific scholastic analysis, much less provide any kind of reasonable guide to arranging our lives in any kind of ethical or moral fashion. The world would be a better place if all "Holy Books" were simply trash-canned once and for all.

Letter #479 from KN of Sacramento, California

I enjoyed issue #102 of Biblical Errancy. Astonishing that you have lasted through so many issues--and you are still going strong! The new format is a great improvement.

It was good fun to watch Mr. James White twisting on your tines (pp.4-5), but why spend over a full page on the poor fellow? You should have just told him to read John 10:30 ("I and the Father are one"). That single verse blows his whole argument out of the water. In this context, John 14:7 ("If you had known me, you should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him") is almost as devastating. My favorite part of BE is the letters, debate and dialogue. Keep up the good work.

Editor's Response to Letter #479

Dear KN. You should write a letter to us and explain to James how these verses destroy his whole argument. I don't think he is going to get your point by only reading them.

Letter #480 from KB of Dallas, Texas

Dear Dennis. I am a subscriber and a freethinker. I monitor Fundy programs for contradictions. I don't have much time to study the subject of End Time Prophecy. This subject is begging to be debunked. Could you put me in touch with literature that points out the falseness of this prophecy. For instance, The Beast, A world dictator is allegedly going to make everyone worship him. That flies in the face of Christians and Jews and Muslims. None of these will worship the beast. Yet, it says in a sweeping motion that everyone will worship the beast. It honestly causes me some stomach upsets. It is a topic that is begging for your rationalist debunking. If I can break away from work, I'll check it out and send you some results. P.S. Please answer. I'm serious. This prophecy (End Time) scares me.

Editor's Response to Letter #480

Dear KB. I'm not sure what you mean by putting you "in touch with literature that points out the falseness of this prophecy." How could I provide you with literature to prove that something is not going to happen? That is not how you approach this kind of material. Instead, you look at the Bible's prophetic track record. Anyone who does will notice that it is not prophetic; it's pathetic. Several of BE's commentaries have been totally devoted to a comprehensive exposure of the Bible's prophetic failures. Why would you think that it would be any more accurate in the future than it has been in the past. As one man wisely said in reference to a discussion of Adam and Eve, "If the Bible can't correctly tell you where you came from, why would it be able to tell you where you are going." If, judging by its own record, it could not reliably predict events in the past why would it be any more accurate in the future. No, my friend I certainly wouldn't worry about the Beast or any of that other nonsense in Revelations or Daniel. However, I would definitely be concerned about a whole host of social, environmental and economic problems that are currently expanding throughout the world.

brain. You cannot harmonize evolution and the atonement. The survival of the fittest does away with original sin. Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 8, p. 225

"There is scarcely any part of science or any thing in nature, which those impostors and blasphemers of science, called priests, as well as Christians and Jews, have not, at some time or other, perverted, or sought to pervert to the purpose of superstition and falsehood." The Theological Works of Thomas Paine, p. 295.

"If the Bible is true, man is a special creation, and if man is a special creation, millions of facts must have conspired, millions of ages ago, to deceive the scientific world of today. If the Bible is true, slavery is right, and the world should go back to the barbarism of the lash and chain, If the Bible is true, polygamy is the highest virtue. If the Bible is true, nature has a master and the miraculous is independent of and superior to cause and effect. If the Bible is true, most of the children of men are destined to suffer eternal pain. If the Bible is true, the science known as astronomy is a collection of mistakes--the telescope is a false witness, and light is a luminous liar. If the Bible is true, the science known as geology is false and every fossil is a petrified perjurer." Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 11, p. 233.

"At present, a good many men engaged in scientific pursuits and those who have signally failed in gaining recognition among their fellows, are endeavoring to make reputations among the churches by delivering weak and vapid lectures upon the 'harmony of Genesis and geology'." "Some Mistakes of Moses", Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 2, p. 29

"The Bible is no longer the standard. Science has dethroned the inspired volume. Even theologians are taking facts into consideration. Only ignorant bigots now believe in the plenary inspiration of the Bible. The intelligent ministers know that the Holy Scriptures are filled with mistakes, contradictions, and interpolations." Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 11. p. 552

"For thousands of years the diseased were treated with incantations, with hideous noises, with drums and gongs. Everything was done to make the visit of the ghost as unpleasant as possible, and they generally succeeded in making things so disagreeable that if the ghost did not leave, the patient did." "The Ghosts," Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 1, p. 286

"He (Comas--Ed.) also declared that the earth was flat. This he proved by many passages from the Bible. Among other reasons for believing the earth to be flat, he brought forward the following: We are told in the NT that Christ shall come again in glory and power, and all the world shall see him. Now if the world is round, how are the people on the other side going to see Christ when he comes?" "The Ghosts," Ingersoll's Works, Vol 1, p. 301

"The church says the earth is flat, but I know that it is round, for I have seen the shadow on the moon, and I have more faith in a shadow than in the church. Ferdinand Magellan

"Christian theology is not only opposed to the scientific spirit; it is opposed to every other form of rational thinking." H. L. Mencken

SCRIPTURES--"The sacred books of our holy religion, as distinguished from the false and profane writings on which all other faiths are based." Ambrose Bierce

SIN--"Accustom a people to believe that priests, or any other class of men can forgive sins, and you will have sins in abundance." The Theological Works of Thomas Paine, p. 207

SLAVERY--"...it was established by decree of Almighty God,...it is sanctioned in the Bible, in both Testaments, from Genesis to Revelation;...it has existed in all ages; has been found among the people of the highest civilization, and in nations of the highest proficiency in the arts."
Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederacy

"There was no place in the land where the seeker could not find some small budding sign of pity for the slave. No place in all the land but one--the pulpit. It yielded at last; it always does. It fought a strong and stubborn fight, and then did what it always does, joined the procession--at the tail end. Slavery fell. The slavery texts (in the Bible--Ed.) remained; the practice changed; that was all." Mark Twain and the Three R's by Maxwell Geismar, p. 109

SUMMARIES--"I have now gone through the Bible, as a man would go through a wood with an ax on his shoulder, and fell trees. Here they lie; and the priests, if they can, may replant them. They may, perhaps, stick them in the ground, but they will never make them grow." The Age of Reason, Thomas Paine, p. 151

"I here close the subject on the OT and the New. The evidence I have produced to prove them forgeries, is extracted from the books themselves, and acts, like a two-edged sword, either way. If the evidence be denied, the authenticity of the Scriptures is denied with it, for it is Scripture evidence: and if the evidence be admitted, the authenticity of the books is disproved. The contradictory impossibilities, contained in the OT and the New, put them in the case of a man who swears for and against. Either evidence convicts him of perjury, and equally destroys reputation. Should the Bible and the Testament hereafter fall; it is not that I have done it. I have done no more than extracted the evidence from the confused mass of matters with which it is mixed, and arranged that evidence in a point of light to be clearly seen and easily comprehended; and, having done this, I leave the reader to judge for himself, as I have judged for myself." The Age of Reason, Paine, p. 182

"I here close the subject. I have shown in all the foregoing parts of this work that the Bible...(is an imposition and a forgery--Ed.); and I leave the evidence I have produced in proof of it to be refuted, if any one can do it; and I leave the ideas that are suggested in the conclusion of the work to rest on the mind of the reader (or listener--Ed.); certain as I am that when opinions are free, either in matters of government or religion, truth will finally and powerfully prevail." The Age of Reason, Paine, p. 195

"The old faiths light their candles all about, but burly Truth comes by and puts them out." Lizette Reese (TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT MONTH)

LOVE THE SINNER, HATE THE SIN--One of the most common responses Christians make in defense of wayward behavior, especially that exhibited by their own adherents, is that although they hate the sin, they still love the sinner. Unfortunately they fail to note, either intentionally or otherwise, that a significant number of verses clearly show all true Christians are under a biblical mandate to hate both. FIRST, 2 Chron. 19:2 says, "And Jehu, the son of Hanani the seer, went to King Jehoshaphat and said to him, Is it right for you to go to the help of evil-doers, loving the haters of the Lord? because of this, the wrath of the Lord has come on you" (The Bible in Basic English--Ed.). The same verse in the NIV says, "Jehu the seer, the son of Hanani, went out to meet him and said to the king, 'Should you help the sick and love those who hate the Lord? Because of this, the wrath of the Lord is upon you'." SECOND, Psalms 5:5-6 RSV says, "The boastful may not stand before thy eyes, thou hatest all evildoers. Thou destroyest those who speak lies; the Lord abhors bloodthirsty and deceitful men." Notice it says that evildoers, not evil per se, and deceitful men, not deceit, are hated and abhorred by the Lord. People are to be hated, not deeds. THIRD, Psalms 139:21-22 is especially powerful. It says, "Do not I hate them, O

Lord, that hate thee? and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies." Again, we see that sinners are to be hated, not just the sin. FOURTH, Hosea 9:15 RSV says, "Every evil of theirs is in Gilgal; there I began to hate them. Because of the wickedness of their deeds I will drive them out of my house. I will love them no more; all their princes are rebels. AND LASTLY, even Jesus says in Luke 14:26, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." So it is rather difficult to see how Christians are being taught to love the sinner while hating the sin. The evidence would suggest that they are being taught to hate both. We are indebted to Dan Barker of FFRF for bringing these verses to light.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #477 from James White of Alpha and Omega Ministries Continues from Last Month (Part c)

First, let us not lose sight of the original issue that was presented by you. You alleged that John 5:37 ("And the Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me. Ye have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape") is contradictory with the appearances of Jehovah in the OT. I pointed out that within a Trinitarian structure, this is untrue. I demonstrated that the NT writers identified the Lord Jesus as Jehovah God, and provided you with references demonstrating this (that you didn't seem to understand), such as John 12:39-41 in comparison with Isaiah 6:1-10, and Hebrews 1:10-12 in comparison with Psalm 102:25-27. Given that the Father is clearly differentiated from the Son in Scripture, yet both bear one divine name Yahweh (Jehovah), we can see why the early Church understood God in a trinitarian fashion. We can also see why the Son could say that the Jews had never heard the Father's voice nor seen his form, since it was the Son who had appeared and who was seen by the OT believers, not the Father. Therefore, your alleged contradiction was shown to be incorrect.

Editor's Response to Letter #477 (Part c)

You are just not with it my friend. Even your shell game can't save you on this one. What did Jesus say in John 14:9--"he that hath seen me hath seen the Father." So even if it was the Son who appeared in the OT, the Father was still seen. In fact, one of Christianity's beloved messianic prophecies is Isa. 9:6 which says, "...and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. If you will note, Jesus is called "The Father." So if he was seen, the Father was seen. Secondly, upon what basis do you conclude that the OT appearances were those of Jesus and not God the Father? Could you provide chapter and verse for such an unsupportable assertion? Thirdly, John 14:10 says, "I am in the Father, and the Father is in me." So, if Jesus was seen in the OT, then the Father must have been seen simultaneously. Fourthly, in literally scores of instances the NT uses phrases such as "God our Father," "God the Father," "God and Father," "God and Our Father," "God and the Father," and "God, even the Father." Where are we to find such phrases as "God the Son," "the Son is God," or "the Son our God"? Consequently, when the OT says that God is seen, the evidence is overwhelmingly in favor of this referring to the Father rather than the Son. It must have been God the Father who was seen and heard. Fifthly, you fail to note that Jesus prayed to the Father. That means the Father is God, not just one within a Trinity of equals, and Jesus is not God. Otherwise, he could have prayed to himself and there would have been no need for him to pray at all. So, if God were seen and heard in the OT, it had to have been the Father they saw, not Jesus.

You said, "I demonstrated that the NT writers identified the Lord Jesus as Jehovah God, and provided you with references demonstrating this...such as John 12:39-41...Isa. 6:1-10, and Hebrews 1:10-12...Psalm 102:25-27." In the first place, I fail to see how these verses prove anything of the sort. In fact, I have difficulty even seeing how they are relevant to the issue. Secondly, even if they did prove that Jesus were Jehovah God, that would not mean that Jesus was the one seen and heard in the OT. It could have been God the Father. You conveniently ignore the fact that the OT says it was God who was seen and heard; it does not say Jesus. Again, why do you assume it was God the Son rather than God the Father? You state that "the Father is clearly differentiated from the Son in Scripture" but ignore the fact that the OT says it was God who was seen without reference to the Father or the Son.

Letter #477 Continues (Part d)

Your defense of your error was to attack the doctrine of the Trinity, which in and of itself should be viewed as a "delaying tactic" rather than an actual answer for your failure to prove a contradiction. In your recent attempt to continue this attack, your main point has been to say that logically the Trinity cannot affirm the existence of three persons within one being. You do not make any attempt to deal with the definitions of being and person, though seemingly rejecting the differences between the two that would be familiar to anyone who has studied the doctrine to any depth. Your argument goes like this: If A is B, and C is B, then A is C. If the Son is God, and the Father is God, then the Father is the Son. You seem to recognize that your argument cannot be maintained if the basic teaching of the Trinity--that is, that being and person are not synonymous--must be done away with. Obviously, if the distinction between being and person is maintained, your argument becomes false on the face of it. "Robert is human. John is human. Therefore, Robert is John." The argument is obviously false, but it is your argument.

Editor's Response to Letter #477 (Part d)

What a muddle! You say that I don't deal with the definitions of being and person and seemingly reject the differences between the two. To begin with, you are the one who keeps using these terms, so you are obligated to provide definitions of "being" and "person" and a distinction between the two. So far, I have seen neither. Without a maze of metaphysical doubletalk, what are the differences? You say that they would be familiar to anyone who has studied the doctrine to any depth when, in fact, there are no differences and the doctrine has no depth, only obfuscation. "Being" and "person" have no distinction and are merely elements of a ruse employed by apologists. Because they can come up with two different words, they, therefore, claim they have two different entities. Secondly, your syllogism has no relevance to my argument, so don't build a strawman. My argument is that if Robert is a human and John is a human, then how could human be a third being. Human is a quality; it is not a being per se. If Jesus is God and the Father is God, then how can God be a being. It must be a quality such as Godhood or Godhead. But it is not a separate being per se. As I have said before, Christians are not tritheists as Muslims and Jews allege. They are quartheists. The Father is God and a separate being with its own identity. Jesus is God and a separate being with his own identity. The Holy Ghost is God and a separate being with his own identity. And God is a separate being with his own identity. Christians call this three persons within one being but fail to admit that one of the beings is separate from the other three beings. Thus, there are not 3 persons within one being but 3 separate beings distinct from a fourth being which has a separate and distinct identity. On the other hand, whenever expediency dictates, Christians dissolve the beingness or personhood of God and turn him into nothing more than a general term, a rubric, into which the other 3 beings are absorbed, much like the words "mankind" or "dogkind" and use words like "Godhead" or "Godhood." Your argument is that Robert is a separate and distinct human; John is a separate and distinct human; therefore, "human" is a separate and distinct being.

Letter #477 Continues (Part e)

Your attempt to deny the difference of being and person falls far short of accomplishing its goal. I had said, "Any person who would even glance at (for example) the Athanasian Creed would know that the doctrine differentiates between the terms "being" and "person." You responded, "No it doesn't. It merely says there is a difference. It doesn't prove it or even attempt to do so. It doesn't define it. It doesn't even quote scripture to prove it or show where scripture makes such a distinction." I hope you just forgot to proof read this section, because responding to my statement that the creed differentiates between being and person by saying, "no it doesn't it just says there is a difference" is rather humorous. Be that as it may, the doctrine does teach a difference between being and person, and you need to admit that your sole defense against the doctrine is to deny this distinction. Furthermore, you must admit that the doctrine, as it is stated historically by the Christian faith, does answer your supposed objection to John 5:37, since the differentiation of the Father and the Son is a part of the doctrine, no matter how much you may object against it.

Editor's Response to Letter #477 (Part e)

James, your position continues to deteriorate apace. If there is anyone who needs to read something ahead of time it is yourself. Having reread after many years the copy of the Athanasian Creed which lies in front of me, I am yet to find anything that supports your comments or diminishes mine. First, would you please tell me where the Creed differentiates between the words "being" and "person." Where does it specifically define the difference or prove one exists and where does it cite scripture for corroboration? You say, "the doctrine does teach a difference between being and person" without so much as quoting any part of it. Quotes from the Creed are noticeably absent from your diatribe for reasons that are obvious to anyone who takes the time to read the Creed. The word "Being" is nowhere to be found therein. I have read my copy of the Creed several times and am yet to see the word "Being." You say that, "Any person who would even glance at (for example) the Athanasian creed would know that the doctrine differentiates between the terms "being" and "person." One can only conclude that you did not even glance at it. Or do you have another version? Your predecessors conjured up these two words in order to escape the inevitable conclusion and have promulgated them ever since. The only humorous aspect relative to this topic lies in the dismal explanation you managed to throw together. Second, you say that my "sole defense against the doctrine is to deny this distinction." Correction! Your sole support of this absurd concept lies in maintenance of a distinction which has been formulated for defensive purposes only. Third, how the doctrine has been presented historically by the Christian faith is of no importance when compared to the fact that it will not withstand rational analysis and is biblically unsupportable. Moreover, your defense to the problem presented by John 5:37 is inadequate for the reasons mentioned earlier. (TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT MONTH)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #481 from JS of York, Pennsylvania

Dear Sir: Reading a letter in my local newspaper, aroused my curiosity about your publication. I was wondering if you could send me information on your publication and possibly a free copy. I am constantly bombarded by religious dogma, none of which I believe. Perhaps your publication could arm me with some highly intelligent arguments opposed to the trash I receive on a weekly basis. There is no consideration by them of any other culture's myths and religions. I am told that Christianity is the "true" religion and that the Bible is the true "word of God." What Nonsense!!

Editor's Response to Letter #481

Dear JS. We'd be glad to send you a complimentary copy of BE and we are quite confident that if you were to purchase all of the back issues of BE you would be well equipped to deal with Christian bombardments, providing you are able to employ the most effective piece of information at the appropriate time and are well-versed in the Bible itself.

Letter #482 from Louise Baskett, 9000 Wood Sorrel Ct. Richmond, Virginia 23229

Dear Dennis. As a delegate to the First Amendment Congress I made a motion: Be it resolved that evolution be taught in all public schools in their science classes. I was shouted down by resounding NO's throughout the entire auditorium. I was particularly surprised by this reaction because these delegates were well educated, intelligent people. I am frankly discouraged these days because I feel that people are retreating from scientific facts back to the comfort of believing a literal interpretation of the Bible.

Editor's Response to Letter #482

Dear Louise. Your analysis is not without merit. For many years the United States has been experiencing a steady drift toward superstition and anti-intellectualism. The recent avalanche of New Age phantasia is only one manifestation of our downhill slide. Even colleges and universities appear to be turning out far more narrowly-focused technicians and finely tuned specialists for the productive wheels than broadly-based intellectuals.

Letter #483 from HB of Alexandria, Virginia

[HB is responding to Letter #459--ED.]. Don't let the Christians get you down Anonymous. They are more to be pitied because they need: (1) A church to tell them what is right and wrong. (2) A book of fable to support their faith. (3) Belief in miracles and magic. (4) And prayer and Bible reading in school because these are not provided at home....

Letter #484 from KH of Sacramento, California

Dear Dennis. Just a quick note to congratulate you on Issue #106--one of the best ever! The new format is a great improvement, and I truly enjoyed the excellent, incisive letters from John George and John Sikos. I am waiting to see how Rev. James White is going to wiggle out from under the Sikos criticism. Should be fun.... Also, just a bit of constructive carping, if you don't mind. You still have a small problem with punctuation. For example, in the "Reviews" section, Issue #106, page 3, Col. 2, the 2nd and 3rd full sentences (beginning with the words "First" and "Second")--both sentences are interrogatives, so they should have ended with question marks. On the other hand, see page 4, Col. 2, paragraph 4, the first sentence. This one is a flat statement, and the question mark is unwarranted. As a rule, if a state-of-being verb or auxiliary verb precedes the subject in a formal sentence, put a question mark at the end. (But there are exceptions, English is really an infuriating language). This is a quibble, of course. But such little glitches can leave you open to ridicule from small-minded fundamentalists. You already know how they clutch at straws. Be careful Dennis!....

Editor's Response to Letter #484

Dear KN. I reread the issue and your punctuation alterations are accurate. Proofreading your own material is not one of the easiest tasks in the world.

EDITOR'S NOTE: BE Subscriber whom others can contact is: Stephen H. Frey, 710 Hammond Road, York, Pennsylvania 17402-1323

Issue No. 111

March 1992

This month's commentary will conclude the alphabetical listing of notable quotes that was begun long ago and resumed last month.

QUOTATIONS

(PART 9)

TEXTUAL PERVERSION--"The purpose for which the passage is quoted, and the passage itself, are as remote from each other, as nothing from something. But the case is, that people have been so long in the habit of reading the books, called the Bible and the Testament, with their eyes shut, and their senses locked up, that the most stupid inconsistencies have passed on them for truth, and imposition for prophecy. The all-wise Creator has been dishonoured by being made the author of fable, and the human mind degraded by believing it... the name of the person of whom the passage speaks is not given, and we are left in the dark respecting him. It is this defect in the history that bigotry and imposition have laid hold of, to call it prophecy." The Theological Works of Thomas Paine. 241

"Hundreds and hundreds of commentators have obscured and darkened the meaning of the plainest texts, spiritualized dates, names, numbers and even genealogies. They have degraded the poetic, changed parables to history, and imagery to stupid and impossible facts. They have wrestled with rhapsody and prophecy, with visions and dreams, with illusions and delusions, with myths and miracles, with the blunders of ignorance, the ravings of insanity and the ecstasy of hysterics. Millions of priests and preachers have added to the mysteries of the inspired book by explanation, by showing the wisdom of foolishness, the foolishness of wisdom, the mercy of cruelty and the probability of the impossible." "Superstition," Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 4, p. 334-35

"Not versions, but perversions" St. Jerome

"The Bible is a book that has been read more and examined less than any book that ever existed." The Theological Works of Thomas Paine. 179

"Every phrase and circumstance are marked with the barbarous hand of superstitious torture, and forced into meanings it was impossible they could have. The head of every chapter, and the top of every page, are blazoned with the names of Christ and the Church, that the unwary reader might suck in the error before he began to read." The Age of Reason, Thomas Paine, p. 131

"...to argue with a man who has renounced his reason is like giving medicine to the dead." Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 1, p. 127

"Nearly all of the mistranslations have been made to help out the text. It would be much worse, much more contradictory had it been correctly translated. Nearly all of the mistakes...have been made for the purpose of harmony." Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 7, p. 459

"Nothing can exceed the mendacity of the religious press. I have had some little experience with political editors, and am forced to say, that until I read the religious papers, I did not know what malicious and slimy falsehoods could be constricted from ordinary words. The ingenuity with which the real and apparent meaning can be tortured out of language, is simply amazing. The average religious editor is intolerant and insolent...and always accounts for the brave and generous actions of unbelievers, by low, base and unworthy motives." "The Ghosts," Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 1, p. 260

THEOLOGY--"The study of theology as it stands in Christian churches, is the study of nothing; it is founded on nothing; it rests on no principles; it proceeds by no authorities; it has no data; it can demonstrate nothing; and admits of no conclusion." The Age of Reason, Paine, p. 191

"Follow theological 'reasons' far enough and it always leads to conclusions that are contrary to reason." Anonymous

TRINITY--"...the Pythagorean, as well as the Platonic philosophers, probably concurred in the fabrication of the Christian Trinity." The Life and Works of John Adams, by Charles Francis Adams, Vol. 10, p. 84

"This revelation (human understanding as given to us by God--Ed.) has made it certain that two and one make three, and that one is not three nor can three be one.... Miracles or prophecies might frighten us out of our wits; might scare us to death; might induce us to lie, to say that we believe that two and two make five. But we should not believe it. We should know the contrary.

Had you and I been forty days with Moses on Mount Sinai, and been admitted to behold the divine..., and there told that one was three and three one, we might not have had courage to deny it, but we could not have believed it.

The thunders, and lightnings, and earthquakes, and the transcendent splendors and glories might have overwhelmed us with terror and amazement, but we could not have believed the doctrine." The Life and Works of John Adams By Charles Adams, Vol. 10, p. 66-67

"...Jesus' doctrine of the cosmogony of the world is very clearly laid down in the first three verses of the 1st chapter of John, in these words. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being...." Which truly translated means, 'In the beginning God existed, and reason (or mind) was with God, and that mind was God. This was in the beginning with God. All things were created by it, and without it was made not one thing which was made.' Yet this text, so plainly declaring the doctrine of Jesus, that the world was created by the supreme, intelligence being, has been perverted by modern Christians to build up a second person of their tritheism, by a mistranslation of the word.... One of its legitimate meanings, indeed, is 'a word.' But in that sense it makes an unmeaning jargon; while the other meaning, 'reason,' equally legitimate, explains rationally the eternal pre-existence of God, and his creation of the world. Knowing how incomprehensible it was that 'a word,' the mere action or articulation of the organs of speech could create a world, they undertook to make of this articulation a second pre-existing being, and ascribe to him, and not to God, the creation of the universe....the greatest enemies to the doctrines of Jesus are those, calling themselves the expositors of them, who have perverted them for the structure of a system of fancy absolutely incomprehensible, and without any foundation in his genuine words." Jefferson's Works, by H.A. Washington, Vol. 7, p. 283-84

WOMEN--"The religious superstitions of women perpetuate their bondage more than all other adverse influences." Elizabeth Cady Stanton

"The Bible and the Church have been the greatest stumbling-blocks in the way of women's emancipation." Free Thought Magazine, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Vol 14, p. 1, (Sept. 1896)

"The whole tone of Church teaching in regard to women is, to the last degree, contemptuous and degrading." Elizabeth Cady Stanton

"It will yet be the proud boast of women that they never contributed a line to the Bible." George W. Foote

World's End--"Christ never wrote a solitary word of the NT--not one word.... He never told anybody to write a word.... Is it not strange that he gave no orders to have his words preserved--words upon which hung the salvation of a world?.... Why was nothing written? I will tell you. In my judgment they expected the end of the world in a few days." "What Must We Do To Be Saved?" Ingersoll's Works, Vol. 1. p. 455

That concludes 9 commentaries that were wholly devoted to notable quotes from notable people which have been gleaned by BE from a myriad of sources over the last 15 years. Many others are in our repertoire but were not included because they are all contained somewhere within past issues.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #477 from James White Continues from Last Month (Part f)

So, all that is left for me to do is demonstrate that the distinction of being and person is one that is fundamental and logically coherent. We utilize this very distinction every day. We recognize that all things that exist have being. A rock has the being of a rock. A dog has the being of a dog. A human we call a "human being." Yet, we do not think of a rock as personal--we know it has no feelings, no will, no ability to view itself as one of a community of rocks. In the same way, while we may think our dog has "personality," we know that it is not personal in the way that we are (certainly a few radical animal-rights activists might disagree). A dog does not view itself, for example, as but one of the community of "dog-kind" nor do we find any dogs working for the betterment of "dog-kind." Human beings, however, are personal. We have wills, emotion, and recognize our existence within mankind.

Editor's Response to Letter #477 (Part f)

In the first place, James, you have made a distinction based on variances in intellect. Because animals are not capable of higher thought, are we to believe they are beings without personalities? If that were true, then everyone with very low IQ's would rank no higher than the animals because they, too, would not recognize their "existence within mankind" and would not be working for the betterment of mankind. By your definition they would be beings without personalities. Secondly, you constantly talk about the words, "Being" and "Person," without ever defining them. For you to say that dogs don't have wills or emotions is ridiculous. I had a couple of emotional dogs that had wills varying greatly in intensity and whose different reactions to the same situation were predictable. Some dogs are very friendly while others are anything but. People with pet cats and chimpanzees can provide similar testimony. What do you mean by person, personal, or having a personality? Moreover, in a prior issue I asked you for a distinction

between biblical "beings" and "persons," both of which are alive, and you gave me a distinction between animals and rocks which have no life whatever.

Letter #477 Continues (Part g)

The Bible teaches that man is created in the image and likeness of God. God has being, of course, and God is personal, for He speaks, wills, acts, and reveals Himself to His creature, man. God has being, and the Bible clearly teaches us that there are three Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, who share that being. The Bible differentiates between the Father and the Son and the Spirit--they are never said to be the same person. We see the Father speaking to the Son and the Son speaking to the Father, as well as the Father and the Son sending the Spirit. Yet, the Bible describes each as God, attributing to them the activities, names, titles, and prerogatives of deity. Therefore we have the Bible teaching that there is but one God (Isaiah 43:10), yet three Persons who are described as God. Here is the distinction you deny exists, Mr. McKinsey.

So, in closing, you may deny the distinction all you wish, and on that basis deny the Trinity. Oneness Pentecostals do the same. But the fact remains that your original attack upon John 5:37 is based upon your own rejection of the Biblical doctrine of the Trinity. You assume what you wish to prove, and this is clearly a circular argument.

Editor's Response to Letter #477 (Part g)

James, you have come full circle. All you are doing now is rehashing the tired old Christian refrain as if you never heard a thing I have said about the Trinity over the years. First, you say that, "the Bible clearly teaches us that there are three Persons, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit." There is nothing clear about it. Would you please cite chapter and verse to show me where the Bible ever calls the Father or the Spirit a "person" by name. Where are you getting this? You say they are "never said to be the same person" when they are never called a person, period. Anytime you send me a letter from now on, I want to see documentation, not pontification. Otherwise, don't bother. Second, like most apologists, you surreptitiously slip in metaphysical comments like "God has being, and the Bible clearly teaches us that there are three Persons...who share that being." Is this the God that "is personal, for He speaks, wills, acts, and reveals Himself" or is this the God known as the Godhead, the Godhood, the general term encompassing the Trinity? If it is the former, then how on earth do three beings exist within a fourth being all of whom are separate from one another? If it is the latter, then how could it speak, act, and have a will to begin with? Third, you say, "we have the Bible teaching that there is but one God, yet three Persons who are described as God." If each of these persons is God, then you have 3 gods within God and that means you have 4 gods. Fourth, failure lies not in my denial of your distinctions but in your failure, which is encompassed in a distinct aura of intentional avoidance, to adequately define what you are even talking about. Fifth, if there is anyone who assumes what they wish to prove, you are that person. You assume a lot, prove little, preach to excess, and don't even cite the Bible or one of the most well-known creeds in Christendom, the Athanasian, for support. As is true with nearly all Christian apologists, precision, clear-cut distinctions, and conciseness are not your forte. Like typical politicians, you and other Christian spokesmen have learned over the centuries that if you keep it nebulous, avoid specifics, employ a lot of grandiloquent rhetoric, and rely on glittering generalities and metaphysical doubletalk at crucial moments, you attract more and alienate less. As greater precision is employed, more conceptions and theories are removed as options and more people drift away dissatisfied.

Incidentally, I can't help but notice that you cited the Athanasian creed as your source when the very first sentence says, "Whosoever earnestly desires to be saved must above all hold the

Catholic Faith. Which Faith unless every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish in eternity" And approximately 30% of the way through we find a reference to the Catholic Religion. As a protestant, aren't you worried if not panicked? And since you no doubt believe in the Nicene Creed as do nearly all Christians, how do you reconcile your protestantism with the line near the end that says, "And I believe one Catholic and Apostolic Church." And while we are at it, you might confront the line in the Apostles creed, which you no doubt accept, that says, "I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic church...." Apparently it is not just the Bible that is ensnared in contradictions.

Letter #477 Concludes (Part h)

Now, in the July, 1991 issue of BE, you addressed my comments regarding the inclusion of letters from Jeff Frankel and John Sikos in the December, 1990 issue. Both of these letters contained nothing but personal ad hominem attacks upon me--they did not have anything to do with "proving" anything about the Bible's supposed fallibility. In responding to my questions about why you included these letters, you wrote, "For you to talk about character assassination is rather incongruous, James, when your letters are nearly always liberally sprinkled with pejoratives and disparaging personal attacks. You repeatedly denounce ad hominem comments while remaining one of their staunchest proponents." While I claim no perfection for myself, Mr. McKinsey, I would like to challenge you publicly to provide from any of my letters to you anything even remotely similar to the following comments culled from Mr. Frankel's and Mr. Sikos' letters as they appear in the 12/90 issue of BE: (a listing follows--ED.). You see, Mr. McKinsey, you allege that my letters contain "pejoratives" and "personal attacks." You seem to confuse direct rebuttals of error on your part, including the exposure of ignorance, with pejoratives and personal attacks, as we see in the quotations from Frankel and Sikos. Quite simply, Mr. McKinsey, the letters were published for no purpose other than to give vent to their hatred with reference to myself. The letters served no purpose for BE. I believe this is plain for anyone to see.

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #477 (Part h)

Don't try to shift the focus to the letters from others, James. We are talking about correspondence between you and me. And, as far as that correspondence is concerned, anyone who has read what has transpired between us over the years knows that you have leveled far more pejoratives and personal attacks against me than vice versa. In this letter, alone, you accuse me of being unfamiliar with the issues and showing ignorance. In an accompanying letter, which you do not want published in BE, you said I was not well suited to review one of your pamphlets, that I was unfamiliar with basic presuppositional apologetics, that I show a lack of understanding of the Trinity, and that I am unfamiliar with the issues. To me those are personal attacks on my knowledge and capabilities, the kinds of attacks that I have tried to avoid over the years. Lately, however, I've begun to reevaluate that position. I am not responsible for what others say nor do I intend to speak for those who are quite capable of answering your charges. My original comments referred to what you had to say about me compared to what I said about you. What others say about you is between you and them.

Letter #485 from BK of Victoria, British Columbia in Canada (Part a)

(Apparently someone gave BK copies of our pamphlets and he decided to send us the following extensive amateurish refutation--ED.)

Dear Atheists. I write this to reprove and correct and to answer your questions under the title of a pamphlet entitled: "JESUS CHRIST IS THE ANSWER?" The Bible states: "The natural man

does not understand the things of the Spirit of God, neither can he know them." You write as a natural man.

Editor's Response to Letter #485 (Part a)

Dear BK. After having read your letter which is to follow, I can only repeat what I told one of our critics many moons ago. Before you embark upon a program to "correct" BE, read what knowledgeable apologists in the field of biblical contradictions have to say. Instead of putting your toe into the water to test the temperature, you jumped headfirst into a boiling kettle with some of the most inane defenses I have ever encountered. Secondly, your final comment should have been, "You write naturally as a rational man." Preceded by a presentation of the problem and followed by our critique, each of your points will now be stated.

Letter #485 Continues (Part b)

[Point #1 on BE's Pamphlet -- While on the Cross Jesus said, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me" (Mark 15:34). How could Jesus be our savior when he couldn't even save himself--ED.]

You ask: "How could Jesus be our Savior when He couldn't even save Himself?" Jesus could have saved Himself, but if He did there would be no hope for you or I... He was forsaken so that we might be accepted.

Editor's Response to Letter #485 (Part b)

My friend, you completely ignored the question posed and what the man said. You have an image of someone dying for your salvation and nothing he says seems to affect your predetermined notions. Those aren't the words of someone dying for you or anyone else. Those are the words of someone who can think of a hundred places he would rather be. Are we going to go by what he actually said or what you "believe" he is doing? What would he have to do to convince you he intensely dislikes the chain of events in which he is currently embroiled? What do you want him to say, "Get me out of here for Christ's sake!" What are you looking for?

Letter #485 Continues (Part c)

[Point #2 on BE's Pamphlet -- Jesus said, "whoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire" (Matt. 5:22). Yet, he himself did so repeatedly as Matt. 23:17, 19 and Luke 11:40 and 12:20 show. Shouldn't he be in danger of hell too?--ED.]

The context of Matt. 5:22 indicates it is calling a brother a fool which is wrong. Jesus was calling the self-righteous, the hypocrites and the wicked, fools; such as: "The fool has said in his heart there is no God (Psalm 14:1) also (Matt. 15:15-17). The believer (brother) is no fool....

Editor's Response to Letter #485 (Part c)

Jesus said, "whoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire." He did not say, "whoever shall say, Thou fool, to his brother is in danger of hell fire." Your attempt to prove that it was permissible for Jesus to call people fools who were not brothers isn't scripturally sound. Where is that in Matt. 5:22? Moreover, where does the Bible say that those who are self-righteous, hypocritical, and wicked are not your brothers? You need to restudy Christian theology, my friend. If those who are self-righteous, hypocritical, and wicked are not your brothers, then you don't have any brothers, because everyone exhibits these qualities according to

verses such as Romans 3:23 which says, "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God." And where does it say that only believers are your brothers? Upon what textual basis are you making a distinction between the two? (TO BE CONTINUED)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #486 from AWL of Terre Haute, Indiana

Dear Dennis. When I read the Bible a long time ago, I recall reading a verse or verses which, in effect, say, "You can lie and cheat if it further's the Lord's work." Have you written on this? If so, in which 'Errancy'?

Editor's Response to Letter #486

Dear AWL. I think you are referring to Paul's comment in Rom. 3:7 RSV in which he says, "But if through my falsehood God's truthfulness abounds to his glory, why am I still being condemned as a sinner?" I have read this verse scores of times and after consulting many apologetic rationalizations I keep returning to the same conclusion. It means what it says and it says what it means. Or perhaps you are referring to Paul's comment in 1 Cor. 10:23 to the effect that, "All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not."

Letter #487 from LFB of Richmond, Virginia

Dear Dennis. The advice you gave to one of your readers I realized also applied to me. Although it is important to read criticisms of the Bible by freethinking biblical scholars, it is particularly important for us to read and know the Bible first hand. So, I have acquired THE REVISED STANDARD VERSION OF THE OXFORD ANNOTATED BIBLE WITH THE APOCRYPHA--AN ECUMENICAL STUDY BIBLE COMPLETELY REVISED AND ENLARGED.... Appearing in the annotation before Genesis 1, I found this amazing statement: "The primeval history reflects a 'prehistorical' or mythical view of the movement from creation to the return of chaos in the catastrophic flood and the new beginning afterwards...." The mythical view also included the Adam and Eve story and the fall into sin. The Judeo-Christian religion is premised upon sin, redemption and salvation. Doesn't that alone cause both the OT and the NT to fall apart? I am anxious to know your reaction to this surprising statement found in the Bible.

Editor's Response to Letter #487

Dear LFB. Ecumenical Bibles are generally produced by the liberal wing of Christianity and reflect a more pragmatic approach to the clash between Christianity and the Bible on one side and science and reason on the other. Liberals will often admit that many biblical miracles and stories are little more than myth and folklore which is not surprising. What is surprising is their belief in such equally ridiculous myths as the Resurrection, the Ascension, and Heaven. Their theology is as inconsistent as the fundamentalists, although they are often incapable of realizing that fact. They reject sticks turning into snakes and a woman springing from a man's rib, but they accept a man rising from the dead and some of the miracles performed by Jesus. They reject creationism and accept evolution, while contending that man has a soul and his ancient ancestors do not. They don't believe the earth ever stood still or Lot's wife turned into a pillar of salt but they believe in a Day of Judgment and eternal happiness in Heaven. They firmly believe that the Bible is the word of a perfect being, but they admit that it has many contradictions, errors, and falsehoods. While accepting Jesus as the perfect and divine savior, who said in John 14:4 that

only those who accept him can be saved, they contend that people in other religions can be saved too. Liberals are a hard group to corral because they are so diverse in their biblical views and so vague and inconsistent in their theology. They try very hard to reconcile the findings of science and rationality with the superstition of religion in general and the Bible in particular. To the very marrow of their being they want so much to keep the false sense of security provided by religion, while adopting the obvious findings of science and logic. But as one would expect, they only end up with a schizoid philosophy that is little more than a mish-mash of inconsistencies, vagueries, generalities, and metaphysical ambiguities. They have their feet firmly planted in the quicksand of both camps, while astride the vertical razor blade of trying to serve two masters at once, two masters that detest one another. The National Council of Churches is a prime example of an organization composed of liberal Christian denominations. BE does not usually discuss this wing of Christianity because the number of roads down which people can travel once having rejected the inerrancy of the Bible are too numerous to count, too vague to define, too vacillating to anchor and too individualized to warrant attention. Talk about trying to nail jello to the wall! There are almost as many theologies as there are proponents.

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FORGERIES--One of the more intriguing extrabiblical subjects has to do with the number of forgeries that are attributed by noted scholars to various translations of the Bible. Clearly there has been a clash among scholars throughout the ages over the correct translations of various verses which many deem to be forgeries. Some of the most notable examples are the following. **FIRST**, Ex. 6:3 says, "And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by my name JEHOVAH was I not known to them." As several scholars have noted, this translation is flawed. Every time the word "Lord" or "Lord God" appears in the first 14 chapters of Genesis, it came from the word "Jehovah." Translators changed Yahweh (Jehovah) into "the Lord" or "the Lord God" 6,000 times in order to harmonize the entire Hebrew Bible with verse 3. God is referred to as Jehovah by Abraham in Gen. 13:4, by Isaac in Gen. 26:22, by Jacob in Gen. 28:46, by Moses in Ex. 3:15, Gen. 12:1 and Gen. 15:7. Using "the Lord" or "the Lord God" is wrong because it is not a name at all but a form of address. **SECOND**, Ex. 19:3 says, "Moses went up unto God and the Lord called unto him...." According to some scholars the text clearly says "the gods," not god, and exhibits a distinct affinity to polytheism. **THIRD**, Second Sam. 21:19 says, "there was again a battle in Gob with the Philistines, where Elhanan the son of Jaare-oregim, a Bethlehemite, slew the brother of Goliath the Gittite...." "The brother of" is not in the original Hebrew. It was artificially created to coincide with 1 Chronicles 20:5 which says, "Elhanan the son of Jair slew Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite...." If "the brother of" had not been inserted it would say Goliath was killed by Elhanan, not David. Second Samuel 21:19 in the RSV is much more honest and says, "...Elhanan the son of Jaare-oregim, the Bethlehemite, slew Goliath the Gittite...." **FOURTH**, Jer. 23:6 is supposedly a reference to Jesus and says, "In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, **THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.**" This is a dishonest translation of the original Hebrew. As the RSV shows, this should have been translated as: "The Lord is our righteousness." Four points need to be made in this regard. (a) Leaving out the "is" imputes both lordship and righteousness to Jesus rather than God. It imputes divinity to the Messiah. (b) There are no indications of Jesus being called "The Lord our Righteousness" except by those seeking to fulfill the prophecy. (c) The passage does not present an argument for the divinity of Jesus. The Messiah was never called "Jehovah" in the OT. (d) One scholar, English, says this should have been translated from the Hebrew as, "the Eternal shall call him, Our Righteousness." In other words, he is not the Lord, the Eternal. **FIFTH**, Acts 13:33 says, "...he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the

second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee." The Septuagint and the Hebrew both say this should be the first psalm." SIXTH, Matt. 28:16-20 says, "...Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, All power is given to me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world, amen." The Catholic Encyclopedia states the Matthew formula for baptism is a forgery. The last 5 verses of Matthew are forgeries. Most church leaders admit as much. Why, because, after Matthew has Christ declare "I am not sent except to the lost sheep of the House of Israel" would he make a fool of Christ by having him say, "Go ye and teach all nations." Would he have Christ say the world would come to an end before his disciples could reach the cities of Israel and then have him contradict himself by saying, "I am with you always even to the end of the world." Also, if Jesus had broadened his mission to include Gentiles, all would have known. It would not have been necessary for Peter to have a vision to find it out in Acts 10:34-35 which says, "Then Peter opened his mouth and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that fears him, and works righteousness, is accepted with him." SEVENTH, one of the most important of all alleged forgeries pertains to the last 12 verses of the Book of Mark. There is no record in any of the early manuscripts of these verses. They simply "appeared" later. They are pure forgeries according to many and were made to bolster Paul's preaching that Christ was for the heathen instead of the Jews. EIGHTH, Luke 2:33 says, "And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him." This verse is a forgery because the original says, "his father and his mother." The RSV which says, "his father" has translated the verse correctly. This verse had to be forged; otherwise, Joseph would be the real father of Jesus and not God. NINTH, Luke 2:43 says, "...and Joseph and his mother knew not of it." This is forged because the original says, "his parents" did not know it. The RSV also says "his parents" and is correct. Jesus had a real human father. TENTH, Luke 22:43-44 says, "And there appeared an angel to him from heaven strengthening him. And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." Nearly all scholars admit these two verses are forgeries. They are in the KJV but were left out of the RSV. Whatever the character of this so-called bloody sweat, it should be noted that Matthew who was an apostle; Mark, who claimed to be an interpreter of Peter's who was with Jesus at this time; and John who was an apostle and was present, do not refer to the bloody sweat. Luke, who was neither an eyewitness nor an apostle, is the only gospel writer who mentions it. ELEVENTH, John 8:1-11 refers to the woman who was caught in adultery and was excused by Jesus who wrote on the ground and suggested those who are sinless cast the first stone. These verses are forgeries according to many. They are late interpolations and do not appear in the oldest and most reliable manuscripts. Yet, this is popularly regarded as one of the most admirable acts in Jesus' ministry. Verse 11, "Neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more" is doubted by nearly all scholars. TWELFTH, Mark 3:21 says, "And when his friends heard of it, they went out to lay hold on him: for they said, He is beside himself." Many scholars consider this verse to be a forgery. The RSV shows "his friends" should have been translated as "his family." It is of the greatest significance that his own family considered him to be out of his mind. THIRTEENTH, 1 John 5:7-8 says, "For these are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost; and these three are one." Prior to the 15th century these verses were not in any of the copies of 1 John and in none of the Greek copies. Gibbon notes that this verse is not found in any of the extant authentic manuscripts which number over 80. Verse 7 is found in only 2 Greek manuscripts, one of the 15th and the other of the 16th century. About 400 other Greek codices from the 4th century down to the 14th ignore it. All manuscripts before Jerome that are of the old Latin version lack it. In the oldest copies of the Vulgate it is also absent. Gibbon said there is universal silence about it by orthodox fathers, ancient versions and authentic manuscripts. Remove these verses and the forged verse in Matt. 28:19 and there is not one direct word of the Trinity in the Bible. Nowhere does it say Jesus and

God are to be held as One and the same Being. Many other examples of verses that are alleged to be forgeries are available but too much technical detail is required for our purposes.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #485 Continues from Last Month (Part d)

[Point #4 on BE's Pamphlet -- Isn't Jesus a false prophet since he wrongly predicted in Matt. 12:40 that he would be buried 3 days and 3 nights as Jonah was in the whale 3 days and 3 nights? Friday afternoon to early Sunday morning is only 1 1/2 days--ED.]

No! Jesus wasn't a false prophet because the religious world chose what is called good Friday as the crucifixion day. He was three days and three nights in the grave; being crucified on the wednesday.

Editor's Response to Letter #485 (Part d)

You need to reread your book, BK. The religious world did not choose Good Friday; the Bible did. Mark 15:42 clearly states that Jesus was killed on the day before the sabbath and that is Friday, the day of preparation. Where are you getting this Wednesday crucifixion nonsense? I think you have been reading too much literature from the World Wide Church of God. Many biblicists, such as Armstrong, admit that this problem is insurmountable unless the Crucifixion can somehow be shifted from Friday to Wednesday. They are correct in conceding a problem; they are incorrect in providing a solution.

Letter #485 Continues (Part e)

[Point #5 on BE's Pamphlet -- Another prophecy by Jesus in John 13:38 ("The cock shall not crow, till thou, Peter, have denied me 3 times") is false because Mark 14:66-68 shows the cock actually crowed after the first denial, not the third--ED.]

If you read Mark 14:67-72 you will get the proper understanding of what Jesus said regarding the cock crowing: "And the second time the cock crew. And Peter called to mind the words that Jesus said unto him, before the cock crows twice you will deny me thrice." The cock therefore crowed after Peter's first denial and a second time after his third denial thus proving the word of Jesus to be true.

Editor's Response to Letter #485 (Part e)

Don't try to change the prophecy, my friend. Operating on the basis of expediency, you conveniently chose the prophecy in Mark 14:30 that the cock would not crow twice until Peter had denied Jesus 3 times. But that is not the prophecy that is to be found in the Book of John which says that there would be no crowing of the cock whatever until after the third denial. Just compare what is supposed to occur according to John 13:38 and what actually occurs in Mark 14:66-72 and you'll see the mess.

Letter #485 Continues (Part f)

[Point #6 in BE's Pamphlet -- How could Jesus be our model of sinless perfection when he denies his moral perfection in Matt. 19:17 where he says, "Why call thou me good? there is none good but one, that is God"--ED.] Jesus did not deny He was sinless in Matt. 19:17. By his statement He was affirming that He was God come in the flesh.

Editor's Response to Letter #485 (Part f)

In all candor, BK, your answer is a muddle. What are you trying to say? Perhaps you meant to say "a sinner" instead of "sinless, which would run directly contrary to numerous biblical verses affirming the moral rectitude of Jesus. Or perhaps you meant to say that he was reasserting his moral rectitude which would prove he was god. But what did he say? He said, "why call thou me good? there is none good but one." How does that prove he is God? If anything, it proves the opposite. I must say, your logic is anything but coherent. By saying he is not good, he is proving he is not God. You need to revisit the drawing board on this one.

Letter #485 Continues (Part g)

[Point #7 in BE's Pamphlet -- In 1 Cor. 1:17 ("For christ sent me {Paul--ED.} not to baptize, but to preach the gospel") Paul said Jesus was wrong when he said in Matt. 28:19, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them...." So how could Jesus be the fountain of wisdom?]

Paul's God given mission was to preach the gospel, others with him baptized those that believed. Paul chose this way so that the people could not say, "I was baptized in the name of Paul" (1 Cor. 1:15).

Editor's Response to Letter #485 (Part g)

Would you be so kind as to cite chapter and verse for your assertion that Paul, unlike others, was given a specific mission by Jesus that did not include baptizing people? Paul may have given himself that mission but Jesus did not. In Matt. 28:19 Jesus told all of his followers to go into all the world and baptize. Where did he ever say that Paul was to be an exception? Again, I return to my original question. In 1 Cor. 1:17 Paul said that Jesus sent him not to baptize but to preach. Where did Jesus say this? Please cite chapter and verse. If you cannot provide chapter and verse, then Paul is a liar. If you can provide chapter and verse, then Jesus contradicted his Great Commission, because that would mean he did not tell all of his followers after all.

Letter #485 Continues (Part h)

[Point #8 in BE's Pamphlet -- How could Jesus, whom the NT repeatedly refers to as the son of man, be our savior when this is clearly forestalled by Psalm 146:3 ("Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man in whom there is no help") and Job 25:6 ("How much less man, that is a worm? and the son of man, which is a worm")?]

In the OT references which you present, it is speaking of the natural man as being the son of man. In the NT, after the birth of Jesus the words 'Son of man' has reference to Jesus being born a man of David's lineage. He is also called the son of David with reference to His humanity. As to His divinity Jesus is referred to as the Son of God. (You will not understand this until you are born again, of God's Spirit).

Editor's Response to Letter #485 (Part h)

Correction! You mean I won't be able to believe it until I am as indoctrinated as you are. To begin with, you assume the very point in dispute. How do you know the OT text is referring to the "natural man"? Where does it say that? Second, the lineage to which the phrase applies is irrelevant. How does that bear on the issue? The fact is that Jesus was called the "son of man" in the NT and the OT denounces the son of man. Third, we are not talking about the phrases "son of David" or "Son of God." They, too, are irrelevant. What do they have to do with the issue?

Fourth, although it is not relevant to the issue either, how do you know that the phrase "Son of man" has reference to Jesus being born a man of David's lineage and that he is called the son of David with reference to His humanity? For "crime out loud" where are you getting all of this pap? When I listen to people like you, BK, I thank fate that I was not raised in a home in which religious propaganda was polluting the air and choking the thought processes.

Letter #485 Continues (Part i)

[Point #11 in BE's Pamphlet -- Jesus told us to "honor thy father and mother" (Matt. 15:4) but contradicted his own teaching in Luke 14:26 where he said, "If any man come to me and hate not his father and mother...he cannot be my disciple."]

Jesus is teaching His followers that our natural relationships are to be as hatred in comparison to our love and devotion to Him and His will. He is not advocating hate as you suppose.

Editor's Response to Letter #485 (Part i)

You know, I really wish you and your other apologetic cohorts would take the Bible as is and operate on the logical premise that it says what it means and it means what it says. That old hackneyed defense: "that's what it says but that is not what it means" gets quite stale after awhile. There is nothing whatever in the verse that would lead one to believe that Jesus is making a "comparison." There is nothing about comparing anything to anything. Why don't you just be honest enough to admit that you don't have an answer and are rationalizing, pure and simple. Moreover, if the attitude we are to show our parents is as hatred when compared to the love we are to show God, then our attitude to everyone except our parents should be that of real hatred or something akin to despising or loathing. How is that for teaching brotherly love!

Letter #485 Continues (Part j)

[Point #12 in BE's Pamphlet -- In John 3:13 ("And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man....") Jesus erred because 2 Kings 2:11 ("...and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven") shows Elijah went earlier.]

Jesus is the only who ascended up into heaven. Elijah was carried there by special transport. While they watched, Jesus ascended unattended.

Editor's Response to Letter #485 (Part j)

We are going to have to give you the Award for Irrelevancy medal, BK. You bring in more irrelevant junk in an attempt to shift the focus than any apologist I've encountered in the past year. What difference does it make how Elijah and Jesus got to heaven. The fact is that they both ascended, period. John 3:13 does not say no man ascended to heaven unaided or without transportation prior to Jesus. If you are going to use an excuse as silly as this one, why don't you say that a strong wind did not accompany the ascent of Jesus as it did that of Elijah. Of course, if you and other apologists are going to increasingly rely on contrived irrelevancies as the bulwark of your defenses, then I am going to reply in kind by saying, for instance, that Jesus ascended in the same manner as Elijah but that simply was not inserted into the text because it was deemed irrelevant. I can write as much between the lines as you can.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #488 from RM of Red Deer, Alberta Canada

[RM went to an open forum in a college near his home in which an audience of 400 was allowed to question several ministers about the Bible and Christianity. RM called us after the program and was clearly excited and delighted about what transpired--ED.]

Dear Dennis. I am preaching again. But, this time it's the GOOD NEWS of BIBLICAL ERRANCY. I unleashed a number of your arguments on a couple of male ministers, one female pastor, a missionary (who set up the whole public confrontation in the first place), and (unbeknownst to me at the time) a religion columnist for our city newspaper. It was five against one, in front of over four hundred college students, and I won! Not Bad eh! (Yah, I am a Canadian).

Anyway, the IVCF (Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship) missionaries set up posters entitled "Christianity on Trial." So that's just what I did: I put it on trial. I played it like a crown prosecutor. Not willing to waste my first big chance to challenge the bible in public I launched into the math errors riddled throughout the book of Joshua; i.e. Joshua 15:21-32, which states there are 29 cities while listing 36; Joshua 15:33-36 which states there are 14 cities while listing 15; chapter 19:2-6 which states there are 13 cities while listing 14 of them. From there I jumped into 1 Kings 9:23 where Solomon is said to have 550 chief officers. I then drew their attention to 2 Chron. 8:10 where the text says Solomon had 250 chief officers. Before they could collect their wits I pointed out that the NIV Narrated Bible, (a chronological bible that places the scriptures in historical order-- an excellent tool for the BE buff), places the two verses together as one, listing only the 550 and ignoring the 250 without any explanation at all. I then quoted W.A. Elwell, an evangelical fundamentalist commentator, who admits that one of these passages is corrupt but doesn't know which one. Then, I pointed to the 2,000 versus 3,000 baths of Solomon's house in 1 Kings 7:26 and 2 Chron. 4:5 respectively. They were stunned for a good while (over a minute, I think) looking at each other until the older male minister began to ramble on about context and deep sincerity as the necessary requirements to understand the bible. "Bush wah" I replied. I then challenged him to answer my questions if he was so sincere, and if he knew how to read in context. He had no real answer that could stand up and the audience knew it.

From there, I went for their jugular vein. I "hit" them with the scientific fallacies from one of your tracts. They told me to quit monopolizing the microphone. I turned to the crowd and asked them if anyone had any questions to ask these "experts." No one seemed too interested in asking anything, but they seemed to like what I was doing. Out of the crowd I heard shouts like: "No! You're doing fine! Keep up the good work! Don't stop now!" Believe me, it was like a rush of adrenalin to hear that. Best of all, the "experts" heard it too. The show was mine.

Eventually, I launched into some of the bigger problems with christianity and the bible such as the problem of hell and a "just God" tolerating eternal quarantine, and the eternal punishment of finite sinners. After some initial squabbling about my questions not being clear (the audience seemed to think they were quite clear), they made their last attempt to down-play my arguments. Each of them, in turn, suggested that I might be biased as if I have not given Jesus a fair chance. It was at this juncture that a guy from the audience, on his way out of the student forum, came up behind me and suggested, in passing, that maybe Allah deserves a fair chance too. (No one else heard it because he stealthily said it under his breath just as he was passing behind me). I seized the opportunity like any good opportunist might have done and shouted that Allah, Brahma, Krishna, Muhammad, and every other god and visionary deserves a fair chance as well. Then I gave them the "clincher." I said, "Hey! I was one of you for 11 years. Yah! I was a born-again, spirit-filled, double doser of the Holy Ghost, bible punching, christian. So don't even try to suggest that I might be biased. I gave Jesus a fair chance. It just didn't work. Don't you dare try to suggest otherwise."

The show was over. They gave their closing speeches. I signalled them to give me a chance to offer a closing speech also. They couldn't really refuse, after all, most of the audience was on my side. Right to the end I hammered away at christianity and the bible. I was pretty damn good too. I never thought it would go so well. As the saying goes, "Nothing ventured, nothing gained." I hope this helps inspire someone to do the same thing.

But, most of all, I want to thank you Dennis for making it possible. It is because you have the "jam" to take these jokers on that others are able to see that it isn't so impossible to do. Your tireless efforts and your BE magazine are simply incomparable. Keep up the great work. Your material has certainly helped me. I hope I can catch up to you in knowing the errors of the bible. You would make a good role model for a lot of independent thinkers. Thanks again.

P.S. Pardon the punctuation and grammatical errors. I was in a hurry to get back to my home work. You may edit, delete, and correct as you see fit, should you desire to print any of my letter in an upcoming issue of BE. Believe me, what I wrote wasn't even the half of what happened. For over half an hour after the "Christianity on Trial" session, people descended upon me, asking if I wanted to start my own society on campus, (I'm not sure that is feasible at the present but it is an interesting proposition); others patted me on the back, shook my hand, and even the christians were giving me their cards and asking me to call them. They thought my questions/contentions were absolutely unique. I told them that they should write to BE. As I told one person and company, "BE is the place to be, and Dennis McKinsey is the man to see." So don't worry, I am quick to advertise where my best information comes from. Whether or not the christians will "check it out" is uncertain. But, if they ever get curious enough, they will know where to write. My best wishes, for you and your magazine. Thanks again.

Editor's Response to Letter #488

Dear RM. We published your entire letter because you have gone to heart of what this publication is all about and employed the strategy we have been stressing for nearly 10 years. You took it to the other side, on their turf, in their book and before a large audience. And judging from the phone conversation which we had around midnight after you returned home from your encounter, you performed magnificently. You did precisely what we have repeatedly claimed must be done if real inroads are to be made into religious domination of North America. If only I had been there to give you a good pat on the back. I have continually said it can be done; I know it can be done, and I know it is by far the most realistic way to do it. But until far more people realize that it is the only practical way, until they realize it can be done and do it, it won't be done. I keep going back to the basics. You have to reeducate people from the beginning. You have to return to the fundamentals and begin anew, patiently, methodically, systematically, logically, accurately, and knowledgeably straightening out everything they learned in Sunday School as a child, everything they were erroneously told about the Bible and Christianity, everything they unjustifiably assumed from what they have been told about the Bible. That's a tall order but that is what it takes. Throwing rocks from a distance and fighting court battles will never get the job done. I have often seen people debating abortion, homosexuality, sexism, anti-semitism, racism, crime, morality, nuclear disarmament and many other issues on television with biblicists, and if ever there was a conversation going nowhere that is it. Talk about a waste of time! Tens of millions of people view every issue from the perspective of what the Bible teaches and until you convince them the Book is fallacious, until they are convinced it is not the inerrant word of an infallible God, from their perspective you will be on a journey to perdition doing little more than propounding anti-God material from the Devil's cauldron that by definition must be false.

You should have added one very important point, however. You did your homework over a long period of time and went to the forum well prepared. You knew what you wanted to hit and had your ducks carefully lined up; that's what is required of anyone challenging someone in their own book. A week before the meeting you called me and we discussed the questions that should be at the forefront of your attack. You chose well and did so alone. Can you imagine what we could do with a battery of people of like mind and similar knowledge going to many meetings and making many media appearances? Creation of an organization of this nature is what we have been advocating for years. The commentaries in issues 58-60 were devoted to a speech focused almost entirely on proving this very point. But, remember, don't become over-confident, do your research, prepare for even greater challenges, and return to the fray soon and often.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Last summer we began distributing an index of the first 8 years of BE compiled by Ernie Brennaman of Corpus Christi, Texas. We recently received from him the 1991 update which is now available. You can receive the 1991 two-page update by itself or as an addendum to the entire 8 year index. Again, those who seek to have a copy can submit whatever funds they feel are appropriate.

Issue No. 113

May 1992

This issue will continue a tradition that was begun many years ago of occasionally devoting an entire issue to letters from our readers.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #485 Continues from Last Month (Part k)

[Point #13 in BE's Pamphlet -- In Matt. 16:28 Jesus said, "There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom." Yet, they all died and he never came.]

Three days after the statement by Jesus, Peter, James and John watched as Jesus was glorified before them thus revealing His glory and that of His kingdom.

Editor's Response to Letter #485 (Part k)

I wish you would cite chapter and verse when you come out with these weak defenses. That is probably why you don't. Down deep inside you know they can't stand the strain. I assume you are referring to the next verse which is Matt. 17:1. I think you need to reread the script, my friend. First, Matt. 17:1 says 6 days later, not 3. Second, Matt. 17:1 says, "Jesus took Peter, James, and John to a high mountain." Nowhere does it say he appeared to them or came to them. He was already there. Third, it says Jesus was transfigured; nowhere does it say his kingdom appeared or arrived. How does Jesus being transfigured equal the arrival of the kingdom? Fourth, if you will read Matt. 17:3 you will see that the only thing that did appear was Moses and Elias. And lastly, if his kingdom had arrived, then why didn't all the events that were supposed to follow the kingdom's arrival according to biblical predictions actually occur?

Letter #485 Continues (Part l)

[Point #15 in BE's pamphlet -- Even many of the staunchest defenders of Jesus admit that his comment in Matt. 10:34 ("I came not to send peace but a sword") contradicts verses such as Matt. 26:52 ("Put up again thy sword into its place: for all that take the sword shall perish with the sword").]

If you read the verses that follow the words of Jesus in Matthew 10 which you have given, you will find the meaning of Jesus' statement. The message which He had given to His disciples to proclaim would bring opposition and even death to the messenger by those who reject the message. He knew this would be the result. He came as the Prince of peace but rejecting the Prince of peace has brought the sword to families and nations.

Editor's Response to Letter #485 (Part l)

I have read the verses after Matt. 10:34 many times, BK, and others need only read them to see why biblical apologetics is one of the most deceptive activities in existence. The central thrust of the verses that follow Matt. 10:34 do not show that the message "would bring violence, opposition and even death to the messenger by those who reject the message." The central thrust is that the followers of Jesus must jettison all in the fight for Christ and oppose all who fail to support or oppose Christ. All of the verses following Matt. 10:34 show that he clearly intended

for his followers to employ the sword and he did not come as a prince of peace. He did not come as the messenger of peace causing the sword to be employed by his opponents as you would have us believe.

Letter #485 Continues (Part m)

[Point #16 in BE's pamphlet -- The Messiah must be a physical descendant of David (Rom. 1:3, Acts 2:30). Yet, how could Jesus meet this requirement since his genealogies in Matt. 1 and Luke 3 show he descended from David through Joseph who was not his natural father (The Virgin Birth).]

It is the woman's seed that was to bruise Satan's head (Gen. 3:15), not the man's seed. Mary fulfilled this in the birth of Jesus. It is evident therefore that Mary was a direct descendant of David after the flesh. In Luke is given the genealogy of Mary which goes back to David.

Editor's Response to Letter #485 (Part m)

You say that "it is evident therefore that Mary was direct descendant of David" when there is nothing evident about it. Could you cite chapter and verse for this assumption. Moreover, upon what possible basis do you conclude that the genealogy in Luke 3 is that of Mary? I strongly recommend you read our refutation of this commonly held apologetic ploy which can be found on page 4 of Issue #71.

Letter #485 Continues (Part n)

[Point #17 in BE's pamphlet -- Jesus told a man in Mark 8:34 that "whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me." What cross? He hadn't died on the cross yet. There was nothing to take up. That man would have had no idea what he was talking about.]

If you deny yourself you will have a cross to bear. Jesus wasn't asking the man to take up the cross that He would die on. The cross speaks of suffering, loneliness and denial of one's earthly desires. This will be the lot of one who wholly and completely denies himself the things that this world cherishes so that He may serve the Lord.

Editor's Response to Letter #485 (Part n)

Why are you and your Christians brothers so incapable of understanding the problem this question poses? There was no Christian cross at the time this statement was made. So there was no Christian cross to take up. You say, "The cross speaks of suffering, loneliness and denial of one's earthly desires." Where are you getting this? Please provide chapter and verse in support of what is otherwise an unsupportable comment. I have heard this defense several times and it makes no more sense now than the first time I heard it. There is nothing in the Bible about a cross other than the one upon which Jesus died. Christians are so indoctrinated to associate the cross with suffering and bearing one's burdens that they are incapable of realizing that there was a time when the cross had no such baggage. Or perhaps you have extrabiblical evidence that the cross was so viewed prior to the Crucifixion. If so, I'd very much like to hear it and an explanation of its applicability to the eastern end of the Mediterranean.

Letter #485 Continues (Part o)

[Point #18 in BE's pamphlet -- In Mark 10:19 Jesus told a man to follow the commandments. Yet, one of those listed by Jesus was "defraud not" which isn't even an OT commandment.]

Defraud means to take from, or cheat another. It can include being sexually unfaithful, dishonest or deceitful. All are certainly included in the commandments even if another name is used to express them.]

Editor's Response to Letter #485 (Part o)

Sometimes I don't know why I even bother responding to the duplicity of biblicists and this is one of those times. If you will take the time to read Mark 10:19, BK, you will notice it lists 5 of the 10 commandments. Five are omitted and a new one--Defraud not--is added. It is clearly a separate commandment. If it only meant "cheating," "being sexually unfaithful," or "dishonest as you contend," then there would have been no need to have listed it at all, since it would be included within those original commandments that were already listed. No, it is a separate commandment; Jesus is adding to the script, and you are creating your own.

Letter #485 Continues (Part p)

[Point #19 in BE's pamphlet -- In Luke 12:4 Jesus told his followers to "Be not afraid of them that kill the body," but Matt. 12:14-16, John 7:1, 8:59, 10:39, 11:53-54, and Mark 1:45 show that he hid, escaped, and slinked around on numerous occasions.]

To avoid or escape from someone you know is out to get you is not a sign of fear but rather a sign of wisdom and good judgment.

Editor's Response to Letter #485 (Part p)

No, it is a sign of both. Because of fear he exercised good judgment and fled. Fear is certainly present. Otherwise, why did he flee? And because fear is present, his actions contradicted his teaching in Luke 12:4 that one should not be afraid. You stealthily tried to shift attention away from the word "fear" and toward the words you prefer, "wisdom" and "good judgment." Whether he exercised good or bad judgment is irrelevant. The fact is that he hid out until the heat blew over.

Letter #485 Continues (Part q)

[And lastly, point #21 in BE's pamphlet -- For Jesus to be executed for our sins makes about as much sense as my son telling a judge that he would accept execution for my crimes. Although a nice gesture it has nothing to do with justice. What judge would agree?]

...God Himself is the one who has been sinned against; He is also the judge and can set the rules. He was willing to come in the person of Jesus Christ to die for the sins of those whom He had created in order that we may be delivered from all sin. Death, God cannot twice demand; first of His Son and then of me if I receive Christ's death as my death. Even in this life, if someone is put to death for a crime he did not commit, if the one who committed the crime is discovered he cannot be put to death for the crime another died for.

Editor's Response to Letter #485 (part q)

You haven't answered the question. Even if God is "willing to come in the person of Jesus Christ to die for the sins of those whom He had created," the fact remains that it is a nice gesture that

has nothing to do with justice. Those who do the deed should pay the price. That is fundamental to all systems of jurisprudence. The fact that some are willing to die for others means nothing. You say that God is the judge and can set the rules. That is just another way of saying you have a being who wants somebody to pay for the crime and doesn't really care who is punished. He just wants blood. You say that if someone is put to death for a crime he did not commit, the real culprit cannot be executed even if he is caught. Are you a lawyer? I am not, but I doubt justice would be served by allowing a guilty man to go free because an innocent man paid the price.

Letter #485 Concludes (part r)

All of your questions stem from a lack of understanding of God's plans and purposes that will be fulfilled as He has purposed in spite of the objections of ignorant men....

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #485 (Part r)

It is not so much a matter of my questions as your answers, BK. All of them stem from an intense psychological need to justify and rationalize a chaotic maze of discombobulated superstition intertwined with hopes, prayers, dreams, and yearnings based on nothing more than a contradictory book of folklore, fantasy, mythology, and imaginings concocted by childish adults. Every Christian should heed at least one verse in the Bible, namely, 1 Cor. 13:11 which says, "When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things." That about says it all and lays ignorance where it really belongs!

Letter #489 from BB of Cambridge, Massachusetts

My Bible doesn't say that Adam, Noe or Job were perfect in...Gen. 6:9 ("These are the generations of Noe: Noe was a just man and blameless in his generations, he walked with God"), Job 1:1 ("There was a man in the land of Hus, whose name was Job, and that man was simple and upright, fearing God and avoiding evil"--Douay-Challoner Text).

As for your theological conundrum: how can a perfect God create imperfection; the answer can be found in St. Thomas Aquinas' Summa Theologica (paraphrased): God is like a perfect life giving light, out of this light comes creation, since creation is separate from the light it cast shadows and it is in these shadows that doubt and evil dwell, but there are no shadows on the light. God did not make death (Wis. 1:13). God does not will moral evil (Psalms 5:4-6) but merely permits it (Amos 3:6; Job 2:10). The reason for this is that God created man with free will, so that He can bring good out of evil (Gen. 3:15).

Editor's Response to Letter #489

Dear BB. My King James and American Standard refer to Noah as "perfect;" the Good News says he "had no faults," and the Bible in Basic English says he was "without sin." That is about as clear as you can be. If that doesn't mean he is perfect, what do you want? In addition, how does your "blameless" differ from my "perfect." If he is blameless then he is perfect. Either he is blameless or he isn't. There is no inbetween. A major problem with Christians, such as yourself, is that they love to deal in absolutes but attempt to retreat when their hand is called. If Noah committed even one small sin he was not blameless, and if he committed no sins whatever, then he was perfect. Christians are always trying to straddle fences that are not straddleable.

As far as your explanation for the existence of evil is concerned, it's nothing more than a nebulous, fabricated muddle. First, you begin by saying that God is perfect and that he creates a

light which gives rise to creation. If God is perfect then the light he created must be perfect. If creation came from that light then that creation must be perfect also. Then you say that this creation casts shadows and in these shadows evil dwells. Evil created by what? Are you saying that it was created by the creation? But how could that be when the creation itself must be perfect, since it is the creation of a perfectly moral being. Secondly, where on earth are you getting all of this doubletalk. Where does the Bible say that God created a light that gave rise to a creation that had shadows in which evil arose? It sounds like something a theologian would concoct in his spare time or on a sleepless night. Thirdly, regardless of how many stages the formation of evil is removed from the original creation, you still have evil ultimately emerging from a perfect being. All of these intermediaries aren't going to bail you out. That's why several biblicists I quoted in past issues were candid enough to admit they had no explanation for the emergence of evil. Fourthly, the old canard about God not creating evil but just allowing it to exist will not withstand critical analysis. What does Lam. 3:38 say in the RSV. "Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and evil come?" What does Jer. 26:3 have God say? "...that I may repent of the evil, which I purpose to do unto them because of the evil of their doings." Also note Jer. 36:3, Isa. 45:7, and several other verses. They all say that God creates evil. So God doesn't just allow evil; he generates it. And lastly, the "man has free will" deception won't fly either. As I have said on many occasions, according to the Bible God created man and God is perfect. Therefore, man had to have been perfect because he was a product of a perfect God. If God created him, he had to have been perfect and couldn't have sinned. Regardless of how much free will he had, if he chose to sin he wasn't perfect. In essence, because God created him he couldn't have sinned; it would have been impossible. So evil could not have arisen from man exercising his free will. You would do well to avoid theologians, especially the likes of Aquinas.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #490 from FA of Santa Rosa, California

Dear Dennis. In Issue #110, letter #477, James White wrote about "the Son who had appeared and was seen by the OT believers." This could not have happened because there was no "Son" in the OT times. Did you ever wonder why God never told anyone he had a son during the 4,000 years from Adam to Jesus? Why would a kind and loving God conceal such vital information in the light of Acts 4:12 which says, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Nobody in the OT ever heard of God's son, Jesus--Noah, Moses, David, Isaiah--not even Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived.

In your discussion of the trinity, only the Father and Son are considered. James White says it was the Son who appeared in the OT. You say if anyone was seen it was the Father who appeared in the OT. There is a possibility you are both wrong. Maybe it was the Holy Ghost who appeared in the OT; after all, they are identical triplets aren't they?

Editor's Response to Letter #490

Dear FA. As far as the Son not appearing the OT is concerned, you are employing a line of argumentation that is often used by freethinkers but we have always avoided. Just because nobody discussed the Son in the OT does not mean he could not have been there. This is known as arguing from silence and has often been used by freethinkers in regard to all of the events surrounding the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The argument from silence is just too weak for our taste and has never been given a role in BE. You just can't say something did not occur because nobody in ancient history mentions it, no matter how incredible the event.

That is a weak reed to lean on. I would rather call White's hand and ask for biblical proof in support of his position.

Letter #491 from LA of Hollywood, California

Dear B.E.... I've run into far too many un-informed and/or mis-informed people and I need your help. I'm also changing my policy of avoiding these mis-informed people, standing my ground and start shining some long overdue light on the darkness of their misconceptions. I do realize many will never listen but perhaps a few might and start to question themselves. Finding information of this nature in the library is far from easy. The truth is easily hidden. This is where I need your help. Where can I find records or information on the many re-writings, additions, and deletions the church or individuals saw fit to make in the NT and in the OT if you're got some.... Would you agree with my observation that if not for the efforts of people like yourself and other "Freethinkers" most everyone would still be living in the dark ages?.... I'll feel better knowing I've made an effort to keep up the pace of change if not speed it up.... I'm living in Hollywood and I run into so many of these poor blind fools, I truly feel sad and sorry for them. And perhaps somewhere along the way we can turn enough blindness into sight....

Editor's Response to Letter #491

Dear LA. I have as much trouble as you in discovering the degree to which the church and key individuals made alterations in the Bible. It is an extrabiblical subject that is not easy to research and in which we do not specialize, although some prior commentaries were devoted to textual conflicts between the various translations on the market. You might consult the writings of people such as Doane, McCabe, and Graham. That is about as good as I can do. Writings such as those you seek are generally kept hush-hush and, no doubt, many have been destroyed throughout the centuries. As far as reasoning and intelligence is concerned I would say that most people are far closer to the dark ages than the Enlightenment. From religion to folklore, New Age to old myths, horoscopes to metaphysics, superstition is alive, well, and growing in "modern" America.

Letter #492 from EG of El Toro, California

Dear Dennis. I have a friend who is a Christian and we are in a long-standing debate with each other. I, of course, do not think much of his evidences, etc. This time we are debating the flood and prophecy in general. I think he must have been impressed by your last issue of BE (it talks about prophecy). I recently brought a subscription to BE for him, and now I want to discuss BE material concerning the flood and prophecy in general, and see how he tries to deal with the information. Therefore, I ask you to send 2 copies of the following back issues. One to me, and one to him.... P.S. Thanks for your great advice. I'm taking Christians on! Send back issues A.S.A.P.

Letter #493 from RK of Ruston, Louisiana

Dear Dennis.... Allow me to add my periodic encouragement to you. I believe your work will be the seminal reference for future books which will transform western civilization's thinking about the bible. BE's philosophy of avoiding opinion and addressing only errors and inconsistencies avoids mountains of time wasted on responding to specious rebuttals. And BE's logic is a thing of beauty. Do allow me a word of caution: continue to resist the temptation to interject politics, government, economics, etc. Some may find a failure to do so an excuse to sully BE's true worth....

Letter #494 from NS of Richmond, Indiana

Dear Dennis. Being a typesetter for a small-town weekly newspaper does have its advantages. Every week I must set what I call the church garbage, but recently I was incensed at a couple of articles and decided to write a "Letter to the Editor." (Borrowing from B.E.). Thankfully my editor feels much the same way I do, but does not dare reveal his views. I seriously doubt I changed any minds, but what a catharsis for me! It's sad I couldn't use my own name for fear of losing subscribers, which we can ill afford. The one I used is on my birth certificate, but I was adopted and my name changed. I certainly am not ashamed of my religious views, and do not hesitate to state exactly how I feel, but to jeopardize the paper wouldn't be fair. The editor received several irate calls with one demanding to know my address or phone number, which, of course, he didn't give. Makes me wonder what this good Christian would have done to me??.... Thanks again for B.E., which is an inspiration every month. That is, whenever it gets here, last month it was the 22nd, but the P.O. was really on the ball this month, and got it here today, the 10th. You'll never convince me that this isn't deliberate, but being good Christians, I'm sure they would explain it all away!

Letter #495 from LR of Baker, Oregon

Dennis. I thought I was the only person in this world who felt from age 13 onward that this collection of absurdities called the Bible was written by cruel scribes bent on enslaving mankind, keeping their females mute and obedient, ensuring a continuing profit and income for themselves, and establishing an authority to commit a collection of...deceits and other assorted stupidities against weaker men. Apparently many others feel frustrated with this book that is often so ugly in its pronouncements that it is unsuitable for reading by children. I am astonished that such a publication as "Biblical Errancy" is available!! Pretty naive, Huh?... If you are a short-wave listener, a few of us "hams" have started an "atheist" group, and meet on the short-wave frequency of 14.323 Mhz on Sundays at 1800 hours GMT. Also on 3.850 Mhz on Monday at 0300 hours GMT. You wouldn't believe the heckling and name-calling from the religionists!! It's time the rest of us come out of the closet.

EDITOR'S NOTE: (a) We now have available for purchase a 31-page, single-spaced, computer-generated, 3-column index with the location of every biblical verse in the first 108 Issues (9 years) of BE. Bound in an inexpensive folder and with more than 10,000 entries, it will be distributed at a minimum cost of \$10. Thanks to Thomas Gould Jr. of 107 William Shy Drive in Hendersonville, Tennessee 37075 (615) 824-0496, we now have a verse index to supplement our word index created by Ernie Brennaman of Corpus Christi, Texas.

(b) We have decided to periodically recommend books and other materials in regard to the whole subject of biblical errancy. Frankly, there is not much really good material available but that which does exist should be brought to the attention of all concerned. For openers I would recommend that great classic, *The Age of Reason*, by Thomas Paine which focuses on many aspects of the Bible, especially prophetic inaccuracies. *The Bible Handbook* by Foote and Ball is a very good book if you want a short synopsis of many direct biblical contradictions, although they occasionally fail to interpret objectively. John Remsburg wrote two exceptional books entitled *The Bible* and *The Christ* which focus on the OT and the New, respectively. I read them nearly 15 years ago and was impressed by the number of biblical contradictions and other problems that Remsburg was able to bring to the fore. A real eye-opener for the novice is a work by Joseph Wheless entitled *Is It God's Word?* This was one of the writings upon which I broke my biblical teeth ages ago. Two excellent Jewish writings devoted to exposing the distortion of the OT by Christian scholars, especially in regard to messianic prophecy, are *The Jew and the Christian Missionary* by Gerald Sigal and *The Real Messiah* by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan.

believe in the Bible will tend to rely upon saviors rather than their own wisdom and capabilities. Instead of seeing groups and organizations as the motive force in history, they will look for figures in the tradition of John Wayne, Moses, and heroes on white horses to make the right decisions. (6) They will tend to rely upon supposed experts to interpret the Bible for them, fail to view events objectively, be subservient rather than independent, and see the world through the eyes of those who find them easy to persuade. (7) They won't oppose wars with real conviction and might even welcome them for several reasons. (a) To most Christians when you are dead you are merely sleeping and waiting for the day you arise; so there is no real loss. (b) Since you are going to a better world, why be concerned about your fate in this one. (c) Since you can't really be destroyed regardless of what happens on the battlefield, why be concerned with the nuclear threat or be engaged in anti-nuclear or anti-war activity. (d) Why fight the tide of history since Armageddon is inevitable, regardless. (8) They will oppose sexual equality and support the subordination of women. Many biblically influenced women argue that they have equal status with men, despite the fact that a multitude of verses clearly show the opposite. According to the Bible women are less clean than men, are to be subservient to men, and are the prime cause of original sin. Paul's position on women is utterly degrading. Teachings of this nature can't help but retard the maturation of females and damage the image they have of themselves. (9) Of great importance is the fact that religious people are going to believe that giving to "God's representatives," i.e. Falwell, Swaggart, Graham, etc., is equivalent to giving to God. Buying their way into heaven is the unspoken motive and accounts in large measure for the fact that many clergymen and denominations are very affluent. (10) Believers are going to feel their anti-social behavior can be exonerated by bequeathing wealth to the church, repenting, confessing, accepting Jesus, fasting, abstaining, and fulfilling rituals. Church-going will be viewed by many as a cleansing of their record and conscience on Sunday for all their bad deeds committed during the week which will allow them to resume their old ways the following week. People will seriously feel that confession or something akin to same will purify their account and provide a fresh start. Such concepts could foster anti-social behavior as easily as could the belief propounded by fundamentalists that good deeds are irrelevant to salvation. (11) As outlined in Matthew, they will view anti-social behavior as the result of things from within rather than without. Internal makeup rather than external conditions will be seen as responsible for bad behavior. They will fail to realize that if this were true, then most criminal activity would not occur in the poorer sections of society and social stability would not be touted by more affluent areas. Unbeknownst to them they are really saying that those who live in higher crime areas are inherently bad; something is wrong with them rather than their environment. Most anti-social behavior has far more to do with the conditions in which people are raised than something innate. Prosperous people have far more at stake and are less inclined to engage in anti-social behavior out of pure self-interest if for no other reason. (12) Because of their belief in original sin, they will view all people as inherently corrupt and associate with others on a basis of hypocrisy. While outwardly smiling and exhibiting all of the expected social graces, inwardly, they will look upon people as pieces of dung, to quote Martin Luther, fit only to be altered and remolded as deemed preferable. (13) Believing themselves to possess constant, eternal truths, they won't be open to change and new ideas, even though any qualified scientist knows there is nothing so permanent as change. (14) As is often discussed in freethought literature, adherents to Jesus will feel they have the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. The inevitable by-product of their philosophy will be intolerance with all of the accompanying war and conflict. (15) Those caught up in the Judeo-Christian tradition will tend to view themselves as superior to others because they view themselves as chosen by God to carry his message. The OT clearly shows Jews exhibiting a kind of national myopia. Because of the importance God laid on the Jews at the expense of all others, biblicists will strongly believe in nationalism and national superiority. (16) They will not be inclined to marry outside their religion, ethnic group, or nationality. Their narrow, provincial outlook will be the source of endless isolation and mistrust of those in other groups and close their minds to foreign ideas whether right or wrong.

Competition and conflict are an understandable outcome. (17) Those well schooled in scripture will look upon genealogies, family ancestry, and family relationships as being more important than personal accomplishment and social relationships with the community at large. The narrow, clannish, ethnic mentality that will arise can only lead to conflict and judgments based on regressive concepts such as bad blood and good stock. (18) Because of rewards promised in the next world, they will be far more prone to accept and endure mistreatment and injustice than fight back. (19) Those who take Scripture seriously and believe miracles and supernatural intervention will deliver them from their problems will also be more inclined to accept and endure than act and alter. (20) Because of verses such as those found in Psalms, Christians will believe that corrupt people will ultimately get theirs. The outcome has been written on the wind by God and one need not act or be concerned. God will do it all. (21) Because of many scriptural passages, they will not be inclined to plan and labor but accept whatever fate has to offer, which can only act to the detriment of all concerned. What could be more enervating than Matt. 6:25-33 which says, "I tell you therefore, do not worry about your living--what you are to eat or drink, or about your body, what you are to wear. Is not the life more important than its nourishment and the body than its clothing? Look at the birds of the air, how they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, but your heavenly Father feeds them. Are not you more valuable than they?" Anyone who takes advice of this kind seriously is headed for catastrophe. Imagine a farmer who neither sows nor reaps but expects the harvest to fall into his lap out of God's good graces. Matthew continues by saying, "Furthermore, who of you is able through worrying to add one moment to his life's course? And why worry about clothes? Observe carefully how the field lilies grow. They neither toil nor spin, but I tell you that even Solomon in all his splendor was never dressed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field that exists today and is thrown into the furnace tomorrow, will He not more surely clothe you of little faith?" This teaching clashes with the very work ethic we try so hard to instill into our youth and which so many of today's youngsters lack. Matthew concludes by saying, "Do not, then, be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What are we to wear?' For on all these things pagans center their interest while your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you." Millions of people have spent their entire lives seeking his kingdom and righteousness and are yet to receive adequate food, drink, and clothing. What a massive deception! (22) Because of statements in the Book of John and the Book of Acts, as well as comments by Paul and Peter, anti-semitism will be hard to avoid. (23) Anyone taking the Bible seriously will have superstitious, mythological views on many subjects which can only act as a terrible retardant on scientific advancement. The antibiblical concept of evolution is basic to every branch of the physical sciences. (24) And lastly, because of the importance placed on the Old Law, especially the Ten Commandments, the mechanical application of stringent laws with little or no consideration for mitigating circumstances, reminiscent of the Ayatollah, will be carried over into modern society.

These are only some of the reasons one could give for opposing all efforts to propagate the Bible. No doubt nearly every member of the freethought community can think of more. We intend to create an expanded audio tape on this topic heavily focused on the classism and iniquities the Bible fosters.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #496 from JB of Dayton, Ohio (Part a)

Dear Mr. McKinsey. I am a Christian who very much enjoys reading your monthly publication, "Biblical Errancy." Several of my friends and I find it refreshing to finally come across an unbeliever, like yourself, who can articulate his unbelief and give reasons for it. Quite frankly, we are tired of the same dry arguments that most lazy nonbelievers throw at us. I say lazy

because they will not read the Bible for themselves, but instead rely on someone else to provide reasons for their unbelief and to find biblical "contradictions" for them.

Recently, I have encountered several nonbelievers who struggle to make their point, hoping that there are justifiable reasons for their unbelief. Your paper has finally given their spineless unbelief a backbone. One clear example is Letter #472 in which writer EB (of Wayne, Michigan) announced that your publication had made him a "completed" atheist. Yes, Mr. McKinsey you have succeeded in giving nonbelievers that which they have so desperately needed.

However, before you get the wrong idea, let me emphatically state that I do not hate you. In fact, I personally look forward to your paper and have often used it in my Sunday School classes. I utilize "Biblical Errancy" by reading to my class one of the "contradictions" you raise and then employ them to respond to your objection. A great deal of interest is always generated. The class appreciates the opportunity to think and reason about the many issues raised in "Biblical Errancy." Your articles allow them to see that analytical people do exist, and they see things differently than Christians. Bible believers need to do their "homework" and be prepared to reason with people who reject the Christian faith. We should never be afraid of tough questions. We should face them and face them fearlessly and honestly.

Hence, I find your paper extremely helpful. I am able to study your objections, formulate answers, and be prepared to respond to your "missionaries." Several of whom continue to fail miserably in presenting the freethinker's message. I continue to observe that many of your readers cling to you for their answers. After all why should nonbelievers invest time in reading a useless book?

Editor's Response to Letter #496 (Part a)

Dear JB. Although your bouquets are most appreciated and it is nice to know that there are Christians open-minded enough to read material of another conviction, your brickbats merit a response. First, like some who have gone before, your attempt to drive a wedge between BE and its readers is doomed to failure. Subscribers to this publication are among some the most intelligent and analytical individuals you will ever encounter and I know from experience that many don't cling to much of anything ideologically. As far as freethinkers being too lazy to read the Bible, even critically, unfortunately I would agree with you, although that is far less true of BE's readers than those of other materials. Second, I don't hate you either, JB, although I most assuredly feel sorry for anyone who has succumbed to a book, a philosophy, that provides more tease than truth, more deceit than deliverance. Third, you say that you find BE helpful and are able to formulate answers to our queries. But, you are yet to submit one to this publication. Is that because you are still cogitating or is it because you are not sure they will withstand scrutiny? Fourth, you say that our missionaries fail to present our message adequately. Well, then, as a seeker of truth you should be more than willing to have me visit your Sunday School classes and try my hand or have several freeflowing debates on the Bible's validity? Let me know who these incompetent missionaries are. I could even contact them and yourself, and see if we could arrange something more suitable. Perhaps they would like an opportunity to redeem themselves in your eyes. Since the postmark on your letter says Dayton, Ohio, I could drive down rather easily. Although you signed your letter, you did not provide any address or telephone number. Why not? Why do you seek so much anonymity? Is there something you fear or do you have something to hide? Incidentally, I assume in the interest of fairness that you don't hesitate to focus on the strongest arguments presented in BE. After all you wouldn't want to be like most apologists who love to take the only weak argument out of 100 and build their entire case around it while ignoring the other 99. That is unquestionably one of the most common tricks in all of propaganda. Indoctrinators love to focus on something that is very much the exception,

overemphasize its importance, and ignore all cases that follow the rule. It is used in politics everyday, especially via testimonies, stories, pictures, statistics and accounts with political implications.

Letter #496 Continues (Part b)

Along this line of thought, the approach adopted by Madalyn Murray O'Hair seems to be more consistent with freethought. She states, in essence, that it is best to throw the Bible in the trash. She simply does not want her constituency to be dragged to a book that will thwart their atheistic agenda. And this is for good reason. Recall what happened to her son, Bill, when he read the Bible. Would you care to give your opinion as to what happened to him?

Editor's Response to Letter #496 (Part b)

You certainly would like for us to adopt the policy you just enunciated wouldn't you. Practically speaking, all that would mean, after all the rhetoric and pejoratives were cleared away, is that freethinkers would refrain from all criticisms of the Bible and give its proponents free reign. It certainly is not consistent with freethought as was shown in the exchange which occurred between O'Hair and myself in the 16th Issue of BE years ago. I have said it many times before and I will say it again and again. PEOPLE ARE NOT GOING TO COME TO WHAT WE HAVE UNTIL THEY ARE FIRST CONVINCED THAT WHAT THEY HAVE IS ERRONEOUS. Why would people listen to freethinkers when they are already convinced they have the truth. We have nothing to offer as long as they mistakenly believe they are wallowing in veracity. First you must show them the massive error of their ways before they will begin to realize that they have embarked on a journey to nowhere and will be open to alternatives. And that takes time, effort, study, and money. Unfortunately, there is some truth in your broad criticism of freethinkers in general. We, too, have encountered a sizable amount of laziness, indifference, and apathy and that is why we have so often criticized the "throwing rocks at a distance" approach. Far too many freethinkers have never realized that having the truth by no means assures victory. Money and numbers can overcome reality almost indefinitely. Give propagandists enough money and diligent workers and they can prove anything is true to large numbers of people no matter how absurd. After all, if people will believe that individuals can rise from the dead, sticks can turn into serpents, donkey's can talk, women can turn into pillars of salt and the sun can stop moving, what could possibly be beyond the realm of feasibility? People will believe anything as long as it is dressed up in rationalizations, obfuscations, and justifications. Given enough resources, there is nothing so preposterous that a sizable body of people can't be convinced of its validity.

Letter #496 Continues (Part c)

By now you may be wondering how I can read your publication and not throw my Bible into the abyss of the inane? Well, quite frankly, I have not as yet found any compelling reason to. Upon hearing my statement, you may be inclined to accuse me of a faith devoid of reality and desperately wanting to believe old superstitions. Yet, while I am sure that this reasoning may be applied to some Christians, it can not be applied to all.

Editor's Response to Letter #496 (Part c)

If you have read all 113 issues of BE, which I doubt JB, and haven't found any compelling reason to abandon the Bible, then you have not only corroborated the importance of early indoctrination, if not brainwashing, but exposed a desperate need for something to cling to despite all information, logic, evidence and common sense to the contrary. You don't believe the

Bible because of the evidence; you believe it despite the evidence. Your willingness to abandon reason in favor of faith shows vividly why religion in general and the Bible in particular are inimical to man's welfare and no amount of intellectualizing can prove otherwise. Your lot in life is so distasteful that you desperately cling to that which is most alluring, consoling, and comforting out of a personal feeling of inadequacy, regardless of what reality says to the contrary.

And finally, I can't help but wonder how you obtain BE at all since you are not on our mailing list. Don't you feel an obligation to pay for what you receive or do you feel that freeloading is a natural and understandable Christian trait. Or perhaps you are subscribing under another name?

Letter #496 Continues (Part d)

Similarly, I suppose you could be painted with the same broad brush. Rationalizing is a two way street. Nonbelievers have just as much to gain from their unbelief as they say Christians do from their belief. Our indictment could be summarized: "Nonbelievers do not want to believe, therefore they refuse to bend their knee to the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus disallowing any possible way of reconciling difficult passages of Scripture. For unbelievers there is no path around the way they misinterpret the Scriptures." We love it when someone says to us, "Here is a problem that no Christian can answer." It gives us the opportunity to show that the issues you bring up in your newsletter can, in fact, be answered.

Editor's Response to Letter #496 (Part d)

A cardinal mistake made by all religious people such as yourself, JB, is that you start with your own desires and then project them on to reality. You want salvation; you want a savior, you want a better "next world;" you want a book with all the answers, so you make reality conform to your wishes. Rational, scientific people operate in reverse. They go where the evidence leads, although it may be uncomfortable at times, and then formulate their conclusions. You say that "nonbelievers do not want to believe" which has nothing to do with reality. I have no problem with believing anything, but first I look at all relevant data which you all but ignore. Does the evidence bear out what the Bible says about Jesus and is it in accord with what we know about everyday life? Do people rise from the dead? Do sticks turn into snakes? Of course not. And above all, would somebody be utterly devoid of logic if they ignored the Law of Contradiction? Would they have taken leave of their senses? Of course! Can two contradictory statements both be true simultaneously and in the same sense. Definitely not! And, yet, you are asking us to accept contradictory comments when you ask us to look upon the Bible as the infallible, inerrant word of a perfect being. We debated this very issue with James White of Alpha and Omega Ministries several issues ago. The problem lies not with our ego but your credo. (TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT MONTH)

Letter #497 from JF of Decatur, Illinois

Hello Dennis. A point made in your April Commentary requires a correction. Your usage of Jehovah implies that it is synonymous with YAHWEH as the biblical name of god. In actuality the name JEHOVAH was unknown in antiquity. Ancient Hebrews would not speak the name of god out of fear and reverence, resulting in the placement of the word "ADONAI" (Lord) into the texts to be read wherever "YHVH" appeared. Fourteenth century Christian translators, unaware of the Hebrew custom, somehow derived "JEHOVAH" from a combination of "ADONAI" and "YHVH." Scholars have long known that "JEHOVAH" is an incorrect rendering, which is interesting when one considers the implications for the Jehovah's Witnesses sect.

Regarding Jesus' (mis) use of O.T verses? Scholars have found that the knowledge of the OT which the NT attributes to Jesus more often than not is from the Greek Septuagint and not the Hebrew scriptures. This gets interesting when you have a Jewish Jesus arguing against other Jews with a Greek mistranslation of the Jewish scriptures. A prime example of this is in Mark 7:1-8, where Jesus argued against the Pharisees by quoting Isaiah 29:13 from the Greek. This translation is at odds with the Hebrew, which would not have served Jesus' argument.... Keep up the good work!

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #498 from KB of Los Angeles, California

Dear Dennis.... Inerrantists claim that the Bible is one self-consistent whole, while in reality it is a bunch of inconsistent holes. Your impatience with these apologists shows more and more in BE. Again I advise you to use their arguments only as examples and not address them back directly. I tried to get on a local talk show to talk about this stuff, but to no avail.

Letter #499 from RS of Sherman Oaks, California

Dear Dennis.... I couldn't help but be impressed by the letter of the Canadian gentleman you published in #112. It seems to me that he epitomizes the thrust of B.E. and is an inspiration to free thinkers everywhere. His is a model for free thinkers everywhere. His is a model well worth aspiring to and I deem it necessary for us all to lean in the direction of taking it to the Christians. It seems to me that once we are armed with the tools of B.E., the fallacy of the Christian position becomes apparent. Thanks to B.E. I am now at a place where I feel ready to challenge any Christian on their doctrine, and I hope the opportunity comes my way. As a method of preparation I would highly recommend to others your two taped speeches to the Humanists, as well as the commentaries in issues 58-60.

Editor's Response to Letter #499

Dear RS. You might be interested in knowing that no letter in the history of this publication ever generated as many phone calls, comments, and letters to the editor as the last letter in the April 1992 Issue (#488) from RM of Red Deer, Canada. The response was exceptional and clearly shows that RM struck a nerve by going to the very heart of what this publication is all about and what many freethinkers are either doing, planning to do, or would like to do. I am glad I encouraged him to write a letter to us after his debate with some Christians in a college auditorium; otherwise, his activities would have never been known by our readership. Apparently he has been an inspiration for many people who would like to engage Christians in their own territory.

Letter #500 from RN of Moscow, Idaho

Dear Dennis. Thank you for the latest issue of BE. I can't tell you how absolutely delighted I was to read the letter from RM of Red Deer, Alta. I was born and raised in the East Kootenay region, in the upper Columbia Valley, in British Columbia, just over the mountains from Alberta. So I know all about Canada's Bible Belt....

Letter #501 from MJ of Wenatchee, Washington

Dear Mr. McKinsey.... I think you are doing an excellent job. Please continue with this valuable work.

NOTE: A BE subscriber whom others can contact is: Mark Johnson, P.O. Box 1315, Wenatchee, Washington 98807

Issue No. 115

July 1992

In recent months a couple of letters expressing dismay that we would attribute anything less than perfect behavior to the biblical god were sent to this office. For years we have assumed this issue was laid to rest by pages 5 and 6 in the 3rd Issue. But apparently many biblicists remain either unaware of, or unconvinced by, what appeared long ago. Because our prior discussion was contained within a response to a letter and probably should have appeared in a Commentary, and because the earlier approach provided citations rather than quotations, and because the amount of relevant data has expanded since 1983, we are going to provide a much more comprehensive and detailed analysis of God's deeds in the Bible. This supposedly perfect being committed all of the following acts in "Holy" Scripture and textual evidence will be provided for corroboration.

GOD

(Part 1)

HE CREATES EVIL: "I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things" (Isa. 45:7). "Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and evil come?" (Lam. 3:38). "...that I may repent of the evil, which I purpose to do unto them because of the evil of their doings" (Jer. 26:3). "...all the evil which I purpose to do unto them; that they may return every man from his evil way; that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin" (Jer. 36:3). "I gave them also statutes that were not good, and judgments whereby they should not live. And I polluted them in their own gifts...." (Ezek. 20:25-26). "For thus saith the Lord; as I have brought all this great evil upon this people, so will I bring upon them all the good that I have promised them" (Jer. 32:42). "...shall there be evil in a city, and the Lord hath not done it?" (Amos 3:6). See also: Jer. 11:11, 14:16, 18:11, 19:3, 19:15, 23:12, 26:13, 26:19, 35:17, 36:31, 40:2, 42:10, 42:17, 44:2, 45:5, 49:37, 51:64, Ezek. 6:10, Micah 2:3, 1 Kings 21:29, 2 Chron. 34:24, and 2 Chron. 34:28

EVIL COMES FROM THE LORD: "it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took an harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him" (1 Sam. 16:23). "it came to pass on the morrow, that the evil spirit from God came upon Saul...." (1 Sam. 18:10). "the evil spirit from the Lord was upon Saul...." (1 Sam. 19:9). "Saul's servants said unto him, Behold now, an evil spirit from God troubles thee" (1 Sam. 16:15). "the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord troubles him" (1 Sam. 16:14). "...evil came down from the Lord unto the gate of Jerusalem" (Micah 1:12). "Thus saith the Lord, Behold I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbor, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun. For thou did it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun" (2 Sam. 12:11-12). "God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem...." (Judges 9:23). See also: 1 Kings 14:10, 2 Kings 21:12, and Isa. 31:2.

HE DECEIVES: "O Lord, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived...." (Jer. 20:7). "if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the Lord have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel" (Ezek. 14:9). "Ah, Lord God! Surely thou hast greatly deceived this people and Jerusalem,

saying, Ye shall have peace; whereas the sword reaches unto the soul" (Jer. 4:10). "...God sends upon them a strong delusion, to make them believe what is false, so that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Thess. 2:9-12). See also: 2 Chron. 18:18-22, 1 Kings 22:20-23 and Jer. 15:18.

HE TELLS PEOPLE TO LIE: "...and thou (Moses--Ed.) shalt come, thou and the elders of Israel, unto the king of Egypt, and you shall say unto him, The Lord God of the Hebrews hath met with us: and now let us go, we beseech thee, three days journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God" (Ex. 3:18) and "afterward Moses and Aaron went in, and told Pharaoh, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Let my people go, that they may hold a feast unto me in the wilderness." God is telling Moses to lie because the real reason is to escape.

"Samuel said, How can I go? if Saul hear it, he will kill me. And the Lord said, Take a heifer with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the Lord" (1 Sam. 16:2). The Lord told Samuel to lie also, since he is actually going out to meet a son of Jesse to anoint him king. Yet, we are told in Prov. 12:22 that, "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord."

HE LIES: Joshua 7:1 says, "The people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things; for Achan...took some of the devoted things; and the anger of the Lord burned against the people of Israel" and God responds by saying in the 11th verse, "Israel has sinned, and they have also transgressed my covenant...." Yet, God did not tell the truth. Only Achan sinned, not all Israel, and Achan admits as much in the 20th verse by saying, "Indeed I have sinned against the Lord God of Israel...."

"He (David--Ed.) shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever" (2 Sam. 7:13) and to David God says, "thine house and thy kingdom shall be established forever: thy throne shall be established for ever" (2 Sam. 7:16). God's prophecy failed. He didn't tell the truth. The Davidic line ended with Zedekiah and there was no Davidic king for 450 years when the Maccabeans established a dynasty, the first king being Aristobulus. Since the end of the Maccabean dynasty there has never been a king of the Jews. Second Kings 24:14 proves as much by saying, "He carried away all Jerusalem, and all the princes, and all the mighty men of valour, even ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and smiths. None remained, save the poorest sort of the people of the land."

If viewed together the following verses also show God engaged in prevarication. "...of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eat thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17), "God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die" (Gen. 3:3), "the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die" (Gen. 3:4), and "all the days that Adam lived were 930 years and he died" (Gen. 5:5). God said Adam and Eve would die on the day they ate of the tree and the devil said they would not. They ate of it and Adam lived to be 930 years old. In other words, God lied and the devil told the truth. Yet, according to Titus 1:2 "God never lies."

And finally, in Gen. 3:14 God said to the serpent, "...upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life...." Serpents do not now and never have eaten dust. If the serpent represents the Devil, he does not eat dust either; so, in either case God did not tell the truth.

HE REWARDS LIARS: Ex. 1:15-20 says, "The king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, whose names were Shiphrah and Puah, 'When you help the Hebrew women in childbirth and observe them on the delivery stool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, let her live.' The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live. Then the king of Egypt summoned the midwives and asked them, 'Why have

you done this? Why have you let the boys live?' The midwives answered Pharaoh, 'Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive.' So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous." The midwives lied and God rewarded them by being kind to them.

Joshua 2:3-6 says, "So the king of Jericho sent this message to Rahab, 'Bring out the men who came to you and entered your house, because they have come to spy out the whole land.' But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. She said, 'Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they had come from. At dusk, when it was time to close the city gate, the men left. I don't know which way they went. Go after them quickly. You may catch up with them.'" (But she had taken them up to the roof and hidden them under the stalks of flax she had laid out on the roof.) Rahab lied about where the men were and yet James 2:25 says, "...was not Rahab the prostitute considered righteous for what she did when she gave lodging to the spies and sent them off in a different direction?"

And 2 Kings 10:18-21 says, "Jehu brought all the people together and said to them, 'Ahab served Baal a little; Jehu will serve him much. Now summon all the prophets of Baal, all his ministers and all his priests. See that no one is missing, because I am going to hold a great sacrifice for Baal. Anyone who fails to come will no longer live. But Jehu was acting deceptively in order to destroy the ministers of Baal.... all the ministers of Baal came; not one stayed away. They crowded into the temple of Baal until it was full from one end to the other.'" And as verses 25 to 30 show Jehu ordered his guards to go in and kill all those who worshipped Baal. After the bloodshed and killing had concluded the Lord said to Jehu in verse 30, "Because you have done well in accomplishing what is right in my eyes and have done to the house of Ahab all I had in mind to do, your descendants will sit on the throne of Israel to the 4th generation." How is that for a God of mercy! (TO BE CONTINUED)

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #496 from an Anonymous Dayton Observer Continues from Last Month (Part e)

For some time my colleagues and I entertained the possibility of engaging you in an open debate through your publication. However, it has become evident that he who controls the format, and has the last word, looks the best. Since you are the editor and are able to select and edit what appears in your paper, you will always have the betterment of our exchange.

Editor's Response to Letter #496 (Part e)

What a cop out! If you don't like the way you appear in an exchange, then write another letter telling why. I can provide an unqualified guarantee to you and all your associates that I will give you a far more open and fair hearing in this publication than I would ever be accorded in any Christian publication. I know that for a fact. I have seen Christian censorship in action and believe me it is both thorough and ugly. Anyone who doubts this has never tried to oppose Christianity in general and the Bible in particular. They need to leave their ivory towers and enter the trenches to find out what the world is really like. When Christians don't like your message, they seek to make sure it is either distorted on future occasions or no future occasions occur. I have come to the conclusion that if you really want to be heard on any regular basis, then you had better get your own station or your own program. Guest appearances and calling in to register your views on various programs is little more than anemic.

Letter #496 Continues (Part f)

There is no telling how much material you have carefully eliminated from the correspondence that appears in the editions of your publication in order to suppress from your readership any validity of the Christian faith.

For example, I have in my possession a copy of a letter that was sent to you several months ago. This correspondence appeared in your newsletter; however, it was edited nearly beyond all recognition to the original. Thus your bias prohibited you from utilizing the letter in its entirety. Had you not meticulously dismembered the correspondence, several statements would have presented the fact that there are Christians who are open minded and intelligent. The letter was not lengthy, so it cannot be reasoned that it had to be abbreviated because of space requirements.

If you had utilized this technique once, there is no way of telling just how many other times material that did not suit your objections has been edited from the published copies of "Biblical Errancy." Since you publish the names and addresses of some of your readers, I am considering forwarding copies of the original letter and the "Biblical Errancy" abridged version. I feel in all honesty they have the right to know that they are only getting part of the exchange.

Editor's Response to Letter #496 (Part f)

There is no telling how much I edited, JB, because there is not much to tell. A conservative estimate would be that over 90% of the letters that have been sent to BE over the years have been published. Those that were not put in were either poorly written, incoherent, not germane, trivial, personal, excluded by request, too abstract, too voluminous, or too repetitious. None were kept out because their arguments were too effective, if that is what you mean to imply. In fact, on a couple of occasions I have become worried because not enough letters were arriving to provide sufficient material for the Dialogue and Debate section.

As far as your censored letter is concerned, I not only challenge but dare you to produce it. You have made a direct assault on the integrity of this publication and are obliged to either put up or slither away. Wasn't there a serpent somewhere in history that engaged in the same kind of beguilement? You say, "there is no way of telling how many other times material...has been edited." Do you have evidence that material of a substantive nature has been edited? If so, let's see it. By threatening to send letters to the subscribers of BE, you are not only revealing the lengths to which you will go to divide BE from its readers but the unscrupulous nature of your Christian strategy and philosophy. With millions of Christians exhibiting behavior similar to your own, no wonder they have an overwhelming psychological need for confession and repentance. Their conscience must be driving them up a wall.

Letter #496 Continues (Part g)

In closing, it continues to be my observation that much of your readership is lazy; merely looking for easy questions to stump the believer. Further, most are not interested in seeing Christians set free from their "superstitious mind sets." Their only desire is to humiliate them by bashing them over the head with apparent Bible "contradictions." Nonetheless, they are no match for anyone who diligently studies the Bible and knows its content. Yes, I admit you could ask me more questions than I could answer. But that would only prove the adage that, "A fool can ask more questions in three minutes than a wise man can answer in a lifetime." While it is not my desire to address you as a fool, I desire only to make the point that it is easier to ask a question than it is to answer one.

Editor's Response to Letter #496 (Part g)

My goodness! You are something of a mind-reader aren't you. You know the philosophies, the attitudes, and motivation of our readership without having met even a small fraction of our subscribers. Granted, there are freethinkers whose only goal seems to be bashing Christians, but they are not the kind of people who are attracted to BE or concentrate on the Bible's inconsistencies. They generally prefer the "throwing rocks from a distance" approach. You may not have called me a fool but you certainly compared me to one and I'm having some difficulty making a distinction. If there is any group that should not be calling others fools, it is believers in religion in general and the Bible in particular. Afterall, didn't Paul concede in 1 Cor. 4:10 that, "We are fools for Christ's sake." And that is by no means the only denigratory remark one could accurately employ. If I can ask more biblical questions in three minutes than you can answer in a lifetime, that would seem to be pretty good evidence there are no answers. After all, isn't the Bible supposed to be the book with the answers and isn't a lifetime rather long to seek answers from a book that has them readily available? Christian theologians have never been known for taking anywhere near a lifetime to formulate an answer to anything no matter how complex.

Letter #496 Concludes (Part h)

Finally, may I make a suggestion? Consider sending complimentary copies of your newsletter to several of the major apologists of the Christian faith. Challenge them to meet you in a live, face-to-face, no holds barred, debate. You are much too passive. You need to look beyond the minor, localized debates you have had thus far on radio and set goals for major debates with leading apologists. You need to go face-to-face with a well-known defender of the Christian faith. Only when you are able to dwarf clearly and unequivocally the likes of Norman Geisler or Josh McDowell will you be taken seriously by the Christian community.

I hope you will have the courage to print this letter uncut in a future issue of "Biblical Errancy." However, I expect at this point that if it is featured, it will be edited to your advantage. But then again it is your paper, isn't it?

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #496 (Part h)

As you can see you expected wrong, didn't you JB. Was anything edited out of your letter? Why would we abbreviate your letter when we have published much more biting criticisms in the past. Do you think you are somehow superior to all those critics of BE who have gone before? It took very little courage to print your letter, believe me.

As far as debates go, I have said many times that I will go anywhere and debate anyone, providing the financial arrangements are satisfactory. Wealth has never been one of my strong points and the absence of same has been the single greatest obstacle to the growth of our cause. I can assure you that Josh McDowell, Norman Geisler, Gleason Archer, John Ankerberg and many other apologists know BE exists and I am available for engagements. BE is by no means a stranger in their midst. I don't need to send them anything. I debated Dr. Peter Ruckman, Founder of the Pensacola Bible Institute, who knows the Bible as well as anyone you could suggest, Dr. Robert Morey, Executive Director of the Research and Education Foundation, and Dr. H. Wayne House of the Dallas Theological Seminary. Somebody from Pennsylvania took out a subscription to BE for Geisler many years ago, so he is by no means a stranger to BE, and the producer of Ankerberg's show and I have clashed on the telephone and by correspondence on more than one occasion. I can vividly remember him telling me that Robert Ingersoll was full of prunes and it was all I could do to keep from telling him what he, his Book, and his religion were full of. I can assure you that passivity and anonymity are not the problem; censorship and selectivity are.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #502 from MA of Tulsa, Oklahoma

Dear Dennis. I've never found any passage in the bible that condemns abortion. But there is a very interesting story in the book of Numbers where the LORD, himself, causes an abortion to punish a woman for adultery. It is found in NUMBER 5:11 to the end of the chapter. The jealous husband takes his wife to the priest who makes her undergo a trial by ordeal, in which she is forced to drink filthy water. The NEW ENGLISH BIBLE says, "If she has let herself become defiled and has been unfaithful to her husband, then when the priest makes her drink the water that brings out the truth and the water has entered her body, she will suffer a miscarriage or untimely birth, and her name will become an example in adjuration among her kin. But if the woman has not let herself become defiled and is pure, then her innocence is established and she will bear her child."

Letter #503 from RS of Denton, Texas (Part a)

Dear Dennis. Last time I wrote you (2/91), I was happy to tell you that I had founded the Student Atheist Organization at the University of North Texas. I am sorry to say that this organization has since folded. Our officers were graduating and nobody else wanted to take the reigns. I am, however, happy to announce that while our organization existed, we achieved many things.

One of the things we did as a group was sponsor several information tables in the Student Union Building. At these tables, we handed out several pamphlets from BE and FFRF. We also handed out scores of sample issues of BE, sold dozens of buttons and bumper stickers, and answered the many hysterical questions and frenzied accusations with calm, logical answers. The most successful tables we hosted were at a series of freshman orientation welcome nights. There were tables from many different student groups at this event, but mine seemed to be the busiest. Not only were we seen, heard, and debated by almost the entire entering freshman class, we were also on display to many of their parents. I have found that it is very practical to have several versions of the Bible with me when manning such a table. When Christians wish to argue the "holey" Bible, I am very responsive and I use their preferred version. However, when Christians wish to argue from an extra-biblical standing, I can respond equally as well on topics of philosophy, science, and ethics. I tend to let the Christian choose the battleground. I never relinquish control of the discussion; I just let them choose the topic. I have found that when they are beaten on biblical grounds, they retreat to extra-biblical grounds. When they are defeated in this area, they revert once again to the Bible. Once they realize that they have been beaten on all fronts, they tell me that they will pray for me, grab a flyer with my mailing address and phone number, and leave. I usually receive several late-night phone calls after such an event and they all sound pretty much the same: "Jesus loves you and so do I!" followed by an immediate hang-up.

I've always been amazed how much the Bible is purchased and how seldom it is read. I personally have read from cover to cover the KJ and NI versions of the Bible as well as the Book of Mormon, the Koran, the Satanic Bible, and the Witch's Bible Complete. I personally prefer using the NIV Study Bible, so all quotes used in this letter are from this version unless otherwise noted. One thing that almost all Christians will claim when first questioned is that they not only have read their Bible from cover to cover but that they have also studied it in great detail. I have discovered that it is very easy to pull passages out of the Koran, the Book of Mormon, or the Satanic Bible and ask from where the quotations came. 100% of the time, the Christians think that it comes from the Christian Bible if it is a "morally correct" statement. I can also read many passages from the Christian Bible and be told that they are from the Satanic Bible. If the passage

is ethically "good," the Christians are absolutely positive that they have read it in the Christian Bible, but if the passage is "bad," they figure that it came from somewhere else. Christians seem always to be shocked when I show them the source and have them read it for themselves. I then mention that if the passage is so "good" by their standards, why was it not worth mentioning by their god and their bible, the source of all morals? If the passage is so "bad" why weren't they shocked enough to remember it when they read the Bible? I am yet to receive an intelligent answer. Instead, all I get are excuses and admissions of their not having ever read the book.

I also have been writing responses to the many Christian tracts which I have inevitably received. I always try to figure out from which version of the Bible the tract is quoting and to use only this version for my reply. I also make it a point to return a copy of my response to the person gracious enough to have given me the original tract. I try to keep a few copies of each tract response and a few "non-tracts" from BE and FFRF on hand at all times. This allows me to respond immediately upon receiving "The Four Spiritual Laws" for the 23rd time. (TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT MONTH)

Letter #504 from RS of Glendale, Arizona

Dear Mr. McKinsey.... My compliments regarding your recent rebuttals to James White. You did such a good job of exposing the error and irrationality of his positions that I almost felt sorry for him. But after some time analyzing his methods and positions, both in your newsletter and more extensively in what he has written on BBSs in the Phoenix area, I have gradually and reluctantly concluded that he doesn't really believe the Bible to be inerrant.

For instance, in a debate showing that the writer of Lev. 11:5-6 erred by having Yahweh incorrectly identify hares and rock badgers as cud-chewers, Mr. White tried his familiar evasion tactics: like claiming that the particular chewing motions of these animals might have led observers to believe that they were cud-chewers--as if that leaves Yahweh correct for so identifying them. Eventually, after much persistent debate, he was reduced to a defense of claiming that while it is true that these animals are not cud-chewers, it is unreasonable to expect this ancient document to have a greater degree of technical specificity than what would be expected of other documents of that era--though other documents are not claiming to be divinely-inspired by the inerrant being that purportedly created these animals. Then he reverted to claiming inerrancy while also refusing to give his apparently unique definition for that term. So, because of this incident and others, I have come to believe that though he likely once did believe the Bible to be inerrant, he now knows it is not. For one reason or another--for instance, his substantial personal investment of schooling in theology--he continues to argue for the position of inerrancy.... Keep up the good work!

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GOD

(Part 2)

HE ORDERS MEN TO BECOME DRUNKEN: "Then tell them, 'This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says: Drink, get drunk and vomit, and fall to rise no more because of the sword I will send among you' (Jer. 25:27).

HE REWARDS THE FOOL AND THE TRANSGRESSOR: "The great God that formed all things both rewards the fool, and rewards the transgressors" (Prov. 26:10).

HE DELIVERS A MAN (JOB) INTO SATAN'S HANDS: "The Lord said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life" (Job 2:6).

HE MINGLES A PERVERSE SPIRIT: "The Lord has mingled a perverse spirit in the midst thereof; and they have caused Egypt to err in every work thereof..." (Isa. 19:14).

HE IS NOT OMNIPOTENT OR ALL POWERFUL: "the Lord was with Judah; And he drove out the inhabitants of the mountains; but could not drive out the inhabitants of the valley, because they had chariots of iron" (Judges 1:19).

HE CAUSES INDECENCY: God orders that the king of Assyria is to "lead away the Egyptian prisoners, and the Ethiopian captives, young and old, naked and barefoot, even with their buttocks uncovered, to the shame of Egypt" (Isaiah 20:4).

HE SPREADS DUNG ON FACES: "Behold I will corrupt your seed, and spread dung upon your faces, even the dung of your solemn feasts...." (Mal. 2:3).

HE ORDERS STEALING: "...and ye shall spoil the Egyptians" (Ex. 3:22). "...and they shall spoil those that spoiled them, and rob those that robbed them, saith the Lord God" (Ezek. 39:10). "As for the women, the children, the livestock and everything else in the city, you may take these as plunder for yourselves. And you may use the plunder the Lord your God gives you from your enemies" (Deut. 20:14).

HE MADE FALSE AND UNFULFILLED PROPHECIES: In Jonah 3:4 God said, "yet 40 days and Nineveh shall be overthrown." But the 10th verse says, "God saw their works, that they turned from their evil ways; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not." In other words, He who knows the future changed his mind, repented, and Nineveh was not overthrown. His prophecy failed.

In Gen. 15:13 God said to Abraham, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they shall be enslaved and mistreated 400 years." Acts 7:6 says the same. But Ex. 12:40 says, "Now the sojourning of the children of Israel, who dwelt in Egypt, was 430 years." God's prophecy failed by 30 years.

Another deific prophecy is found in Gen. 15:16 which says, "...in the 4th generation they (Abraham's descendants--Ed.) shall come here again...." God told Abraham that his descendants would return in the 4th generation. Yet, if Abraham is included, it actually occurred during the 6th generation. The generations were: Abraham, Issac, Levi (Ex. 1:2), Kohath (Ex. 6:16), Amram (Ex. 6:18), and Moses (Ex. 6:20).

In Gen. 17:3, 8 and Ex. 32:13 God told Abraham that he would give to him and his descendants all of Canaan for an eternal possession. But Acts 7:5 says, "He gave him (Abraham--Ed.) no inheritance here, not even a foot of ground. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child" and Heb. 11:13 says, "All these people...did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance." The Bible itself admits that God's promise to Abraham failed.

In Gen. 35:10 God said to Jacob, "thy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name: and he called his name Israel." Yet, 11 chapters later Gen. 46:2 says, "God spoke to Israel in the visions of the night, and said, Jacob, Jacob. And he said, Here am I."

Lastly, 1 Sam. 23:12 says, "David asked, 'Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me and my men to Saul?' And the Lord said, 'They will.'" This prophecy never occurred, because the opposite happened. Saul was delivered into David's hands, not once but twice.

HE CHANGES HIS MIND: "The Lord said: I have forgiven them at your request...." (Num. 14:20). "God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not" (Jonah 3:10). "God said to Balaam, 'Do not go with them. You must not put a curse on those people, because they are blessed.'.... That night God came to Balaam and said, 'Since these men have come to summon you, go with them, but do only what I tell you.' Balaam got up in the morning, saddled his donkey and went with the princes of Moab. But God was very angry when he went, and the angel of the Lord stood in the road to oppose him...." (Num. 22:20-22). God told Balaam not to go, then changed his mind and told him to go and punished him when he did. Talk about indecision!

Finally, in 2 Kings 20:1 Isaiah came to the sick Hezekiah and told him he would die and not recover according to God's word. But according to the 4th and 5th verses God told Isaiah to go back and tell Hezekiah that because God had heard his prayer and seen his tears he would be healed and live 15 more years. Again, God changed his mind.

HE CAUSES ADULTERY: "This is what the Lord says: 'Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity upon you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel'" (2 Sam. 12:11-12).

HE ORDERS THE TAKING OF A HARLOT: "...the Lord said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from the Lord" (Hosea 1:2).

HE ORDERS A MAN TO PURCHASE HIS WIFE: "The Lord said to me, 'Go show your love to your wife again, though she is loved by another and is an adultress. Love her as the Lord loves the Israelites, though they turn to other gods.... So I brought her for 15 shekels of silver and about a homer and a half of barley. Then I told her, 'You are to live with me many days....'" (Hosea 3:1-3).

HE KILLS REPEATEDLY: "there came out a fire from the Lord, and consumed the 250 men that offered incense" (Num. 16:35). "the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people; and much people of Israel died" (Num. 21:6). "See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound and I heal...." (Deut. 32:39). "The Lord smote the men of Beth-shemesh, because they had looked into the ark of the Lord, even he smote of the people 50,070 men: and the people lamented, because the Lord had smitten many of the people with a great slaughter" (1 Sam. 6:19). "The Lord kills, and makes alive: he brings down to the grave, and brings up" (1 Sam. 2:6). "the hand of the Lord was heavy upon them of Ashdod, and he destroyed them, and smote them...." (1 Sam. 5:6). "it came to pass about 10 days after, that the Lord smote Nabal, that he died" (1 Sam. 25:38). "Who smote great nations and slew mighty kings...." (Psalms 135:10). "For by fire and by his sword will the Lord plead with all flesh: and the slain of the Lord shall be many" (Isaiah 66:16). "I will dash them one against another, even the father and the sons together, saith the Lord: I will not pity, nor spare, nor have

mercy, but destroy them" (Jer. 13:14). "I have sent among you the pestilence after the manner of Egypt: your young men have I slain with the sword...." (Amos 4:10). "For our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29). Also note: Gen. 38:7,10, Ex. 22:23-24, Num. 11:1, Deut. 32:41-42, Joshua 10:10-11, 1 Sam. 5:9, Psalms 136:17-18, Hosea 9:16, Amos 2:3, Ex. 4:24, 2 Sam. 6:6-7, and 2 Kings 5:7.

HE ORDERS KILLING: "ye shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. And five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall put 10,000 to flight: and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword" (Lev. 26:7-8). "the Lord said to Moses, Take all the heads of the people, and hang them up before the Lord against the sun, that the fierce anger of the Lord may be turned away from Israel. And Moses said to the judges of Israel. Slay every one his men that were joined to Baal" (Num. 25:4-5). "Vex the Midianites and smite them" (Num. 25:17). "But of the cities of these people, which the Lord thy God doth give thee for an inheritance, thou shalt save alive nothing that breathes. But thou shalt utterly destroy them...as the Lord thy God has commanded thee" (Deut. 20:16-17). "So Joshua smote all the country of the hills...he left none remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the Lord God of Israel commanded" (Joshua 10:40). "As I listened, god said to the others, 'Follow him through the city and kill, without showing pity or compassion. Slaughter old men, young men and maidens, women and children....'" (Ezek. 9:5-6). "And the Lord sent you on a mission, saying 'Go and completely destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites; make war on them until you have wiped them out.'" (1 Sam. 15:18). "Attack the land of Merathaim and those who live in Pekod. Pursue, kill and completely destroy them' declares the Lord. Do everything I have commanded you" (Jer. 50:21). "Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys" (1 Sam. 15:3). Also note: Ex. 32:27-28, Num. 21:34-35, 31:7-8, 35:19-21, and Jer. 48:10. (TO BE CONTINUED)

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #505 from BCB of Cambridge, Mass.

Dear Dennis. On your tape (PART 1): an Atlanta radio show with host Mike Malloy; you accused Yahweh of being unjust: a murderer, a rapist, a racist, a pornographer and a hypocrite (The numerous misspellings in this letter will not be corrected--Ed.). When you were asked for proof; you cited: DT. 21:2, 2K(3K in my Bible) 18:27, PR. 5:19, EZ. 23:21, Cant. 5:4. None of these passages prove your point. DT. 21:2 expiates a secret murder through a ritual sacrifice of a skate goat. This is similar to an out of court settlement. Where both plaintiff and defendant decide its best not to pursue their grievance any further. Isn't this wise and just? 3K.18:27,40 deals with the weeding out of treacherous false prophets and their execution.... The Jewish state during the time of Elias was a theocracy: ruled by Yahweh. False prophets and religions were a threat to Yahweh's government....The Canticles of Canticles is about the "birds and the bees" between a husband and wife. Are you ashamed of your sexuality? Could you send me the chapter and verse where Yahweh orders a murder, a rape or mass murder, mass rape?....

Editor's Response to Letter #505

Dear BCB. You are referring to a radio program in which I participated that occurred around 1987. If my memory serves me correctly, you have erred in several important respects. First, I never used the word "Yahweh" once and have always used the word God. Second, I never called the biblical god a rapist or a racist; so all your mass rape nonsense is just that, nonsense. Third, your book has 3Kings instead of 2Kings probably because you are using a Catholic version of the Bible. Christians can't even agree on the correct version to use. Canticles is the word used by

Roman Catholics in reference to the Song of Solomon. Fourth, Canticles has more to do with bawdy and befouled than the birds and the bees. Fifth, where did you get the idea that Canticles was referring to activities occurring between a husband and wife? Would you care to cite chapter and verse to show that a marriage relationship existed. Sixth, I fail to see how your explanations adequately explain the verses I cited on the radio program. And lastly, if you seek chapter and verse to support my exposure on the radio and elsewhere of God's horrific behavior, I strongly suggest you read the monthly Commentaries on GOD that will appear in BE starting with the June 1992 issue. Proving God ordered people to kill others, for example, is quite easy. I am surprised you would even question the veracity of that assertion, unless, of course, you are far less acquainted with the Bible than you would like to admit. I'll provide you with more proof texts than you ever imagined to demonstrate that the biblical god exhibits numerous traits and characteristics that are little short of demonic. Is it any wonder that Ingersoll said on page 237 of Volume 2 in his Works, "It is impossible for me to conceive of a character more utterly detestable than that of the Hebrew god."

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #503 from RS of Denton, Texas, Concludes from Last Month (Part b)

I have recently been re-reading several of my back-issues of BE as well as listening to my BE tapes and I have a few comments, suggestions, and statements of constructive criticism.

I believe it was on tape #27 that talk show host David Gold asked you and Dr. House to give your backgrounds in Greek and Hebrew. You have stated before why you do not feel that knowing these languages is of any importance, but you did not explain this to Mr. Gold and to Dr. House at this time. I agree with your reason that knowledge of Greek and Hebrew is not important when discussing the alleged inerrancy of the Bible. If the scholars who translated the Bible use "incorrect" terms, why is the Bible not re-translated using the "correct" words? One example which the apologists try to use against you is the true meaning of the Hebrew term for "perfect" when discussing Job and Noah. You have stated that, being perfect, Job and Noah could not have sinned thereby contradicting Rom. 3:23 which says that "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." Dr. House explains that the Hebrew term for perfect really means mature. What you failed to state is that if this is true, why isn't the word mature used in the Bible? I feel that this would have greatly strengthened your argument. Next, you mention that if Noah was not perfect and actually had sinned, why was he and his family allowed on the ark? Dr. House stated that God had grace on Noah and his family. This seems to be stating that God shows favoritism. However, according to Romans 2:11 and Acts 10:34, "God does not show favoritism." This seems to be another contradiction.

Another comment I have about part of your tapes has to do with your statements on John 14:6 which states that JC is the "way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." I agree with you that this means that everyone must have accepted JC in order to be saved; there are no exceptions. Apologists tend to use Romans 2:14-15 as an exception to John 14's requirement of needing JC. During my listening to four of your tapes (#8, 27, 28, and 29), I have not heard you mention that the passage in Romans does not claim to constrain or modify the JC requirement; it just contradicts the JC requirement. You seem to come right up to the verge of saying it, but I have not heard you actually come out and say it pointblank. It seems to me that the apologists are doing nothing but pointing out contradictions within their own book. When they are foolish enough to do this, you should point it out.

My next topic is the original manuscripts. The apologists are always claiming that any contradictions in today's copies are not in the non-existent original manuscripts. You do an

excellent job of pointing out their fallacies on this point, but I would like to point out a couple of additional problems with their arguments. First of all, it would seem that God would want to keep all copies of the original manuscripts accurate so that the obedient Christians would have the correct set of guidelines to follow. Also, it seems that this argument is defeating the apologists' purpose by pointing out that the current Bible is not an independently reliable source. They are trying to demonstrate that the original manuscripts are the only truly reliable word of God, but that the current copies are only reliable in certain portions which are chosen by the apologists.

In the Review section of the BE #105, you dealt with Brooks and Geisler's rationalization of the OT slaughters. It seems to me that all Geisler and Brooks are saying is that might makes right. Evidently, the only reason God is allowed to do the terrible things mentioned throughout the Bible is because there is nobody more powerful to tell him "NO!" Geisler and Brooks mention that if our "thinking were carried out constantly, would one have to repudiate the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and the flood in Noah's time too?" While I do not feel that "repudiate" is the correct term, I do agree that the destruction mentioned would fall under the same heading of egotistic, power-hungry slaughter by an unethical, unloving, merciless God.

Returning to my tapes, I have noticed that there are many instances where the host or the guest apologist mention that your example of a biblical error is not a contradiction in the truest sense of the word. I feel that this would be a good point to mention once again that you do not deal strictly in contradictions but in other errors and problems within the Bible as well.

I realize that many of the points I have brought up are nitpicky, but nitpicking is one of the specialties of apologists. I also realize that this letter is very long and I do not expect that it will be printed in whole. I would be interested to know if you see any problems in my above statements. I would like to encourage you to keep up the good work....

Editor's Response to Letter #503

Dear RS. Recommendations are always welcome and yours are duly noted. I would suggest, however, that you try them out on some biblicists and let me know what happens. No theory is worth its salt until it has been tested in the real world. On one point you are completely correct. BE deals with every problem relevant to the Bible's validity and that includes much more than a mere listing of contradictions. Our focus is much broader.

Letter #506 from RS of Sherman Oaks, California

Dear Dennis. As a student of Biblical Errancy, I have researched other writings in the field of Biblical criticism.... It may be interesting to note that the Christian Doctrine generated incredulity from the very start of its miserable career. I have included some of the contradictions of the Bible that were cited by Porphyry in the 3rd Century A.D., just as the Christian Cult was beginning to take root. Even then, men of learning and perception could sense the veiled fraud that was inherent in Christianity. Porphyry, who had collected ammunition from other thinkers of his time, had communicated many of these contradictions to the likes of Jerome and Augustine. He seems to have stirred up a lot of embarrassment then, and many of his contentions still go unanswered today. I hope you may be able to use some of these as ammunition in your own periodical.

A valuable approach to confronting Christian fraud is to be seen in the way you answer apologists. So far, you have answered quite well the letters of apologists who read your periodical. I have often hoped to see the rebuttal of fallacious arguments generated by the big-

name apologists like Josh McDowell and the like. By exposing their fallacious harmonies of Bible difficulties, we can defuse the enthusiasm of persons who are impressed by the apologetic argument. So far, I haven't found a book that deals specifically with their apologia, although you have whittled them down to size on quite a few occasions. I would like to read more....

(We are putting into BE the following material submitted by RS in order to show that BE is continuing a battle that began centuries ago--Ed.).

What follows is a list of questions submitted to Jerome and Augustine by Porphyry in his work entitled, *Porphyry's Work Against the Christians: An Interpretation.*"

"If all of God's works are good, why does the Law distinguish between clean and unclean beasts? Did Saul's evil spirit really come from God? Why is sacrifice, which is commanded in the Law, opposed in Psalm 51 and Jeremiah 7:22? Why does the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew list 27 or 28 generations, while that in Luke lists 43 and why does Matthew omit three kings between David and the Captivity? Where was Jesus called Emmanuel? Mark attributed to the demons (5:7 and elsewhere) the statement that Jesus was stronger than they, yet Paul claims in 1 Cor. 2:8 that the 'princes and powers of the world' did not know of his divinity.... Was the Holy Spirit granted to the Apostles before or after the Ascension? How could Christ's rule be without end according to Isaiah 9:7, since he must surrender it to the Father according to 1 Cor. 15:24.

The sayings of Jesus attract some attention. What agreement is there between: 'Let your light shine before men,' and 'Take heed that ye do not your good works before men, to be seen of them' according to Matthew 5:16 and 6:1?, 'The Father is greater than I' and 'I and the Father are one' found in John 10:29-30, 'We know that God hears not sinners' and 'Every one that asks receives' (John 9:31 vs. Matthew 7:8). Why does he call himself Son of Man, when he was Son of a Woman? Why did he deny his mercy to a Canaanite woman, and not to the centurion and the leper of another race? Jesus said, 'All who came before me were thieves and robbers'; was this said of the Prophets? If Tyre and Sidon would have repented at the sight of his mighty works, why did he not perform them there? We are to agree with our adversary quickly; does this apply to the devil? And is the devil the father of the Jews (John 8:44)? How shall one accommodate Jesus saying, 'I pray not for the world' (John 17:9) to 1 John 2:2 --'And not for our sins, but for those of the whole world?'"

RS continues discussing comments by Porphyry by saying, "Questions of this type are proof of the presence of much Scriptural criticism in ancient times.... Much larger remains the contention of Porphyry regarding the folly of Christianity. He played up the contradictions in Scriptures.... In many examples he prepared the way for the historical criticism of our time.... He found fault with Gen. 2:16-17 for the prohibition of the knowledge of good as well as evil,.... In the NT, he concentrated upon the discordant genealogies of Jesus and the rival accounts of his crucifixion and resurrection. He recalled foolish and contradictory sayings of Jesus.... For example, Jesus brought not peace but a sword; he disowned his parents; he forbade salvation to the rich. If God alone is good, how does the good man bring forth out of his heart that which is good (Mark 10:18; Matt. 12:35)? If his witness of himself is not true, how is he the light of the world (John 5:31 and 8:31)? Which of these sayings is true: 'Me ye have not always' or 'Lo, I am with you always' (Matt. 26:2 and 28:20)? Is Peter Satan or a Rock (Matt. 16:18, 23)?.... The disciples were promised that they would drink deadly poison without harm and move mountains, yet Jesus himself was full of fear when challenged to leap from the Temple. The sayings that his followers should eat his flesh and drink his blood (John 6:53)...places his approval upon cannibalism, now held in disgrace by all men.... Jesus himself was guilty of lack of steadfastness when he broke his promise not to go to Jerusalem (John 7:8-10).... He said that the work of salvation had been

accomplished (John 17:4) before the Standard of the Cross had been raised.... Today a Porphyry might challenge the claim of Christianity to be the universal religion."

[We included all of the above from the writings of Porphyry to show that intelligent opposition to Christianity has been around from the beginning and many of BE's points were seen by men nearly 2,000 years ago-Ed.]

Letter #507 from RR of Hooks, Texas

Dear Mr. McKinsey. I always enjoy reading B.E. every month, but I was particularly impressed by the lead article in Issue #114, which addresses the very basic issue of why a person should be concerned with Biblical errancy in the first place, and should be of particular value to many who have given very little thought to the possibility that religious beliefs based on the Bible might possibly be harmful to someone. (There are plenty of such people around who do not hold with church teachings and are also pretty much indifferent to them.) Also of importance is the glimpse I get into your concern with such issues as the improvement of social conditions, concern with the environment and the possibility of nuclear war, concern with women's rights, et. al. I realize that these issues are not primarily what B.E. is all about, but since B.E. has only one editor at present, I'm sure it's gratifying to many of us to know what the editor has to say on matters related to religion.

You mentioned your intention to create a tape on the subject. I would welcome this, but in addition I would like to see something along the lines of a tract to distribute along with the other two tracts you've provided, which might be entitled "Can the study of the Bible be harmful?" or some such.

I wish you well and hope to see more on this topic in future issues.

Editor's Response to Letter #507

Dear RR. Right now I am preoccupied with a major audio project that will be explained to our readers in the not-too-distant future; so, we just don't have time to engage in other concerns. Rest assured many programs are under consideration, but time and resources are a restraint.

Issue No. 117

September 1992

With this month's commentary we will continue the listing of God's shortcomings in the Bible that was begun in the June issue.

GOD

(Part 3)

HE LOSES HIS TEMPER. Even though Job 5:2 says, "For wrath kills the foolish man, and envy slays the silly one" God often loses his composure. The following are good examples:

- "...the Lord may turn from the fierceness of his anger...." (Deut. 13:17).
- "The anger of the Lord was hot against Israel and he sold them into the hand of Mesopotamia's king...." (Judges 3:8).
- "...the Lord shall swallow them up in his wrath, and the fire shall devour them" (Psalm 21:9).
- "again the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel...." (2 Sam. 24:1).
- "...he made Israel to sin, to provoke the Lord God of Israel to anger with their vanities" (1 Kings 16:26).
- "...the Lord revenges, and is furious; the Lord will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserves wrath for his enemies" (Nahum 1:2).
- "the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel...." (2 Kings 13:3).
- "the anger of the Lord was hot against Israel" (Judges 2:20).
- See also: Ex. 32:10, Num. 11:1, 16:46, 32:13-14, 1 Kings 14:9, 15:30, 16:2, 16:7, 16:13, 2 Chron. 34:25, Psalm 18:7, and Jer. 44:6.

HE IS OFTEN JEALOUS.

- "...I the Lord thy God am a jealous God...." (Deut. 5:9, Ex. 20:5).
- "For the Lord thy God is a jealous God among you...." (Deut. 6:15).
- "How long, O Lord? Will you be angry forever? How long will your jealousy burn like fire?" (Psalm 79:5).
- "For in my jealousy and in the fire of my wrath have I spoken...." (Ezek. 38:19).
- "God is jealous, and the Lord revenges...." (Nahum 1:2).
- "Thus says the Lord of hosts; I was jealous of Zion with great jealousy, and I was jealous for her with great fury" (Zech. 8:2).
- See also: Ex. 34:14, Deut. 4:24, 29:20, Psalms 78:58, Ezek. 16:38, 36:5-6 and Joshua 24:19.

HE IS NOT EVERYWHERE or OMNIPRESENT. Even though Jer. 23:24 ("Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth?") and Psalm 139:7-12 say the Lord is everywhere, the following verses say he is not.

- "Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden" (Gen. 4:16).
- "the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men built" (Gen. 11:5).

- "he said to Balak, Stand here by thy burnt offering, while I meet the LORD yonder" (Num. 23:15).
- "...the Lord was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire...." (1 Kings 19:11-12).
- "I, the Lord, will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know" (Gen. 18:21).
- "So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord" (Job 1:12 and 2:7),
- and "Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord...." (Jonah 1:3).
- Also note: Gen. 17:22, 18:33, Ex. 11:4, 20:24, 25:8, Deut. 33:2, Psalm 9:11, 10:1, 14:2, Jer. 23:39, Hosea 11:9, Joel 3:17, Hab. 3:3.

HE DOESN'T KNOW ALL. Even though Prov. 15:3 ("The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good") says god sees everything that goes on, the following verses deny his omniscience.

- "the Lord God called to Adam, and said to him, Where art thou?" (Gen. 3:9).
- "the Lord said to Cain, 'Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast?'" (Gen. 4:6).
- "the Lord said to Cain, Where is Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: Am I my brother's keeper?" (Gen. 4:9).
- "Then the Lord said,...I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know" (Gen. 18:20-21).
- "Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands" (Deut. 8:2).
- "you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The Lord your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deut. 13:3).
- "The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God" (Psalm 14:2).
- "This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Have you come to inquire of me? As surely as I live, I will not let you inquire of me, declares the Sovereign Lord" (Ezek. 20:3).
- Also note: Gen. 22:12, Num. 22:9, 2 Chron. 32:31, Hosea 8:4, Amos 9:3, and Jer. 32:35.

Yet, God does know all according to Prov. 15:3 which says, "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good."

HE REPENTS. Even though 1 Sam. 15:29 ("the Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent: for he is not a man, that he should repent") says that god never repents, the following verses say the opposite.

- It repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart" (Gen. 6:6).
- "...the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people" (Ex. 32:14).
- "...the Lord repented that he had made Saul king over Israel" (1 Sam. 15:35).
- "The Lord said, It repenteth me that I have set up Saul to be king...." (1 Sam. 15:11).
- "...that I the Lord God may repent of the evil, which I purpose to do unto them because of the evil of their doings" (Jer. 26:3).
- "If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do to them" (Jer. 18:8),
- and "...for I repent of the evil that I have done to you" (Jer. 42:10).

- Also see: Deut. 32:36, Judges 2:18, 2 Sam. 24:16, 1 Chron. 21:15, Psalm 106:45, Jer. 15:6, 18:10, 26:13, 26:19, Amos 7:3, 7:6, Jonah 3:9-10, Joel 2:13, and Hosea 11:8.

HE PRACTICES INJUSTICE. Even though Deut. 32:4 ("He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he") says God is just and fair, the following verses prove the opposite.

- "Then say to the Pharaoh, This is what the Lord says, : Israel is my firstborn son, and I told you, 'Let my son go, so he may worship me,' But you refused to let him go; so I will kill your firstborn son" (Ex. 4:22-23).
- "The Lord is longsuffering, and of great mercy...visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children unto the 3rd and 4th generation" (Num. 14:18).
- "A bastard shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord; even to the 10th generation shall he not enter...." (Deut. 23:2).
- "Thy son and thy daughters shall be given unto another people...." (Deut. 28:32).
- "When Achan son of Zerah acted unfaithfully regarding the devoted things, did not wrath come upon the whole community of Israel? He was not the only one who died for his sin" (Joshua 22:20).
- "because by doing this you have made the enemies of the Lord show utter contempt, the son born to you will die" (2 Sam. 12:14).
- "During the reign of David, there was a famine for 3 successive years; so David sought the face of the Lord. The Lord said, 'It is on account of Saul and his blood-stained house; it is because he put the Gibeonites to death'" (2 Sam. 21:1).
- "if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the Lord have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel" (Ezek. 14:9).
- "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned...." (Rom. 5:12).
- "Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam...." (Rom. 5:14).
- For additional examples of divine injustice in action see: Gen. 9:25, 12:17, 20:6-7, Ex. 12:12, 12:29, 21:29, Lev. 5:17, 12:2,5, 15:19, 19:20-22, 21:14, Num. 5:27, 20:7-8, 11, 23-24, 28, 21:4-6, 35:15-18, 35:25, Deut. 19:11-12, 21:18-21, 25:11, 28:53-55, 59, 32:25, Joshua 7:11, 1 Sam. 2:33, 6:19, 2 Sam. 6:6-7, 24:15-17, 1 Kings 11:11-12, 13: 17-19, 24, 14:15-17, 16:34, 20:35-36, 20:28, 34, 41-42, 21:21, 21:29, 2 Kings 21:16, 17:21, 1 Chron. 21:1, 7, Ezek. 21:3, Matt. 13:12, and Rom. 9:13-16, 18-20.

HE PLAYS FAVORITES. We are told in Deut. 10:17 and 16:19 that "the Lord your God is God of Gods...which regards not persons" and we are told in 2 Chron. 19:7 that, "...there is no iniquity with the Lord our God, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts." Yet, that is clearly disproven by the following comments.

- "For thou art an holy people unto the Lord thy God: the Lord thy God has chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth" (Deut. 7:6, 14:2).
- "the Lord will not forsake his people for his great name's sake: because it has pleased the Lord to make you his people" (1 Sam. 12:22).
- "For thy people Israel didst thou make thine own people for ever; and thou, Lord, became their God" (1 Chron. 17:22).
- "Thou art my servant; I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away" (Isaiah 41:9).
- "my people shall know my name...." (Isa. 52:6).

- "I will bring forth a seed out of Jacob, and out of Judah an inheritor of my mountains; and mine elect shall inherit it...." (Isa. 65:9).
- "You only have I known of all the families of the earth...." (Amos 3:2).
- "But Jesus answered and said, 'I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel'" (Matt. 15:24).
- "...for salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22).
- Favoritism is also evident in Gen. 4:4-5, 12:1-3, 13:14-15, 35:12, Ex. 2:25, 11:7, 19:5-6, Lev. 26:3-12, Deut. 4:40, 7:14, 28:1-13, Joshua 24:13, 1 Kings 3:12, 8:53, 2 Kings 13:22-23, 2 Chron. 1:1, 12, Psalm 138:6, Isa. 43:1, 5, 45:4, 51:2, 16, 63:8, Haggai 2:23, Mal. 1:2-3, Matt. 10:5-6, Luke 1:13, 6:20, Acts 10:40-41, 13:19, 16:6-7, Rom. 1:16, 2:9-10, 9:4-5, 9:13, 11:5, 7, and 1 Peter 2:9.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #508 from Jerry McDonald of Sullivan, Missouri (Part a)

[Jerry is the fundamentalist Director of Challenge Publications in Sullivan, Missouri. A couple of months ago he sent us a booklet published by him entitled *STILL A PERFECT WORK OF HARMONY* which is subcaptioned: *A Critical Examination of Dennis McKinsey's Tract: "It Is God's Word?"* As part of his introduction he says, "It will be our purpose to examine each and every objection that Mr. McKinsey produced in his tract and show that they can be answered." Jerry is going to systematically refute our pamphlet when he can't even get the title correct. It's proper name is: "The Bible Is God's Word?" After reading the booklet one can't help but conclude that he is another one of those Johnny-Come-Latelys who race onto the confrontational scene, thinking they are going to blow us away with an arsenal of pop guns and water pistols. Nearly all of his rationalizations are little short of pathetic, and expose a "defend the book at all costs" mentality, that is so typical of those who have been indoctrinated, usually from birth. Let us now analyze his "defense" of this "perfect work of harmony"--ED.]

(Point #1 in our pamphlet was: If you must accept Jesus as your Savior in order to be saved (John 14:6), what about the billions of beings that die as fetuses, infants, mental deficient, etc.? For them to accept Jesus would be impossible, so they are condemned to hell because of conditions over which they have no control. Deut. 32:4 says God is just, but where is the justice?"--ED.)

Jerry's Defense is: Mr. McKinsey assumes that John 14:6: "...I am the way, the truth and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me" is saying that every human being must come to him in order to be saved. When one takes into consideration the totality of Biblical teaching on this matter the problem disappears. Jesus was speaking of those who are of age, and mentally capable of sin. The reason for coming to Christ is to have one's sins washed away (Acts 22:16). Since fetuses, infants, and those mentally deficient have no sin in their lives, they do not fall into the category of John 14:6.... Those who are mentally deficient are as innocent as little children because they are incapable of sin. Why? Because sin is transgression of God's law by those who have the capacity to know right from wrong (James 4:17; 1 John 3:4). Therefore, Mr. McKinsey's objection is without merit.

Editor's Response to Letter #508 (Part a)

My advice to any biblicist who sees this problem coming down the road is to flee to the hills in terror. Run for your life and don't look back, unless you don't mind being eaten alive. Your response is dripping with mistakes, Jerry.

First, the verse says "no man", period. It does not say "some men", "most men", or "many men". It says quite clearly "no man", and that includes everybody. No exceptions are allowed. That is what it says; no assumptions are involved. Other verses can be cited for corroboration. John 3:18 says, "He that believes on him is not condemned: but he that believes not is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God"; John 3:36 says, "He that believes on the Son has everlasting life; and he that believes not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abides on him," and 1 John 5:12 says, "He that has the Son has life; and he that has not the Son of God has not life." That is about as clear as one can be and about all that can be said on that matter. There are no extenuating circumstances. What would you have had the man say in order to make that point crystal clear? How would you have had him phrase it?

Where does it say that only those who are of age and mentally capable of sin are included? Are we going to read the verse as is or as you would like it to be? All you are doing is resurrecting the old "Age of Accountability" nonsense, which has no biblical basis whatever. From your perspective it would be nice if the Bible contained this concept, but, alas, your own book drowns you. You talk as if the book were rational and permitted obvious exceptions, when that is by no means the case.

Second, you need to reread your own book, my friend. When you say that, "fetuses, infants, and those mentally deficient have no sin in their lives," you clearly demonstrate an ignorance of Scripture. Rom. 5:12 says, "Wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." Notice it says "have sinned." It does not say people inherited from Adam the capacity, inclination, or propensity to sin; it says they, in fact, sinned. It was a completed event.

Third, in the same vein you completely ignored verses which clearly say that there are no sinless people, even at birth. Psalm 58:3 says, "The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies." Note well! They "go astray as soon as they be born." Job 14:4 says, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? not one." Contrary to Scripture, you would have us believe that every baby and fetus is clean. Job 15:14 says, "What is man, that he can be clean? Or he that is born of a woman, that he can be righteous?" Even Jesus said in Mark 10:18, "Why call thou me good? there is none good but one, that is God." According to you, all babies and fetuses are good and yet to be sinners. Sorry, but that is not scriptural.

Fourth, you say that "sin is transgression of God's law by those who have the capacity to know right from wrong" and quote 1 John 3:4 ("Whosoever commits sin transgresses also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law") to prove your point. In truth, it proves nothing of the sort, because no qualifiers are involved. Where is there the slightest reference to "those who have the capacity to know right from wrong"? It simply says that sin is the transgression of the law. Nowhere does the verse imply, much less state, that one must have a capacity to know right from wrong. Transgression alone is sufficient. According to Romans, sin accompanies the very act of being conceived.

And lastly, you cite James 4:17, which says, "Whoever knows what is right to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin." This verse does not say you must know right from wrong in order to sin. It does not say only those who know right from wrong can sin. It says those who know right from wrong know when they have sinned. You don't have to know right from wrong in order to sin. Moreover, if it did, Jerry, you would only be exposing a biblical contradiction between this verse and those I cited earlier. One does not take precedence over the other. They are both scripture.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #509 from NS of Richmond, Indiana
(NS is employed at a city newspaper--Ed.)

Dear Dennis.

I finally received your Biblical Errancy yesterday, which is earlier than usual!.... I put another "Letter to the Editor" in our April 15th issue of the paper...and really got a lot of response. Much of it was over the phone inquiring who "Beverly Overman" (my pseudonym--Ed.) was, where she lived etc. Of course, my boss at the paper revealed nothing. I have a feeling every Overman in the phone book has been called, but they must wonder what is going on. I have this terrible urge to call them and ask if there are any messages for Beverly! The letters have been about equally divided. Some are sarcastic and bitter...and others are from people with at least a smattering of intelligence. These will all be answered personally, not via the paper, as I feel it could go on forever, and my boss might get a wee bit upset. I am fortunate he feels much the same as I do, and enjoys this immensely, but probably would be a social outcast if he admitted publicly to these views.... This has been a wonderful opportunity for me to really research the Bible on my own and not depend on you to do my work for me. I must admit, however, that you are a good guide and starting point, and I have quoted you on several occasions. This is the most fun I have had in ages, and is a terrific learning experience. Never let it be said you are too old to learn, for I am learning with your help, to back up the knowledge that the Bible is indeed an errant book....

Letter #510 from RM of Red Deer, Alberta, Canada

Dear Dennis....

I have a couple of Mormon "Elders" on the run right now. I used some of your quick references for the Book of Mormon, and combined it with my materials, i.e. photocopies of their false prophecies and contradictions between their prophets and their scripture books. They are supposed to return soon with their analysis/answers. I'm quite ready for it, so it should prove interesting. I have debated with Mormon elders and bishops before. They always run when Mormon doctrines are pushed to their logical conclusions. I want to keep these "Elders" as long as possible so that the information will "seep in" more and more. It's a kind of "cat and mouse" game. I "nail" the facts down; they run from the fray and come back with their "answers"; I demolish the key arguments and offer a challenge, i.e., "Prove that my material and quotes are false or non-existent and I will join your church. If my research stands and my material is accurate, be honest and admit it. Of course, if you're truly honest, you will leave the church organization you're in when you find that my arguments are undeniably correct. If you disagree with me, prove that I am wrong. Just don't ignore it! I challenge you to follow this course of action through to its final conclusion. Let's shake on it." At this juncture, after I have given them my favorite arguments and materials, they usually leave, never to return again. I know they can't disprove my contentions, which go to the heart of their belief system. Hence, I see them for the frauds they are. Their "truth" can't take the real truth. Still, they often insist that they have the truth. Some come out of their false system. The others, like most christians, ignore reality and continue under their delusion, in spite of the fact that it has been systematically disproven. This is typical of religious professors. This dishonesty never ceases to amaze me. I hope I can keep these "Elders" a little longer. It's always fun watching them squirm over my questions, etc. Is it as much fun for you? I'm sure you get quite a "kick" out of it. As you have told me on the phone a few times, they generally run for the door. It's the same here. I just wish I knew some way to keep them long enough to face the facts and deal with them. Got any suggestions?

Anyway, keep up the great work you are doing with BE. If you feel like using more material against the Book of Mormon or the Koran in BE, please do. There seems to be a growing need for it. Especially where the Koran is concerned. By the way, do you know of any books that

expose Islam? It seems to be the most untouched religion around. I can't seem to find even one book that really deals with it. If you have time, please respond. Thanks again.

Editor's Response to Letter #510

Dear RM.

You are doing a great job. Keep it up. I, too, have had some difficulty in finding anti-Koranic material. Perhaps our readers can be of some assistance? Most of what I have found is Christian propaganda, which is often of little use to me.

Letter #511 from TG of Arlington, Texas

Dear Dennis....

A final thought: I find it curious that unbelievers are expected to read and study the bible before rejecting it, while believers are under no similar obligation to read the Koran, the Bhagavad Gita, and the mountain of secular writings that exist, including BE, before they can responsibly reject them. Your anonymous correspondent from Dayton, Ohio, for example, calls unbelievers "lazy" if they don't read the bible. But has this JB individual read Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Russell's *Why I Am Not A Christian*, Ingersoll's *Some Mistakes of Moses*, or Huxley's *Some Controverted Questions*, to name just a few? If he hasn't, then it ought to be clear who's "lazy".

Editor's Response to Letter #511

Dear TG.

Your point is well taken. There is something of a double standard involved, isn't there. I seriously doubt he has ever heard of them, much less read them.

Letter #512 from DV of Government Camp, Oregon

Dear Dennis.

The work you are doing is excellent. You should publish it in book form. I would love to own more examples of your clear thought on biblical idiocy! I want to support your work.... Keep hammering at the ignorance of the Christian masses! (or any masses!).

Letter #513 from JW of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma Dear Dennis.

... you have told your readers for years that the best attack was from within. That is, finding errors in the Bible which is the very foundation of fundamentalist beliefs. A story for you. I have a friend at work who is always trying to win converts over, and since I let it be known that I think the Bible is so much bunk, I am usually a target for the "soul-savers". This friend was recently talking about how Christ rose from the dead to give us salvation for our sins. I immediately said, "Hey, a lot of people rose from the dead in the Bible, so what is the big deal about that?" His reply was, "Well, they rose because Jesus made them rise." I answered, "Not so, and I will look it up for you." I went to Issue #8, and found the list you had prepared of those rising from the dead. I typed it into my computer, and made a printout, which I am enclosing. When I gave it to him, it angered him, so I asked him, "Why do you get angry when I am only telling you what is in the Bible? You profess to believe in the Bible. Do you believe in it or not?" This left him totally frustrated, but he did cool his anger, because I had only quoted to him what he professed to believe--the Bible. It works every time.

Dennis, I am not kidding you, you need to compile all of your BE issues into a well organized book which will totally destroy the Bible as anything more than a bunch of old Jewish stories. I will buy a bunch of them. Do it before someone else does. You are the authority--do it--please!

Editor's Response to Letter #513

Dear JW.

This month's commentary will continue our enumeration of God's reprehensible deeds that was begun in the June issue.

GOD (Part 4)

HE SANCTIONS SLAVERY in direct contradiction to 2 Cor. 3:17, which says, "Where the spirit of the Lord is there is liberty." Key statements in this regard are the following:

- "Then thou shalt take an awl, and thrust it through his ear unto the door, and he shall be thy servant (Read *slave*--Ed.) forever. And also unto thy maidservant thou shalt do likewise" (Deut. 15:17).
- "Bid slaves to be submissive to their masters and to give satisfaction in every respect; they are not to be refractory, nor to pilfer, but to show entire and true fidelity, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God" (Titus 2:9).
- "Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free" (Eph. 6:5-7).
- "Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God. But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps" (1 Peter 2:18-21).
- "Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence of the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving" (Col. 3:22-24).
- "All who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of full respect, so that God's name and our teaching may not be slandered. Those who have believing masters are not to show less respect for them because they are brothers. Instead, they are to serve them even better, because those who benefit from their service are believers, and dear to them. These are the things you are to teach and urge on them" (1 Tim. 6:1-2).

HE DEGRADES DEFORMED PEOPLE: In Lev. 21:16-23 God said to Moses, "Say to Aaron: 'For the generations to come none of your descendants who has a defect may come near to offer the food of his God. No man who has any defect may come near: no man who is blind or lame, disfigured or deformed; no man with a crippled foot or hand, or who is hunchbacked or dwarfed, or who has any eye defect, or who has festering or running sores or damaged testicles. No descendant of Aaron the priest who has any defect is to come near to present the offerings made to the Lord by fire. He has a defect... because of this defect, he must not go near the curtain or approach the altar, and so desecrate my sanctuary....'" (Lev. 21:16:23).

HE PUNISHES BASTARDS FOR BEING ILLEGITIMATE: Deut. 23:2 says, "A bastard shall not enter into the congregation of the Lord; even to his tenth generation shall he not enter into the congregation of the Lord."

HE PUNISHES MANY FOR THE ACTS OF ONE: "...for the Lord had closed up every womb in Abimelech's household because of Abraham's wife Sarah" (Gen. 20:18). "When David saw the angel who was striking down the people, he said to the Lord, 'I am the one who has sinned and done wrong. These are but sheep. What have they done? Let your hand fall upon me and my family'" (2 Sam. 24:17). "To the woman he said, 'I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children'" (Gen. 3:16). Also note Joshua 7:24-26.

HE PUNISHES CHILDREN FOR THEIR FATHERS' SINS: "...visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation" (Ex. 34:7). "...for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the 3rd and 4th generation of them that hate me...." (Ex. 20:5, Deut. 5:9). "It came to pass, that at midnight the Lord smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne unto the firstborn of the captive that was in the dungeon; and all the firstborn of cattle" (Ex. 12:29). See also: Deut. 23:2, Num. 14:33, Gen. 17:14, and Gen. 9:22-25.

HE PREVENTS PEOPLE FROM HEARING HIS WORDS: "Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed" (Isa. 6:10). "So you see God is kind to some just because he wants to be, and he makes some refuse to listen" (Rom. 9:18). "This is why I speak to them in parables: Though seeing, they do not see; though hearing, they do not hear or understand. In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving" (Matt. 13:13-14). See also: John 12:39-40, Mark 4:10-12, and Luke 8:9-10.

HE SUPPORTS HUMAN SACRIFICE: Ex. 22:29-30 says, "Do not hold back offerings from your granaries or your vats. You must give me the firstborn of your sons. Do the same with your cattle and your sheep. Let them stay with their mothers for 7 days, but give them to me on the 8th day." And Lev. 27:28-29 says, "Nothing that a man owns and devotes to the Lord--whether man or animal or family land--may be sold or redeemed; everything so devoted is most holy to the Lord. No person devoted to destruction may be ransomed; he must be put to death." He also permitted human sacrifice according to Ezek. 20:26, which says, "I let them become defiled through their gifts--the sacrifice of every firstborn--that I might fill them with horror so they would know that I am the Lord."

HE ORDERS CANNIBALISM: Lev. 26:29 says, "Ye shall eat the flesh of your sons, and the flesh of your daughter shall ye eat." Jer. 19:9 says, "I will make them eat the flesh of their sons and daughters, and they will eat one another's flesh during the stress of the siege imposed on them by the enemies who seek their lives." Ezek. 5:10 says, "In your midst fathers will eat their children, and children will eat their fathers. I will inflict punishment on you and will scatter all your survivors to the winds." Isaiah 49:26 says, "I will make your oppressors eat their own flesh; they will be drunk on their own blood, as with wine...." And in John 6:53-54 Jesus says, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life...."

(TO BE CONTINUED NEXT MONTH)

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #508 from JM of Sullivan, Missouri Continues from Last Month (Part b)

(Point #2 in our pamphlet was: Why are we being punished for Adam's sin? After all, he ate the forbidden fruit, we didn't. It is his problem, not ours, especially in light of Deut. 24:16, which says the children shall not be punished for the sins of their fathers.--ED.)

Jerry's Defense: Mr. McKinsey thinks that the Bible teaches that we are punished because of Adam's sin. There is not one single verse in all of Holy writ that even implies such a thing. 1 Cor. 15:22 says, "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive." This falls into the category of one not reading exactly what the writer actually said. This says that in Adam, all die. It says nothing about being punished because of what Adam did. Adam (and Eve) sinned, thereby allowing sin to come into the world. Two kinds of death came into the world with their act: Spiritual and physical death. However, anyone who is punished will be punished for his own sin. Ezekiel 18:20 says, "The soul that sins, it shall die." One must sin in order to be punished for sin. One thing that most people from every walk of life seem to misunderstand is the difference between the consequences of sin and the punishment for sin.... Man suffers the consequence of what Adam and Eve did, but they are not punished for that sin."

Editor's Response to Letter #508 (Part b)

Your answer to this query is almost as vacuous as your prior response, JM. You say there is not one single verse in all of Holy writ that teaches we are punished for Adam's sin. You can't be serious. As we noted earlier, Rom. 5:12 says, "...so death passed upon all men, for that ALL HAVE SINNED." We are deemed sinners and die for what Adam did and that isn't punishment? Aren't sinners punished? The 18th verse says, "...as by the offense of one JUDGEMENT came upon all men to condemnation." We are condemned for what Adam did and that isn't punishment? Judgement doesn't entail punishment? The 19th verse says, "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners" and that isn't punishment? You quote 1 Cor. 15:22, which says that we all died because of what Adam did and then allege that we are not being punished as a result. How silly! Of course we are. We are paying the penalty for what he did. If there is anyone who is not reading the script closely, it is you. Adam and Eve didn't just "allow" sin to come into the world; they caused it and they caused it to rain down on everyone. Without them it would never have appeared. Because of them, according to Christian theology, everyone must now take the affirmative act of accepting Jesus as his savior. Those who do not are doomed. If Adam and Eve had not disobeyed God, sin would not even be an option today; the world would be a perfect place, and all men would be saved. Because of them, everyone sinned, not just Adam and Eve, and, thus, everyone is a sinner. And because everyone is a sinner, we are all doomed unless corrective measures are taken. You falsely state that "one must sin in order to be punished for sin" and then allege that "anyone who is punished will be punished for his own sin" when anyone reasonably well acquainted with Christian theology knows that we are sinners condemned to hell at the moment of conception, if not before, and sinful acts are not required. If you never do anything wrong in your entire existence, you are still condemned to hell because of what Adam and Eve did. In fact, no amount of good deeds will save you; your only salvation is through the acceptance of Jesus. As part of your defense, you quote Ezekiel 18:20, which says, "The soul that sins, it shall die" when you had already quoted 1 Cor. 15:22, which said that all died because of what Adam did, and as we have already noted, Rom. 5:12 says, "death passed upon all men." According to the latter verses you die when you first come into existence, not when you later commit a sinful act. By quoting Ezekiel all you did was highlight a biblical contradiction regarding when death occurs. Ezekiel says death appears when you first sin, while other verses say it emerges the moment you are created.

And finally, your attempt to draw a distinction between "consequences" and "punishment" is stillborn because they are two sides of the same coin. They don't oppose but complement one another. As a consequence of what Adam did, mankind is punished. A conscious judgment was

made by a supreme being that everyone should be adversely affected because of the deeds of one. That's a judgement in which punishment is being administered, my friend. If what had occurred had been merely the result of blind, impersonal natural forces, such as that dispensed by a hurricane or an earthquake, then your argument might have some merit. People suffer the consequences of natural disasters, but they are not punished. The term is inapplicable. But that is not the Original Sin situation by any means.

Letter #508 Continues (Part c)

(Point #3 in our pamphlet was: God created Adam so he must have been perfect. How, then, could he have sinned? Regardless of how much free will he had, if he chose to sin he wasn't perfect."--ED.)

Jerry's Defense: Again Mr. McKinsey did not consider the totality of Biblical teaching concerning the matter. There are two things wrong with McKinsey's objection: [1] He thinks that if God created something that he could only make it so perfect that it could never be corrupted. [2] He does not understand the "free moral agency" of man.

Why would God have to make a thing so perfect that it could never be corrupted? Does he mean that God could not have made the earth because it has become polluted and corrupted? God made the tobacco leaf, but he did not make it to be smoked and chewed. God made opium, but certainly not so man could abuse it and make illegal drugs out of it.... What rule of logic can he employ to show that if a person sins, that he was never perfect in the first place....

Editor's Response to Letter #508 (Part c)

You don't have a real grasp of the problem, JM. God is perfect by definition. Thus everything God is and does is perfect. God created man; therefore man must be perfect and couldn't sin. Your "free agency" means nothing. If man chose to sin, then that proves he was not perfect. But he had to have been perfect because God created him; so how could he have sinned? How could a perfect being create something less than perfect? According to you, we have a perfect being that is doing something less than perfect, which is contradictory. If I tell you I am perfect and immediately sin, that is excellent proof I lied. What evidence could be more conclusive?

You say, Does that mean God could not have made the earth because it has become polluted and corrupted? No! Under your theology, God could have made the earth perfect. That's no problem. But it was polluted by man and that is a problem. How could man have chosen to do that which is imperfect when he was created perfect by God. So we return to the original problem.

Your question is also beset by another problem. We are primarily dealing with morality and how do you morally corrupt something that is not alive. Morality is not applicable to non-living matter. But even if pollution or corruption did involve morality, they are brought about by man's acts and couldn't occur on their own. So we again return to our original question: How could that which was created perfect--man--sin or corrupt?

You ask what rule of logic I can employ to show that if a person sins, that he was never perfect in the first place? The rule is quite simple. If he was created perfect but chose to sin or corrupt, he was not created perfect to start with. If he was perfect at no time would he choose to be imperfect because that which is perfect could never choose to be imperfect. If it chose to be imperfect, then it proved it wasn't perfect to begin with. Don't you understand that the very act of choosing the imperfect proves the "perfect" is not perfect but imperfect? Why is that so hard to comprehend? By definition everything the perfect does must be perfect. So it can't make an imperfect choice.

Letter #508 Continues (Part d)

McKinsey needs to prove that a perfect man cannot sin. It would be utterly impossible for a man (who is free to choose) not to be able to choose the wrong. If he is allowed to choose, then he must be able to make the wrong choice, otherwise he is not free to choose. If the only choice he has is the right choice, then he has no choice at all. So this argument falls.

Editor's Response to Letter #508 (Part d)

Proving a perfect man cannot sin is quite simple, JM. As I said, by definition he can't sin. If he sinned, then he proved he wasn't perfect. The essence of the argument between us is this: You say man was created perfect but chose to sin and thus became imperfect. I say that is impossible. If he was perfect, he couldn't have chosen to be imperfect, because if he did, that would prove he was not perfect to begin with. No perfect being can choose to do that which is imperfect, i.e., sin. You need to realize that when you bring "perfection" in the door, you throw "free choice" out the window. The only choice he has is the right choice; that is why he has no option at all, and that's why your argument collapses. And that is also why the whole idea of a "perfect man" is ridiculous from the outset.

(To Be Continued)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #517 from GN of Phoenix, Arizona

Dear Dennis.

I'm enclosing a Christian newsletter that came to my house edited and published by John A. Thought you would enjoy the contents along with my reply. Please note its caption: How to Beat the Atheist in a Debate. However, the article does not really tell you how to beat an atheist in debate; all it contains is a character assassination of atheist people. I would sure like to challenge this joker to debate YOU. If this is the best he can do, he wouldn't even be able to go one round. I found his comments to be insulting and humorous all at the same time. It's hard to imagine that an educated person could make such ludicrous statements. Evidently history is not one of his strong points.

What follows is the response GN sent to John A:

Dear Mr. A:

...I must take exception to the article about atheists. My mother and father were both atheists and never could there be found a more moral people. They were not moral because they were afraid of a punishing God; they were moral because it was in their heart to be so. They taught me not to lie, not to steal, to value truth, never to cheat, to be ambitious. My father was a hard worker and a loyal friend. My mother was a saint, and still is.

I think the article was quite misleading when you consider that our prisons are full of professed Christians. Possibly you are not aware of the part that Christians played during the Crusades and the Inquisition, all quite pious and all very immoral.

Insofar as morality is concerned I would pit my dear father against any of the biblical holy men. My father never murdered anyone such as David and Moses did; my Dad was faithful to his one and only wife and did not imitate the adultery and polygamy of both King David and Solomon. My Dad did not shack up with several women such as the patriarch Jacob, nor did he murder innocent men, women and children such as Judah and Levi, not did he sell his brother into slavery such as the sons of Israel. No, my friend, it is not the atheist who is immoral; it is very much the religious fanatics.

You mentioned the killing of 6 million Jews in the article. According to history, Hitler was a devout Catholic and the people of Germany were very much Christian, not atheist. If we look to the Bible for our ethics and morality we will come up short of civilized. What kind of morality and ethics is it when God's so called "chosen people" were commanded to enter Canaan and kill every man, woman, and child (genocide) and rob them of their land because they were not of the religion of the Jews? What kind of morality is it to stone men and women for adultery except when it is David and Bathsheba? What kind of morality is being taught when it is all right to kill and maim others in the name of God and religion? If Jimmy Swaggart had as many wives and concubines as Solomon, he would never have been tempted to immorality. How "righteous" was Lot when he was willing to offer his virgin daughters to be molested and raped by the wicked men of Sodom, and later, supposedly in a drunken stupor had relations with them causing their pregnancy? My atheist father had far higher standards than that. He would have died before handing my sister and me over to such a fate, and certainly, not even in a drunken stupor, would he have behaved indecently toward either one of us.

Yes, you are right, the atheist has his opinion to tell him what is right and wrong, and I'll be truthful with you, their morality far outshines the morality in holy writ.

I can only think of a few scriptures that contain any morality at all and they are in the New Testament. Jesus made some moral statements but they were no more moral than statements made by leaders of various pagan religions. Most religions teach you that it is wrong to steal, to murder, to lie, to cheat. However, among the moral statements of Jesus there are the immoral ones, such as "hating your mother and father," and encouraging his followers not to work but to let God clothe and feed them, not to mention his false prophecies about returning to those people who had put their trust in him. They are dead and gone and did not live to see his return as he promised.

It is quite egotistical to elevate the Christian philosophy. Our Christian nation was involved in two world wars and several immoral wars such as Korea and Vietnam. Our Christian immorality was further evidenced by the dropping of the atom bomb on innocent women and children in Japan. Christians were responsible for the slaughter of 6 million Jews. Our Christian nation is ravaged by AIDS, hungry and homeless children are on the increase daily, the mentally ill are wandering the streets, many of our veterans are homeless, our T.V.'s and movies are filled with filth and immorality, our politicians (most of them Christians) are corrupt and greedy for wealth and power, and our religious leaders are full of hypocrisy and lust after women and money.

Before writing another condemning article about a group of people that you know nothing about, I would suggest that you help get the "Christian" house in order.

Letter #518 from RM of Red Deer Alberta, Canada

Dear Dennis.

A christian couple I spoke to recently are no longer fundamentalists. They now have a more liberal paradigm. I believe that I am starting to get through to them, but they are not fully converted. Obviously, since they have been brainwashed for so many years, "deprogramming" them will take some time. The point is, I really do care for them. While I have a lot of fun disproving the bible's validity, genuine concern for the people I am reaching is, especially to them, an essential requirement. Every christian I have spoken to thus far has never been able to accuse me of insincerity. They have all assented to the integrity with which I present my arguments affirmatively.

At the same time, destroying false hope in the bible is a priority. The couple that is now becoming more liberal in their view, thanks to my personal efforts and some of the BE material,

is a fine example. They quoted a host of scriptures to prove that God knew everything and predestined everything accordingly. That everyone has to go either to heaven or to hell, without having a say in the matter, was their sincere conviction.... Since no one can resist God's will (Rom. 9:18-19), man has no choice in the matter...and that's that.

In brief, they said that God is God from eternity to eternity (Ps. 90:2). According to His foreknowledge God Predestined all things according to His will.... No one can resist his will...and since God is omniscient...and is never given to change...there will be no exceptions where eternal salvation and damnation are concerned. Everything has been determined by God.

Well, I could hardly believe my luck. Here was my chance to blast both the bible and Calvinism at the same time. First, I pointed out that people have indeed resisted God in the bible. For example, Acts 7:51 says, "...ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye." Since they were already Trinitarians there was no need to cross-reference the OT to prove that the "Holy Ghost" referred to here is God.... In Luke 7:30, it states that, "...the Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God for themselves.".... The point is that God's will is often resisted and He does not always get his way. The fun really begins when Jer. 3:7 is quoted because the will, the prophetic ability, and the omniscience of God all start to fall apart. As this verse states: "I said after she had done all these things, Turn thou unto me. But she returned not.... Thus, Israel resisted God's command to "return" to Him.

Interestingly enough, most translations...reveal here God's ignorance about the future. As the RSV puts it: "I, God, thought after she had done all this she will return to me; but she did not return." Clearly, God thought wrong. This was shocking to the couple I was speaking to and they retreated to the KJV for safety. But I wasn't finished yet. Pointing to Jer. 3:19b-20 I demonstrated that even God admits to not knowing everything.... Horrors! There's more, still! God's omniscience is lacking in Gen. 18:21, 22:12, Deut. 8:2, 13:3, Hosea 6:4 and 2 Chron. 32:31. These verses are pointed out in BE, my favorite magazine.

At this point, all that was needed was an assault on the contradictory resurrection accounts and this couple, although not made into complete skeptics, made a strong turn away from fundamentalism and its inerrancy hogwash. Even if they are still clinging to christianity, I know they will never be quite the same as when they first locked horns with me and BE. While I have always (since leaving christianity) been able to win the argument with christians on my own, BE has made it all the more easy to win it quickly and completely. Thanks for all the support, Dennis. It's only a matter of time before many christians begin to "wake up and smell the Scriptures."

In every debate that I enter there is one verse that I bring up before, during, and after to drive home the point I am trying to make: "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" This is Psalm 11:3, and it is a good argument when one considers that the bible is the foundation of the christian faith. So, "if the bible be destroyed, what can the fundamentalists do?" Only two things: 1. Become a liberal or 2. Drop the subject completely. While (2) is the best option (1) is a good start. I intend, ultimately to push for number (2) where this couple is concerned. I think they're still in shock from the last meeting, but getting to number (1) is still a plus in my book. All the best to you and BE.

Editor's Response to Letter #518

Dear RM.

Good job and keep it up. As I have said so often, we need far more people putting forth the same kind of effort. My only reservation lies in your use of Psalm 11:3 which, by implication, refers to

believers as righteous. If there is anything millions of believers are not, it is righteous. Perverts and adulterers such as Jimmy Swaggart and Jim Bakker attest to that.

Issue No. 119

November 1992

This month's commentary will add to the list of reprehensible deeds committed by God that was begun in the June issue.

GOD (Part 5)

- **HE DEMANDED 16,000 VIRGINS BE GIVEN TO SOLDIERS AS WAR PLUNDER AND 32 BE SET ASIDE FOR HIMSELF:** Num. 31:31-40 says, "Moses and Eleazar the priest did as the Lord commanded Moses. The plunder remaining from the spoils that the soldiers took was 675,000 sheep, 72,000 cattle, 61,000 donkeys and 32,000 women who had never slept with a man.... And the half, the portion of those who had gone out to war, was....16,000 people, of which the tribute for the Lord was 32." Women rank right up there with cattle, donkeys, and sheep. And they have to be virgins, at that! Imagine a righteous and perfect God wanting 32 virgins to be set aside for himself!
- **HE ORDERS GAMBLING:** Joshua 14:2 says, "Their inheritances were assigned by lot to the nine-and-a-half tribes, as the Lord had commanded through Moses." Num. 26:52-56 says, "The Lord said to Moses, The land is to be allotted to them as an inheritance based on the number of names.... Be sure that the land is distributed by lot.... Each inheritance is to be distributed by lot among the larger and smaller groups."
- **HE REQUIRES AN UNBETROTHED VIRGIN TO MARRY HER SEDUCER:** Ex. 22:16 says, "If a man seduces a virgin who is not pledged to be married and sleeps with her, he must pay the bride-price, and she shall be his wife."
- **HE ORDERS HORSES TO BE HAMSTRUNG:** Joshua 11:6 says, "The Lord said to Joshua,...You are to hamstring their horses and burn their chariots."
- **HE SANCTIONS THE DEGRADATION OF THE ENEMIES' WOMEN:** Deut. 21:10-13 says, "When you go to war against your enemies and the Lord you God delivers them into your hands and you take captives, if you notice among the captives a beautiful woman and are attracted to her, you may take her as your wife.... After she has lived in your house and mourned her father and mother for a full month, then you may go to her and be her husband and she shall be your wife."
- **HE SANCTIONS THE BEATING OF SLAVES AS LONG AS THE SLAVE CAN ARISE AT LEAST A DAY OR TWO AFTER THE BEATING:** Ex. 21:20-21 says, "If a man beats his male or female slave with a rod and the slave dies as a direct result, he must be punished, but he is not to be punished if the slave gets up after a day or two, since the slave is his property."
- **HE REQUIRES A WOMAN TO MARRY HER RAPIST:** Deut. 22:28-29 says, "If a man happens to meet a virgin who is not pledged to be married and rapes her and they are discovered, he shall pay the girl's father fifty shekels of silver. He must marry the girl, for he has violated her. He can never divorce her as long as he lives."
- **HE TRAINS OTHERS FOR WAR:** Psalm 144:1 says, "Praise be to the Lord, my Rock, who trains my hands for war, my fingers for battle."

- **HE ORDERED THE COOKING OF FOOD WITH HUMAN FECES:** Ezek. 4:12 says, "Eat the food as you would a barley cake; bake it in the sight of the people, using human excrement as fuel."
- **HE KILLED THE WICKED AND THE RIGHTEOUS:** Ezek. 21:3-4 says, "...This is what the Lord says: I am against you. I will draw my sword from its scabbard and cut off from you both the righteous and the wicked. Because I am going to cut off the righteous and the wicked, my sword will be unsheathed against everyone from south to north."
- **HE INTENTIONALLY GAVE OUT BAD LAWS:** Ezek. 20:25 says, "I also gave them over to statutes that were not good and laws they could not live by...."
- **HE EXCUSED THE SINS OF PROSTITUTES AND ADULTERERS:** Hosea 4:14 says, "I will not punish your daughters when they turn to prostitution, nor your daughters-in-law when they commit adultery, because the men themselves consort with harlots and sacrifice with temple prostitutes...."
- **HE EXCUSED A MURDERER AND PROMISED HIM PROTECTION:** After Cain killed Abel he was banished from the Garden of Eden and the following dialogue occurred within Gen. 4:13-15. "Cain said to the Lord, 'My punishment is more than I can bear. Today you are driving me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me.' But the Lord said to him, 'Not so; if anyone kills Cain, he will suffer vengeance seven times over.' Then the Lord put a mark on Cain so that no one who found him would kill him."
- **HE KILLED A MAN WHO REFUSED TO IMPREGNATE HIS WIDOWED SISTER-IN-LAW:** Gen. 38:8-10 says, "Then Judah said to Onan, 'Lie with your brother's wife and fulfill your duty to her as a brother-in-law to produce offspring for your brother.' But Onan knew that the offspring would not be his; so whenever he lay with his brother's wife, he spilled his seed on the ground to keep from producing offspring for his brother. What he did was wicked in the Lord's sight; so he put him to death also."
- **HE AIDED RATHER THAN PUNISHED A SWINDLER:** In Gen. 28:14-15 God promised Jacob that his descendants would be like the dust of the earth and all the families of the earth would be blessed by him and his descendants. God also said he would watch over Jacob wherever he went and would not leave him. Yet, Jacob was the swindler who stole the birthright of his brother, Esau.
- **HE DOESN'T SEE ALL:** Gen. 4:14 says, "Today you (God--Ed.) are driving me (Adam--Ed.) from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence."
- **HE IS INDECISIVE:** In Gen. 18:17 the Lord says, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?"

(TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT MONTH)

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #508 from JM of Sullivan, Missouri Continues (Part e)

(Point #4 in our pamphlet was: How can Num. 23:19, which says God doesn't repent, be reconciled with Ex. 32:14 which clearly says he does?--ED.)

JM's Defense is: In Exodus 32:14 we have a figure of speech, which Mr. McKinsey ignored, called anthropopatheia which is defined by Bullinger as: "The Ascribing of Human Attributes, etc., to God...REPENTANCE is attributed to God...."

In Num. 23:19 we have the case where it is stated that God cannot repent of wrong doing, because God cannot do wrong. Notice: "God is not a man that he should lie; neither the son of man, that he should repent." This clearly shows that the repentance, here, refers to the same kind

of repentance made by man when he sins. In Exodus 32:14 we have the case of God merely taking a different course of action. The figure of speech anthropopatheia is employed so that God can condescend to man's level to allow man to know what is taking place. So there is no problem here at all because the word "repent" is used in two totally different ways.

Editor's Response to Letter #508 (Part e)

Where are you getting this figure of speech nonsense, JM? Your forerunners created a word--anthropopatheia--out of nothing concrete, managed to have it put in the dictionary, and now you would have us believe it is applicable in this instance, when there is nothing in the text that would justify such a construct. Where are you getting the idea that there are different kinds of repentance? What do you mean the text "clearly shows"? It clearly shows nothing of the sort. Scripture says God does not repent, period. It doesn't even imply, much less state, that God does not engage in the kind of repenting man does or that there is a distinction between the two.

Secondly, Ex. 32:14 most assuredly does not prove that "repent" means that God was "merely taking a different course of action." The verse states, "the Lord repented of the evil which he thought to do unto his people" and clearly shows that evil behavior was involved. Of course, if words no longer have any meaning or mean whatever any Christian propagandist chooses to apply to them, then the sky is the limit as far as the meanings of "repent" and "evil" are concerned. I operate on the principle that the Bible means what it says and says what it means. Apologists, on the other hand, especially those of a fundamentalist variety, operate on the principle that words say whatever expediency requires.

Letter #508 Continues (Part f)

(Point #5 in our pamphlet was: How can 2 Kings 8:26 which says Ahaziah began to rule at age 22, be reconciled with 2 Chron. 22:2 which says he was 42?--ED.)

JM's Defense is: A co-reign would work very nicely in there. In other words, Ahaziah began to co-reign with his father Jehoram when he was 22 and took full control of the reign when he was 42. Things were often done differently then than they are today.

Immediately someone is going to notice where Jehoram (Ahaziah's father) only reigned for 8 years. However, the text does not say that he reigned only eight years. It says he reigned 8 years in Jerusalem. One possible explanation of this would be that Jehoram reigned 8 years in Jerusalem, and then reigned longer elsewhere....

One might point out that every Judean king was said to reign in Jerusalem. True, but not every Judean king was said to have spent part of that reign elsewhere. It is implied that Jehoram did (2 Chron. 21:11) in showing that he caused Israel to move to the mountains of Judea for their worship, which did not last as ours today does. Their periods were probably long periods of time. And it specifically stated that Ahaziah did in 2 Chron. 22:6-9.

Editor's Response to Letter #508 (Part f)

What gobbledygook! Believe me, my friend, you'll never get an award for reading the Bible with a critical eye. You are so obsessed with defending the book at all costs that you don't hesitate to throw caution to the winds. You shot yourself in the foot right off the bat by saying, "A co-reign would work very nicely in there." How do you "co-reign" with a dead man? Second Kings 8:24 says, "So Joram (Jehoram--Ed.) slept with his fathers, and was buried with his father in the city of David; and Ahaziah his son reigned in his stead...." And the 26th verse says, "Ahaziah was 22 years old when he began to reign...." Second Chron. 21:20-21 says, "Jehoram was 32 years old when he began to reign, and he reigned 8 years in Jerusalem; and he departed with no one's regret. They buried him in the city of David, but not in the tombs of the kings." Second Chron.

22:1-2 continues by saying, "the inhabitants of Jerusalem made Ahaziah his youngest son their new king.... So Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah reigned. Ahaziah was 42 years old when he began to reign, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem...." From these verses we can see that both Kings and Chronicles clearly show that Ahaziah's father was dead when Ahaziah began to reign, whether he was 22 or 42. Obviously there could not have been a "co-reign." Second, where on earth are you getting this "co-reign" nonsense anyway? Nothing whatever in the text says anything about a co-reign. Show me one verse that even implies such an arrangement, let alone states as much. Third, where does the text say that Ahaziah took "full control" when he became 42? You have quite an imagination. Moreover, that isn't even relevant. Any kind of co-ruledship would still mean that he was ruling. If he reigned he ruled, and if he ruled he reigned. The text says he "began to rule" and that is all that counts. The degree of rule doesn't matter; all that matters is that he reigned and the age at which it began. Fourth, since you created this co-reign gimmick out of nothing, can you provide one other instance of a co-reign in the entire Bible? In fact, can you provide one other instance of a co-reign in all of ancient history, be it biblical or otherwise? Please be specific with names, dates, and places. And lastly, I fail to see the relevance of your argument about Jehoram ruling in some other place besides Jerusalem. Moreover, 2 Chron. 21:11, which you cite as proof, says, "He made high places in the hill country of Judah, and led the inhabitants of Jerusalem into unfaithfulness and made Judah go astray" and certainly doesn't prove Jehoram "caused Israel to move to the mountains of Judea for their worship...." It says he made high places in the hill country and led the people into unfaithfulness. It doesn't say he led all of Israel into the hill country or ruled from that region.

Letter #508 Continues (Part g)

(Point #6 in our pamphlet was: How can Ex. 33:20, which says no man can see God's face and live, be squared with Gen. 32:30, which says a man saw his face and his life was preserved?--ED.)

JM's Defense is: This is a case where Mr. McKinsey did not look at how the words were used in the sentences. Leupold said concerning Genesis 32:30: "But this experience centered in a personal encounter with God, a direct meeting with God, a seeing of him, though not with the eye of the body. Does not the whole experience, then, sum itself up as a seeing of God and living to tell about it...." Jacob did not literally see God's face, but the whole experience is called a face to face meeting because he was in close connection with God in this confrontation.

Moses, however, had asked to literally see God's face with his eyes. He could not do that and live because to be able to see God one would have to be as God is, a spirit. (John 4:24, 1 John 4:1-2)

Editor's Response to Letter #508 (Part g)

Your problem is that since the literal meaning of the words is not what you want to hear, JM, you simply choose to ignore them and concoct an interpretation more to your liking. What do you mean by saying God was seen "not with the eye of the body" and "Jacob did not literally see God's face"? Of course he did. What does the text say? "I HAVE SEEN GOD FACE TO FACE AND MY LIFE IS PRESERVED." What are you looking for? This is by no means the only verse that says God was literally seen. Num. 14:14 says, "thou Lord art seen face to face." In Job 42:5, while talking to God, Job says, "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now my eye sees thee." And Isaiah 6:5 says, "...for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts." How could the text be clearer? You should also read Psalm 63:2, Ex. 33:11, 24:11 and Amos 7:7-8. Are you going to symbolize all of these verses too? Why don't you just allegorize the entire book and be done with it and stop criticizing Christian liberals for practicing the same behavior? You and nearly all of your fundamentalistic compatriots are just like the liberals you decry. You don't hesitate to employ a figurative meaning when boxed into a corner. The only difference between

you and they is that you resist more vehemently and have to be dragged kicking and screaming toward the unavoidable. (TO BE CONTINUED)

Letter #519 from JG of Altadena, California

Dennis.

In one of your previous periodicals (June 1990) you gave reference to Jesus saying that the hand of his betrayer was on this table. One reference said Jesus said this during supper and another reference after supper. I checked the KJV to cross-reference these verses; they all seemed to say Jesus made this statement during supper. You were quoting from Craveri who gave a list of NT events chronologically opposite from one book to another.... Matthew, Mark, and Luke all seem to say Jesus made this statement during supper. I debate with Christians over statements in the bible and I like to be accurate. If I am not, then that means I get egg on my face. Anyhow you are doing a Good job.

Editor's Response to Letter #519

Dear JG.

Stated verbatim, the 14th example given in the June 1990 issue is as follows: In Luke 22:14-21 Jesus said during supper that the hand of his betrayer was with him on the table, while in Matt. 26:21 and Mark 14:18 Jesus made this statement after supper. I should have said Jesus made the statement "during" supper in Matt. 26:21 and Mark 14:18 while he made it "after" supper in Luke 22:14-21. Sorry about the mixup but I inadvertently reversed the two key words. Luke 22:20-21 clearly shows that he made the statement after supper in Luke, and the contradiction remains, however.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #520 from HB of Alexandria, Virginia

Dear Mr. McKinsey.

Thank you for filling my order for issues 1 to 46 of Biblical Errancy and for enclosing the index for issues 1 to 115.

The Ten Commandments have apparently been omitted from your publication. This is a surprise because they have been praised and defended loudly, appear in many public places, and are held up by many churches as the finest set of moral principles. But they are terribly deficient.

They do not prohibit anti-Semitism, arson, atomic bombs, bacteriological warfare, beating, bestiality, bigamy, castration, drug addiction, drunkenness, exhibitionism, false advertising, forgery, fornication, fraud, gluttony, incest, pedophilia, poison gas, pollution, prostitution, racial segregation, racism, rape, sexual harassment, sexism, torture, and vagrancy.

The Ten Commandments are appropriate for a primitive group wandering through a wilderness who have no sense of values. They are inadequate for a modern society. You should examine them critically.

Editor's Response to Letter #520

Dear HB.

I can only assume that your final comment arises from the fact that you are not yet thoroughly acquainted with BE. After you complete the first 46 issues we sent, I recommend that you read issues 46 through 118 as well. I think you will then see that we have covered the Ten Commandments rather well. Incidentally, you could add slavery and child abuse to your litany.

Letter #521 from FT of Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Dear Dennis.

I have been ordering 12 prior issues of BE every month for several months and have finally read them all. From now on it's back to one BE per month. I hope the withdrawal symptoms will not be too severe. Thank you for your excellent publication.

I, too, like RS of Denton, Texas (Letter #503 in BE #115), have been writing to the producers of tracts when I receive one. I would never have attempted this without the ammunition from BE.

Letter #522 from NS of Richmond, Indiana

Dear Dennis....

Want you to know I have had an on-going written debate with a "preaching minister" from a town near Richmond. It certainly has caused me to delve deeper into what has become an important subject to me. Thanks to BE, and other publications, plus my own research, I am learning! The fellow is a delightful man, for I stopped and met him, but, as I told him, he is awash in the stormy sea of Christianity with a leaky boat and no oars. We have exchanged two or three letters of considerable length, each one debating the other, and I LOVE it! As you well know, there is nothing he can come up with that there isn't an answer to, and nothing gives me more pleasure than to point this out. We are civil, polite and each very committed to the cause that we believe is the truth. Of course, I KNOW mine is, and I can prove it.

Enjoyed your replies to the "Anonymous Dayton Observer" that I finally got to read in the July issue. He's almost, but not quite, as bad as Jim White, who is totally irrational. Nothing is more amusing than a committed Christian explaining away the obvious inconsistencies in the Bible. Keep going at 'em, Slugger: you've got a lot of fans out here.

Letter #523 from RS of Sherman Oaks, California

Dear Dennis.

B.E. is right on the mark for exposing the hundreds, if not thousands of errors, inconsistencies, fallacies and contradictions of the Bible. We need the honest, direct evaluation that B.E. provides. Unfortunately, most Christians seem to prefer apologetic sophistry over honest, direct examination; not only do they fail to apply common sense when it comes to the Bible's innumerable errors, but they also don't follow its advice to "check ye the spirit."

The recent issues of B.E. give chapter and verse evidence of the "spirit" inhabiting the Bible. As B.E. shows, and has clearly shown in the past, the "Biblical" god is lacking in all areas of common decency. Can this be the god Christians want us to love, follow, and admire?.... The contradictions of the Bible stand as monumental testimony to Biblical error and vindication of B.E.'s brave stance against delusory Christian claims. Thank you again for your sanity-saving publication....

Letter #524 from RS of Sherman Oaks, California

Dear Dennis.

I sent a letter earlier, congratulating you for the pluck of B.E. in standing up to the fallacious doctrines of Christian fundamentalism. I have been posting BE pamphlets at college campuses, right next to fliers that advertise campus Bible Study groups; this action helps to balance the perspective of students who see the Christian advertisements, but are as yet unaware of the many errors, contradictions and fictions in the Bible. I think it is working because I don't see as many Christian fliers posted lately. Just knowing that B.E. exists seems to make people look before they leap.

Issue No. 120

December 1992

This month's commentary marks the final installment on our enumeration of God's reprehensible deeds that was begun last summer.

GOD (Part 6)

- **HE DISCOVERS WOMEN'S SECRET PARTS:** Isaiah 3:17 says, "the Lord will smite with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and the Lord will discover their secret parts."
- **HE BREAKS UP FAMILIES:** Ex. 21:2-4 says, "If you buy a Hebrew servant, he is to serve you for six years. But in the 7th year, he shall go free.... If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the woman and her children shall belong to her master, and only the man shall go free."
- **HE ORDERS THE KILLING OF CHILDREN:** Ezek. 9:6 says, "Slay utterly old and young, both maids and little children, and women...." and 1 Sam. 15:3 says, "...slay both man and woman, infant and suckling...."
- **HE KILLED OVER 50,000 PEOPLE BECAUSE A FEW LOOKED INTO AN ARK:** 1 Sam. 6:19 says, "the Lord smote the men of Beth-shemesh, because they had looked into the Ark of the Lord, even he smote of the people 50,070: and the people lamented, because the Lord had smitten many of the people with a great slaughter."
- **HE MANDATED UNLIMITED PUNISHMENT FOR LIMITED SINS:** Matt. 25:46 says, "these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal." Also note Rev. 14:11 and Mark 9:43-48.
- **AND LASTLY, HE VIOLATED HIS OWN LAWS ON NUMEROUS OCCASIONS:**
 - (1) In Ex. 20:13 he said thou shalt not kill; yet, in Deut. 32:39 and many other verses he said, "I kill, and I make alive; I wound and I heal...."
 - (2) John 4:8 and 4:16 say God is love and 1 Cor. 13:4 says love is not jealous or boastful. Yet, Deut. 4:24 says God is a consuming fire, even a jealous God. How can God be jealous when several verses say God is love and 1 Cor. says love is not jealous?
 - (3) In the Ten Commandments God says thou shalt not commit adultery; yet, Matt. 1:18 says, "This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about. His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Ghost. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly." The Holy Ghost, who is God, impregnated another being's wife. If that is not adultery, what is it?
 - (4) In Lev. 19:18 God says, "you shall not take vengeance or bear any grudge against the sons of your own people...." Yet, in Deut. 32:35 God says, "To me belongs vengeance, and recompense." God rules out taking vengeance by others, but relegates it to himself.
 - (5) In Luke 6:27 God tells us to love our enemies and do good to those who hate you. Yet, in Gen. 19:24 he rained fire and brimstone upon Sodom and Gomorrah because they had rejected him.
 - (6) Prov. 6:16 says, "there are 6 things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him" and the 19th verse says one of these is, "...a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers." Yet, Gen. 11:9 says, "That is why it was called Babel--because there the Lord confused the language of the

whole world." The Lord hates those who sow dissension even though he is responsible for all the confusion that emerged from his creation of a multitude of languages.

- (7) In Matt. 26:52 Jesus said, "Put up thy sword...for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword." Yet, in Ezek. 21:5 God says, "Then all the people will know that I the Lord have drawn my sword from its scabbard; it will not return again." If what Jesus said is true, why has the Lord not perished?
- (8) Deut. 6:16 says, "Ye shall not tempt the Lord your God," while Gen. 22:1 says, "it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham...." God tells us not to tempt, but he does.
- (9) In First John 2:15 we are told not to love the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. Yet, John 3:16 says, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have eternal life." We are not supposed to love the world, but God sure does.
- (10) And finally, Job 5:2 says, "For wrath kills the foolish man, and envy slays the silly one." Displaying wrath is to be considered anathema; yet Psalm 21:9 ("...the Lord shall swallow them up in his wrath, and the fire shall devour them"), Ex. 31:10 ("...let me alone that my wrath may wax hot against them"), and Num. 16:46 ("...for there is wrath gone out from the Lord") clearly show wrath is one of the Lord's more prominent traits.

The obvious conclusion to be drawn from all of the above is that God strongly adheres to the maxim, "Do as I say, not as I do," which parents are often condemned for practicing.

In sum and substance, the last six commentaries have proved beyond any reasonable doubt that the biblical God is one of the most reprehensible characters to have ever appeared in the annals of literature.

One can readily understand why Robert Ingersoll said on page 237 in Volume 2 of his *Works*, "It is impossible for me to conceive of a character more utterly detestable than that of the Hebrew god." Two pages later he said, "It is impossible to conceive of a more thoroughly despicable, hateful, and arrogant being, than the Jewish god." And in *Some Mistakes of Moses* he said, "A false friend, an unjust judge, a braggart, a hypocrite, a tyrant, sincere in hatred, jealous, vain and revengeful, false in promise, honest in curse, suspicious, ignorant, infamous and hideous--such is the God of the Pentateuch."

After reading the last six commentaries can you imagine anyone, any being, saying, "Yes, that's my book, that represents me, that's the way I am," especially a supposedly perfect being? Is there any figure in history with a worse record, including Adolph Hitler and Ghenghis Khan? In fact, to go even further, one would be hard-pressed to think of one good, decent act god committed in the entire OT, such that you would want to hug him around his neck, kiss him on the cheek and say, "Good job, well done, I am proud of you." The Devil comes out of the Bible looking much better than God. You would almost think the book was written by the Devil about God.

And finally, Thomas Paine appears to have encompassed the entire topic as well as anyone when he said on page 198 in *The Age of Reason*, "All our ideas of the justice and goodness of God revolt at the impious cruelty of the Bible. It is not a God, just and good, but a devil, under the name of God, that the Bible describes."

ANNIHILATIONISM--Within Christianity are several organizations, such as the Seventh-Day Adventists, the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Worldwide Church of God which deny the existence of hell. They preach, instead, a doctrine known as Annihilationism, according to which the wicked pass into nonexistence, either at death or the resurrection. Essentially, annihilationists are trying to put a more human face on Christianity and attract more followers by modifying the scare tactic of hell-fire and damnation that is so crucial to the NT. As fundamentalist Robert Morey said on page 203 in his book *Death and the Afterlife*, "As the pressures of liberalism continue, we can expect to see more neo-evangelicals moving either into Universalism or Annihilationism, either of which are acceptable to those who hold a liberal theological position."

Unfortunately for orthodox Christians, such as Southern Baptists, Annihilationism is biblically defensible as the following verses show all too well. Undoubtedly the strongest passage is found in Eccle. 3:19-21 which says, "For that which befalls the sons of men befalls beasts; even one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other; yet they all have one breath; so that man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity. All go to one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward, and the spirit of the beast goes downward to the earth." That is about as definitive as one can be. If man has no "preeminence" or "advantage" over the beasts as the RSV and the Modern Language say, then all else is for nought. Another potent verse is found in Eccle. 9:5 which says, "For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward: for the memory of them is forgotten." If there is no more reward, then it is all over, including the shouting.

As Morey said on page 216 in the same book, "The book of Ecclesiastes has always been a favorite source of proof texts for the doctrine of soul sleep" otherwise known as annihilationism. Less prominent verses are: Psalm 6:5 ("For in death there is no remembrance of thee: in the grave who shall give thee thanks?"), Psalm 88:10 ("Wilt thou do wonders for the dead? Will the dead rise and praise Thee?"), Psalm 115:17 ("The dead do not praise the Lord, nor do any who go down into the silence"), and Eccle. 9:10 ("Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going"). All of these verses state or strongly imply that once you are dead you are dead and that is that. As far as annihilationism is concerned, Freiling's cartoons summarize the situation as well as any by saying: "That's All, Folks" there isn't any more, at least not for the wicked.

Annihilationists have other arguments in their portfolio as well. For example, they cite 1 Tim. 6:15-16, which says, "...and this will be made manifest at the proper time by the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality...." If only Jesus has immortality, then the conclusion is obvious. One of the annihilationists' strongest arguments against hell is related by Morey on page 218 of his previously quoted book, where he says, "The words 'olam,' 'aion,' and 'aionios' do not mean eternity, because they are used of such temporal things as mountains. Therefore, 'eternal punishment' need not mean that the punishment is eternal in duration, but only in result."

A final argument upon which annihilationists rely is succinctly stated by Morey on page 217, "'Eternal life' means unending physical immortality or existence. Since only the righteous receive 'eternal life' at the resurrection, the wicked must pass into nonexistence. Otherwise, they too would be recipients of 'eternal life'."

So annihilationism is by no means a weak position to assume from a biblical perspective. The problem is that an even larger number of verses can be cited to refute annihilationism and prove punishment awaits the wicked after death. Matt. 25:46, Rev. 20:10, Rev. 14:11, Mark 3:29, 9:43-48, and Luke 3:17 are prime examples. All that is accomplished by citing the verses relied upon

by both sides is to expose a major biblical contradiction. What happens to people after death is by no means a clear-cut matter as far as the Bible is concerned, and all protestations to the contrary are doomed to failure. Anyone seeking a definitive description of post-death events should not go to the Bible for assistance, because only despair and disappointment await his arrival.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #508 from JM Continues from Last Month (Part h)
(Point #7 in our pamphlet was: Rom. 3:23 says "All have sinned." All means all. Yet, Gen. 6:9 says Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations. Job 1:1 and 1:8 say Job was perfect. How could these men have been perfect if all have sinned?--ED.)

JM's Defense is: This is a case where Mr. McKinsey did not give consideration of the meaning of the words of the original language. According to the Greek Bible the word perfect in Genesis 6:9 is the word "teleos" which does not mean sinless. It means complete, mature, or grown up. Noah was a complete man. He was mature in the faith.

The word for perfect in Job 1:1 and 1:8 is the word amemptos which merely means blameless, irreprehensible or without defect. It is the same word that is used in 1 Thess. 3:13 ("To the end he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God..."). In other words Job was blameless; he was a man that lived an upright life. This does not mean, however, that he never sinned. It simply means that he lived faithfully to God. The words "without defect" do not mean "sinless." Instead the connotation that is given is that one is blameless.

Editor's Response to Letter #508 (Part h)

This is another one of those problems around which you should have taken a wide detour, JM, for several reasons. First, according to *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* the word "perfect" in Gen. 6:9 comes from the Hebrew word "tamiym" which is transliterated as "taw-meem" and means without blemish, complete, perfect, sound, without spot, undefiled, and upright. Complete, mature, or grown-up are by no means the basic meaning. Second, if he was without spot or blemish, undefiled, upright, and perfect, then he was sinless. Either he was a sinner or he wasn't; there is no in between. And if he was spotless and undefiled, then he was without sin. Third, you used a Greek Bible to trace the Hebrew meaning of a biblical term from the OT. What kind of scholarship is that? Do you use a Hebrew Bible to trace the meaning of Greek words in the NT? How do you get the meaning or derivation of Hebrew words in the OT from Greek words like "teleos" and "amemptos"? Fourth, the word "perfect," which is applied to God in Deut. 32:4, comes from the same Hebrew word as the word "perfect" in Gen. 6:9, which is applied to Noah. If God is perfect and morally sinless, then so is Noah. Second Samuel 22:31 and Psalm 18:30 say, "As for God, his way is perfect...", and this "perfect" comes from the same Hebrew word as that applied to Noah. How can God be morally perfect and Noah not be, when the same Hebrew word for perfect is applied to both? Fifth, your case with respect to Job is even weaker. You admit that the word "perfect" in Job 1:1 and 1:8 means "blameless" and without defect. How does that differ from sinless? You state, "Job was blameless; he was a man that lived an upright life. This does not mean, however, that he never sinned." Don't be ridiculous! Of course it does. If he is blameless, then he never sinned. The moment he performed any sin whatever, he would no longer be blameless or upright. He'd be a sinner. There is no in between. You are trying to draw a distinction where none exists. You make the utterly erroneous comment that, "The words without defect does not mean sinless," when, in truth, if he sinned he obviously had a defect. "Without defect" must mean he is sinless, because the instant he sinned he had a

defect. You are trying to have it both ways. You want a person who is without defect, blameless, upright, without spot and undefiled, who also sins. It is a good trick if you can do it, but only those of an apologetic mentality would be so foolish as to try. Sixth, if Noah was not sinless, as you state, if he was a sinner, as you allege, then he had no more right to be on the Ark than anyone else. So why was he saved? He should have drowned with all the rest of humanity. Apparently God was playing favorites again, since Noah had done nothing to earn his escape from death. Seventh, those who translated the KJV of the Bible chose to use the word "perfect" in Gen. 6:9, and you are implying that your knowledge of Hebrew is superior to theirs because you could have chosen a more appropriate term. And lastly, could you cite a Hebrew dictionary in which the word "perfect" in Job 1:1 and 1:8 is derived from a Hebrew term which primarily means "living faithfully to God"? Again, where are you getting this conglomeration? As I have said so often, it would be nice from the apologetic standpoint if the Bible spoke as its defenders would like, but alas, the opposite is often the case.

Letter #508 Continues (Part i)

(Point #8 in our pamphlet was: How could Moses have written the first 5 books in the Bible (the Torah), when his own death and burial is described in Deut. 34:5-6, which says, "So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab...and he buried him in a valley....?--ED.)

JM's Defense is: Why would Moses' obituary being included in the last chapter of the last book keep the rest of the Pentateuch from being written by Moses? The only reason is because Mr. McKinsey has determined that the Bible cannot be inspired by God and now he must find some excuse to try and prove that it was not. However, his contention falls because the argument does not necessitate the rest of the Pentateuch from excluding Mosaic authorship.

Editor's Response to Letter #508 (Part i)

Oh, so now you are admitting that part of the Torah is not of Mosaic origin. Fundamentalists tell us that Moses wrote the first 5 books of the Bible, and now you admit that he did not write the last part of the fifth book. In other words, you have changed your argument from he wrote the first five books of the Bible to, he wrote most of the first 5 books.

Letter #508 Continues (Part j)

(Regarding the Mosaic authorship of the Bible--Ed.) Gleason Archer said, "Before me lies a copy of Roland de Vaux's excellent volume *Archeology and the Dead Sea Scrolls*. This is a revised English edition of the *Schweich Lectures* he delivered at Oxford in 1959, published by Oxford University in 1973. On page vi is a brief foreword signed by Kathleen Kenyon, which opens with the following words: 'It is sad that Roland de Vaux did not live to see the translation of his *Schweich Lectures* appear.' This then is the kind of obituary notice that is added to the main text of the book. In other terminal works produced by famous authors, the obituary appears in the last chapter of the book. Often that obituary is not signed."

According to McKinsey, Roland de Vaux could not have done the work ascribed to him because his obituary is included in the book. This makes just about as much sense as it does to say that Moses did not write the Pentateuch because his obituary is written in the last chapter of the book.

Editor's Response to letter #508 (Part j)

The situations are not even analogous, JM. First, the sentence from de Vaux's book appears in the foreword of the book, separate from the body of the book itself, and no effort is made to give people the impression that de Vaux was the author. Second, it clearly states another person was the author. Third, the apologetic argument is that Moses wrote the Torah; whereas, no one is arguing that de Vaux wrote all of his book. Fourth, if you want proof that Moses did not write the rest of the Torah either, I strongly suggest you read the commentaries in Issues 19 and 20 of

BE. Lastly, and most important, you insidiously shifted the focus from Moses writing all of the Torah to he wrote most of it. That is not what is claimed by fundamentalists.

Letter #508 Continues (Part k)

[Point #9 in our pamphlet was: Did Solomon have 40,000 stalls for his horses (1 Kings 4:26) or 4,000 (2 Chron. 9:25), and did Solomon's house contain 2,000 baths (1 Kings 7:26) or 3,000 (2 Chron. 4:5)?--ED.]

JM's Defense is: The Number of Stalls: There were 40,000 individual horse stalls: and 4,000 in reference to the stalls accommodating horses and chariots. Mr. McKinsey has not considered that many times different methods of calculation are involved which we may or may not use today. In the latter case, there were 10 chariots and 10 horses per stall. Some of these stalls were in Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 9:25), but others were scattered out in other cities, as some have been found in Megiddo, Hazor, Ell el Hesi dating back to Solomon's time.

The Baths in Solomon's House: This was a very large container made to hold 2,000 baths, but when filled to the rim, would hold 3,000. Many cars are made to seat 6 passengers, but will carry 8 if needed.

Editor's Response to Letter #508 (Part k)

You should have stuck with the copyist's mistake defense that is standard fare for nearly all apologists, my friend, instead of striking out on your own. First, whoever heard of horses being bedded down with their chariots in the same stall? Secondly, and even more important, you say there were 40,000 individual horse stalls and then turn around and say no, there were actually 4,000 stalls with 10 chariots and 10 horses in each. If the latter is true how could there be 40,000 individual stalls with one horse in each? You are contradicting yourself by trying to have it both ways. Either you have 40,000 stalls with one horse in each, or you have 4,000 stalls with 10 horses in each. But you can't have both simultaneously. We are not involved with different methods of calculating the same situation as you allege, but in calculating two different situations which conflict.

As far as the baths are concerned, you are not even in the ballpark. We are talking about the number of baths, not the capacity of each. What does the capacity have to do with the number in his house? And what container are you talking about? Nothing is said about a container. Where are you getting that idea? Your reasoning is often so far off base that one hardly knows where to begin correcting your "thought processes."

Even if what you said were relevant, which it isn't, nothing is said about the baths being filled to the rim. You state, "This was a very large container made to hold 2,000 baths, but when filled to the rim, would hold 3,000" which is ridiculous. If it could hold 3,000 baths, then it was built to hold 3,000, not 2,000. Why not say it was built to hold 1,000 or 1,500 or 1,900 or 2,100? Why arbitrarily stop at 2,000? As I said, you should have stuck with the copyist error defense, instead of wandering into an area in which you are ill-equipped to navigate.

(To be Continued Next Month)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #525 from AS of Chicago, Illinois

Dear Dennis.

...I have had a lot of trouble finding people who will debate me. There was a lady at work who

was shocked to find out I was an atheist, but once I told her water doesn't come from rocks, donkey's don't talk, and maybe one or two other points, she just backed down. Her attitude seems to be "He's intelligent, don't hassle him, don't take him on." She still clearly believes in the Bible, but doesn't want to take me on over it....

I have had some contact with some Jehovah's Witnesses that's getting nowhere. When they recently came to my door, we started talking about the character of God. I got into his murderous nature and she ran away like a whipped puppy dog. She told me she would write with some questions; I've heard nothing. Her partner came back one other time, and, upon recognizing me, said he would check to see why she hadn't written. I haven't heard from him since either. I wrote a letter to their kingdom hall and, again, have heard nothing.

I saw a preacher's name in another publication, wrote him a letter and sent him a copy of my "Jesus Lied" file. He told me he would not engage in a written debate, only face to face. Since he lives in Oklahoma and I'm not rich, that won't happen. He's a grandstander.

If anything does happen and I end up in a good debate situation, I'll be happy to let you know.

Editor's Response to Letter #525

Dear AS.

Every knowledgeable critic of the Bible has experienced the same kind of problems. People avoid us for several reasons. First, they are obviously afraid we might bring up something they have never heard and weaken their faith in the process. Debates reek with insecurity and uncertainty. You never know what the other side might toss out. Second, Christians have been indoctrinated to believe that all critics of the Bible in general, and of Jesus in particular, are satanic agents who are incapable of being honest, sincere and accurate. Third, all religions, especially Christianity and its Bible, are confidence schemes, and what does a confidence man fear as much as anything?--EXPOSURE. You can't sell a bogus product or a fraudulent philosophy when somebody is present to reveal the truth, and does. Fourth, look at it from the apologetic perspective. Why waste time on someone who is clearly better informed than the average citizen and far more difficult to deceive, when there are millions of suckers out there, more than willing to gobble up anything that can be made to look appetizing? Most people operate far more on emotion than intellect, and for that reason are vulnerable and easy to manipulate. The methodology of religionists is no different from that of all other con artists. Fifth, religionists know it is far easier to give an uninterrupted speech before a group of neutrals and sympathizers than contend with those who are not sufficiently brainwashed to fall into lockstep. Why spend time with those with whom you feel little success will be forthcoming? And lastly, knowing they are in the majority, religionists conclude that there is nothing in it for them to jeopardize their superiority in numbers. Why risk an uncertain encounter, when you have far more to lose than gain? Ministers, priests, and rabbis are not anxious to debate knowledgeable critics of the Bible when they know that most of the observers will be of a religious persuasion before the encounter begins. Why engage in debate before a sympathetic audience, when you could very easily lose more adherents than you gain?

The philosophy I follow in regard to this whole issue is the exact opposite of that used by biblicists. Most religionists seek to avoid those who want to discuss the validity of the Bible, while I will not spend much time with those who won't discuss the Book's validity. I won't be preached to or lectured by those who seek only a one-sided presentation with no cross-examination. If they want to debate it, then I'm their man. But if all they want is prejudiced pontification, like TV preachers--if all they seek is a biased monologue, like a radio evangelist--forget it. My time is far too valuable and my concerns far too extensive for such indolence.

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WORKS--One of the most prominent themes running throughout fundamentalist and conservative Christian literature is that you are saved by faith in Jesus Christ. The number of quotes one could relate in this regard is rather sizable so there is no need to belabor the obvious at this juncture. What isn't so obvious, however, is that a large number of verses clearly say that you are saved by works or good deeds. Faith is not sufficient. In fact, many biblical verses show that faith is either unnecessary or useless without works. James 2:17 says, "Even so faith, if it has not works, is dead, being alone." James 2:14 says, "What does it profit, my brethren, though a man say he has faith, and has not works? Can faith save him?" And Matt. 7:21 says, "Not every one who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." So faith without works is ineffectual. According to much of Scripture, your behavior has far more to do with your ultimate destiny than any beliefs, ideas, or concepts lying at the core of your thought processes. The biblical message that constantly emerges is that it is what you do that counts, not what you believe. Because belief in salvation by works is unacceptable to most of Christianity and, in fact, is decried repeatedly and vociferously in most apologetic literature, we feel obligated to present the other side and expose "Salvation in Jesus Christ" for the fraud that it is. All of the following verses show that acts, performance, conduct, and behavior are what matter in the final analysis, not outlook, philosophy, and beliefs.

- Micah 6:8 says, "...what does the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God." Note well! All one need do to meet God's requirements is to be just, love mercy and be humble. Nothing is said about believing in anything. Good deeds are sufficient.
- Another powerful citation is found in Mark 10:17-19 (See also: Matt. 19:16-18 and Luke 18:18-22) in which a man says to Jesus, "Good master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life. And Jesus said to him, Why call thou me good? There is none good but one, that is God. Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honor thy father and thy mother...and go thy way, sell whatever you have and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven and come, take up the cross and follow me." In other words, a man asked Jesus what he had to do to be saved, and Jesus provided him a laundry list of obligatory good deeds. At no time did Jesus tell him to believe in anything, including himself. Good behavior, alone, is sufficient. That is salvation by works. One can't help but note that Jesus only listed 5 of the Ten Commandments. Apparently the others are not crucial for salvation.
- In Luke 10:25-28 a lawyer tempted Jesus by saying, "Master, what must (Note carefully that he says must--Ed.) I do to inherit eternal life?" and Jesus said to him, "What is written in the law? How readest thou?" The lawyer answered and

said, "Thou shalt love the lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself." And Jesus said to him, "Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live." So, Christianity's founder, himself, says that loving the Lord and your neighbor has more to do with salvation than faith in Jesus.

Another example of works being thrust to the forefront is found in Ezek. 18:4-9, which says, "...the soul that sins, it shall die. But if a man be just, and do that which is lawful and right...has walked in my statutes, and has kept my judgments, to deal truly; he is just, he shall surely live...." Again, nothing is said about belief or believing in anything. Good deeds, following God's statutes, and doing what is just and right are all that is required. That could be accomplished by anyone who has ever lived and one need never have heard of Jesus or the Bible. Rom. 2:13 says, "(For not the hearers of the law are just before God) but the doers of the law shall be justified." It says "doers" are justified, not "believers." First Cor. 7:19 in the NIV says, "Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God's commands is what counts. If keeping the commandments is what counts, then belief is of little import. That is also the message to be found in Rev. 22:14, which says, "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." Eccle. 12:13 is another powerful verse in favor of salvation by works, and says, "...Fear God and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man." Notice it says the "whole duty." There are no other requirements, such as believing in something or someone. Acts 10:35 also says that in every nation, "He that fears him, and works righteousness, is accepted with him." So, clearly works are primary according to these verses.

The Book of James is exceptionally rich in verses that focus on the importance of works over faith. James 2:24 flatly states, "You see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only." James 2:21 says, "Was not Abraham our father justified by works?" James 2:25 says, "Was not Rahab the harlot justified by works when she received the messengers?" James 2:20 says, "Faith without works is dead." James 2:26 says, "For as the body without spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." And James 1:27 says, "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this. To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction and to keep himself unspotted from the world." Notice that nothing is said in any of these verses about believing in anything. Visiting the fatherless and widows, in other words good deeds, are all that is required to have an undefiled and pure religion.

Works are also the focus of attention in Luke 18:29-30, in which Jesus says, "There is no man that has left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake, who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting." Good behavior is also stressed over ritual in 1 Cor. 7:19, which says, "Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God." John 6:27 says, "Labour not for the meat which perishes, but for that meat which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man shall give to you." Notice it says "labour," not "believe." Matt. 7:24 says, "Whoever hears these sayings of mine, and does them, I

will liken him to a wise man, which built his house upon a rock." Again, notice it says "does" not "believes." Works, not belief, are further stressed in Luke 19:8-9, which says, "Zacchaeus stood, and said to the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusations, I restore him fourfold. And Jesus said to him, This day has salvation come to this house, forasmuch as he also is a son of Abraham." The key verbs--give, taken, and restore--are words of action, not belief. Another key citation that is rich in action verbs is Psalm 15:1-3 which says, "O Lord, who shall sojourn in thy tent? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He who walks blamelessly, and does what is right, and speaks truth from his heart; who does not slander with his tongue, and does no evil to his friend, nor takes up a reproach against his neighbor...." The main verbs are "walks," "does," "speaks," and "takes", and not one stresses beliefs or thoughts. Deut. 10:12-13 says, "And now Israel, what does the Lord thy God require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, To keep the commandments of the Lord, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good?" Every one of the verbs--fear, walk, love, serve, keep--embodies works over faith or belief. Other verses that clearly show works are of far greater importance in the salvation scenario are Gen. 4:7 ("If you do well, will you not be accepted?"), 2 Peter 1:10 ("...for if you do these things, you shall never fall"), 1 Cor. 9:24 ("Know you not that they which run in a race run all, but one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain"), Matt. 25:31-46, 1 John 3:7, and James 1:25.

And finally, a sizable number of verses clearly state that the ultimate reward, heaven, belongs to those who commit good deeds. Faith isn't even considered. Key verses in this regard are: Rev. 22:12 ("...my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be"), Matt. 16:27 ("For the Son of Man shall come...and then he shall reward every man according to his works"), Rom. 2:6 ("The righteous judgment of God; who will render to every man according to his deeds"), 2 Cor. 5:10 ("For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to what he has done, whether it be good or bad"), Psalm 62:12 ("...for thou renderest to every man according to his work"), John 5:28-29 ("Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, to the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil to the resurrection of damnation"), Ezek. 7:3 ("...and will judge thee according to thy ways"), Ezek. 18:30 and 33:20 ("I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways"), Gal. 6:7-8 ("...for whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap. For he that sows to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that sows to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting"), Rev. 2:23 ("I will give to every one of you according to your works"), Rev. 20:12-13 ("And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works...and they were judged every man according to their works").

Many more verses are available but the point has been carved in granite. As far as biblical theology is concerned, when it comes to the final decision on the last day, an

overwhelming number of verses clearly show that man's ultimate destiny will be based on behavior and not beliefs. Works will be the final determinant, not faith. If faith gets into the act or, worse yet, becomes the main consideration, then fundamentalists face a dilemma of the first magnitude. What happens to someone who lives an exemplary life but never accepts Jesus as his savior? If he goes to hell, as fundamentalists predict, then he most assuredly will not have been rewarded for good behavior, as is so often promised in Scripture. All of the verses that predict, promise, or prophesy that the final reward of mankind will be based on works rather than deeds present an insurmountable problem for anyone who claims that one's ultimate destiny hinges on whether or not he accepts Jesus Christ as his personal savior. Verses such as John 14:6 ("I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man comes to the Father, but by me"), John 3:18 ("He that believes on him is not condemned: but he that believes not is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God"), John 3:36 ("He that believes on the Son has everlasting life; and he that believes not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abides on him"), and 1 John 5:12 ("He that has the Son has life; and he that has not the Son of God has not life") place fundamentalists and their allies in a horrible predicament. If belief in Jesus is the only way, as these verses allege and fundamentalists believe, what are they going to do about all of the verses that say you are saved by works, and deeds will be the primary determinant of your ultimate fate? Equally important, what happens to those people who died never having accepted Jesus, but having led virtually immaculate lives?

Probably the most important ramification of all, however, is that if works are the primary determinant of one's destiny, then Christianity in general and the Bible in particular become all but irrelevant. Anyone from any religion or no religion can perform good deeds and attain salvation. Jesus ceases to be a factor of any importance.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Editor's Response to Letter #508 Continues from Last Month (Part I)

[Point #10 in our pamphlet was: Paul says that Christianity lives or dies on the Resurrection (1 Cor. 15:14, 17). Yet, why would it be of any consequence when the Widow of Nain's son, Jairus's daughter, Lazarus, and many others rose before Jesus? By the time he rose, this was actually a common occurrence. I would think it would have been met by a resounding yawn rather than surprise. Adam's act of coming into the world as a full grown adult is much more spectacular--ED.]

JM's Defense is:

Mr. McKinsey thinks that Paul was teaching that the resurrection itself was special. Paul never taught this idea. In Christ's life, he was sinless. In his death and resurrection he overcame death for us. That is what makes it so special. Jesus Christ was the only one who lived a sinless life, died and was raised to die no more. All of those together are what makes his resurrection so important. Had Jesus not lived a sinless life, his resurrection would mean nothing more than the others. Had he lived

the sinless life, and not been raised, his death would have meant nothing. However, when all this is applied together, the end result is salvation for man-kind....

This is the same as saying that hearing saves (John 5:25); or that belief saves (John 20:30-31); or that repentance saves (Luke 13:3); or that confession saves (Romans 10:10); or that baptism saves (1 Peter 3:21). All of these are said to save, but there is not a one of them that will save all by itself. When they are all combined, when a person does all of them, salvation from past sins is the result. The same thing is true with Paul's statement about the resurrection in 1 Cor. 15:17.

Editor's Response to Letter #508 (Part l)

Paul was not teaching the resurrection was special? Are you serious? Have you taken leave of your NT senses? The verses I cited from 1 Corinthians clearly show that Paul felt the whole ball-game rose or fell on the Resurrection. What did he say? Without the Resurrection your faith is in vain and you are still in your sins. That is what he said and that is about as definite as one can be. Second, you say that Jesus was the only one to die no more. How do you know those who rose before him died again? Would you please cite chapter and verse to justify that allegation? You certainly couldn't be making this assumption based on anything in Scripture; for nothing is said about the subsequent lives of these people. Third, would you also please cite chapter and verse to show where Paul ties the Resurrection and sinlessness together? If anything, this is the idea that "Paul never taught." At no time are they related in the manner you describe, and your efforts represent nothing more than a transparent attempt to extricate your beloved book from an obvious dilemma. Fourth, you say that, "Paul was only dealing with one aspect of salvation; the resurrection." Precisely! And that's why your efforts to bring sinlessness into the picture are wholly unwarranted. He was only discussing the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15, and your attempt to drag in sinlessness is biblically unsupportable. Fifth, after saying that hearing, belief, repentance, confession, and baptism save us, you allege that, "there is not one of them that will save by itself." Nowhere does the Bible say they are tied together or one necessitates the others. You can't make that judgment based on either Scripture or common sense. It's ridiculous and analogous to saying: a Ford is a car; a Honda is a car; a Buick is a car, and a Pontiac is a car; but none of them are cars unless they are all cars. Each is independent of the other and is to be judged on its own merits.

Letter #508 Continues (Part m)

Why was the resurrection of Jesus a surprise after other resurrections had taken place? In every other case these people were resurrected by the power of God, given by the Holy Spirit, through Jesus Christ (cf. Matthew 12:28). In this case, Jesus was raised directly by the Father (Acts 2:22-24; Romans 6:3-5).... In Jesus' case, there was no intervention; it came directly through God....

Editor's Response to Letter #508 (Part m)

You say that in every case except that of Jesus, people were resurrected by the power of God, given by the Holy Spirit, through Jesus Christ, and then you quote Matt. 12:28, which says, "But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the

kingdom of God has come upon you." Matt. 12:28 isn't even relevant to the issue. What does casting out demons have to do with being resurrected? Apparently you were desperate for a verse, and that was the only one available. Secondly, you artificially created a distinction where no substantial difference lies. You state that "these people were resurrected by the power of God" while Jesus "was raised directly by the Father." All you are saying is that the final source for the resurrection of everyone was God; so where is a difference of real substance? In fact, what difference does it make how they were raised? The fact is that they died and ascended from the grave. And lastly, you say that, "these people were resurrected by the power of God," while Jesus was "raised directly by the Father." Yet, one of your own sources for the latter allegation is Acts 2:24, which says, "Whom God has raised up." It does not say "the Father"; it says "God raised Jesus." And that is the same being you hold responsible for the resurrection of all those who preceded Jesus. So where is the distinction?

Letter #508 Continues (Part n)

[Point #11 in our pamphlet: Was Jehoiachin 18 years old when he began to reign in Jerusalem and did he reign 3 months (2 Kings 24:8) or was he 8 years old and reigned 3 months and 10 days (2 Chron. 36:9) and did Nebuzaradan come to Jerusalem on the 7th (2 Kings 25:8) or 10th (Jer. 52:12) day of the 5th month?--ED.]

JM's Defense is:

One possible explanation is that Jehoiachin was 8 years old when he began to co-reign with his father.... If Mr. McKinsey has problems with a child co-reigning with his father at such an early age, we only need remind him that Joash sat on the throne by himself at the age of 7 (2 Chron. 24:1).

Editor's Response to Letter #508 (Part n)

Surely you aren't going to rely on more of this co-reign nonsense, JM! There is no reason to discuss this dodge any longer. Again, how do you co-reign with a dead man? You should have consulted the text more closely before you leaped into this quagmire. Second Kings clearly states, "So Jehoiakim slept with his fathers; and Jehoiachin his son reigned in his stead." Jehoiachin had no father to "co-reign" with.

Secondly, your point with reference to Joash proves my argument, not yours. You readily admit he reigned "on the throne by himself" and that is precisely my point. He did not co-reign with anyone. Why on earth did you even mention Joash? I suggest that you devote more effort to creating logical connections in your reasoning processes. You often make leaps in thought that are either irrelevant, innocuous, or erroneous. You really should work on this. Seriously! I'm not being facetious or patronizing. You are exhibiting traits common to those infected by the religious malady, which always has a negative influence on the ability to reason.

Letter #508 Continues (Part o)

Did he reign 3 months or 3 months and 10 days? His actual reign (by himself) was, no doubt, 3 months and 10 days (2 Kings 24:8): rounded off to 3 months (2 Chron. 36:9). For example one puts his age of 37 on an application for a loan, when actually he is

37 and 3 months and 5 days old. Instead of putting the exact age, he rounds it off to 37. Since this is done by most people even today, why does McKinsey consider this as a contradiction, when it is found in the Bible?....

Editor's Response to Letter #508 (Part o)

Your rounding off explanation is no answer whatever. Whether the correct figure is 3 months or 3 months and 10 days is of no consequence. What is of immense importance is the fact that one of the figures, and possibly both, is erroneous. If someone says he is 37 years old when additional days or months are involved, he is incorrect. But his figure is acceptable because the creditor does not demand perfection. Biblicists, on the other hand, claim the Bible is perfect. There are no mistakes or errors contained therein. Perfection is demanded. When dealing with perfection, approximations don't count and that is why the Bible erred. You have to be on-target at all times. We aren't pitching horseshoes. No errors of any kind are allowed in any book written by a perfect being.

Letter #508 Continues (Part p)

Did Nebuzaradan come to Jerusalem on the 7th day of the 5th month, or did he come on the 10th day of the 5th month? This is a case where Mr. McKinsey failed to carefully read what the Bible said. Second Kings 25:8-9 says, "And in the 5th month on the 7th day of the month...came Nebuzaradan...unto Jerusalem: and he burnt the house of the Lord..." While Jer. 52:12-13 says, "Now in the 5th month in the 10th day of the month...came Nebuzaradan...into Jerusalem and burnt the house of the Lord..." One account says that he came unto Jerusalem while the other says he came into (or in other words he entered) Jerusalem. He apparently waited for 3 days to enter the city after he arrived.

Editor's Response to Letter #508 (Part p)

Like so many biblicists, JM, you have chosen the version of 2 Kings 25:8-9 which best suits your needs. If you had consulted the Jerusalem Bible you would have seen that the 8th verse says Nebuzaradan "entered Jerusalem" on the 7th day. And the New English Bible says that on the 7th, not the 10th day, Nebuzaradan...came to Jerusalem and set fire to the house of the Lord and the royal palace and burned down all the houses in the city, including the mansion of Gedaliah. For all of the latter to have been accomplished, he must have entered the city on the 7th day. In addition, 2 Kings 25:8-9 in the NEB says that Nebuzaradan came to Jerusalem AND set fire to the house of the Lord on the 7th day. In other words, both occurred on the same day. The conjunction "and" proves there was no lapse in time between the two events. (To Be Continued Next Month)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #520 from TD of Morgantown, West Virginia

These are my objections to the Christian doctrine of salvation:

The Doctrine is Incomplete because:

- (1) It is not able to specify what propositions need to be believed in order for one to be saved, or whether or not one could have any doubts about them.
- (2) It is not able to specify an "age of accountability" below which all who die are automatically saved. Such a concept seems to be both required and also absurd. (For example, it is absurd that one's eternal destiny should be a matter of luck regarding the timing of one's death.)
- (3) It is not able to specify the status of persons who lived before Christ and/or who never heard of Christ. There is an absurdity here too in that one's eternal destiny seems to be a matter of luck (the time in which one lives his/her earthly life and the information that one receives during it).

Wherever the line is drawn, it will be largely a matter of luck whether one comes to be above the line or below it. People who are born into circumstances in which they receive the right information have a chance to be saved, whereas no one else receives any such opportunity.

The Doctrine is False because:

- (1) It requires that people deserve damnation, but people do not deserve damnation. Both their beliefs and behavior are totally determined by natural causes and/or predestined by God himself (as is indicated in many places in the Bible). No one deserves anything for that which is totally determined and/or predestined.
- (2) It requires that loving God and believing in Christ, both of which we are commanded to do according to the Bible (1 John 3:23), are actions subject to the will. But neither loving nor believing are actions subject to the will. We do not have control over either of them (because of biblical predestination-Ed.).

Letter #521 from A.W.L of Terre Haute, Indiana

Dear Dennis.

Please note The GOSPEL MUDDLE: "Jesus is serene and sweet in his lovely parables," says one of his enthusiasts. For serenity and sweetness we recommend Jesus' famous parable of the marriage feast, in which a king who can't induce anybody to come to his feast, sends his armies to burn down the cities of the reluctant invitees, and then picks folk casually off the street and puts them in jail if they don't happen to be wearing tuxedos. Or perhaps we shall be referred to the parable in which we are urged to "make friends with the mammon of unrighteousness," or to the tissue of absurdities in the parable of the virgins, or to the economic parable of the employer who pays no more for a day's work than for an hour's work. Perhaps the enthusiast will explain to us why, in one text, Jesus is supposed to speak in parables so that his hearers will not learn the truth, and in another text he is said to teach in parables so as to be more democratic than the Scribes and Pharisees. Any Christian scholar who touches the subject at all, ought to know that all Jewish teachers at that time used parables--there are hundreds in the Talmud--and most of the so-called parables of Jesus are filched from the rabbis, and made in large part nonsensical in the gospel version.

Editor's Note:

We would again like to stress that the post office does not automatically forward BE to your new address if you move. You must contact your old post office about this matter. Several of our subscribers have moved and failed to receive subsequent issues of BE.

Issue No. 122

February 1993

FAITH (Part 1)--Last month's commentary focused on the large number of verses stressing a view deemed anathema to most of Christendom, that salvation comes through works rather than faith in Jesus. And although a very strong case can be made in favor of works, an equally strong argument can be made in favor of faith. So many statements, comments, acts, and quotations are available from the Bible, that next month's commentary will be devoted to this vital issue as well.

Generally speaking, verses in support of faith as the road to salvation can be grouped into 2 broad categories: those which allow one path only and those in which faith is deemed a road to salvation but not necessarily the road, or the only road. The first category is undoubtedly composed of the most powerful comments in defense of salvation by faith, and is well represented by such verses as:

- John 14:6 ("I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man cometh unto the Father but by me"),
- John 3:18 ("He that believeth on him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already"),
- John 3:36 ("He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him"),
- 1 John 5:12 ("He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life"),
- John 8:24 ("...ye shall die in your sins: for if you believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins"),
- Acts 16:30-31 ("What must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house"),
- and Acts 4:12 ("Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved").

Notice the employment of the obligatory term *must* in the last two verses.

These are the 7 most important utterances in favor of faith, because each not only says you are saved by faith but that you are saved by faith alone. There is no other route. There is one route, and one route only, and that route is faith in Jesus Christ.

Contrary to the belief of some, one verse that does not belong in this category because of an additional requirement is Mark 16:16 ("He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned"). This verse does not qualify for entry, because one must not only believe but be baptized as well. Belief alone is insufficient. Another verse that doesn't quite make the grade is John 6:28-29 ("What must we do, to be doing the works of God? Jesus answered them, This is the work of God, that you believe on him whom he has sent"). Even though belief in Jesus is stressed, this verse is disqualified because the key word "must" in the RSV, ASV, NEB, NAB, and NIV is translated as "shall" in the KJV, NWT, and NASB, and "should" in the Modern Language and Living Bible versions. The degree of imprecision and conflict between the various versions of this verse obviate any possibility of it being a definitive statement in favor of salvation by faith only. "Shall" and "should" are not as definitive as "must." Another verse that doesn't qualify is 1 Cor. 3:11 ("For no other foundation can any one lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ"). It's too vague. It doesn't say you have to believe in Jesus or have faith in Jesus. It could very well mean that all you need do is perform good deeds or follow in his footsteps. Another verse that can't be included is Heb. 11:6 ("But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him"). Because of the strong emphasis on faith and employment of the word "must," it would appear to meet the essential requirements for category #1. But wait a minute! Faith in what? Not faith in Jesus as one's savior, but faith in the existence of God. Under that standard a wide assortment of people, including Muslims and Jews, would qualify. And lastly, another citation that is just too nebulous to be included in category #1 is John 15:4-5 ("Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can you except you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing"). The problem in this instance is with the word "abide." What does it mean? Does it mean belief in Jesus as one's savior, or does it mean following in the footsteps of Jesus by practicing his alleged good deeds, as is implied by "bringeth forth much fruit"? Is faith or works the key element? The question remains unresolved.

One of the more interesting conflicts between faith and works adherents arises from the fact that faith-alone adherents allege that prior to the death of Jesus on the cross, one was, indeed, saved by works. But after the cross, salvation became possible only through faith in Jesus Christ as one's savior. Unfortunately for faith-alone proponents, this defense won't stand the strain of critical analysis. A significant number of verses show that people were saved by faith prior to the cross as well. Prime examples are:

- Rom. 4:13 ("The promise to Abraham and his descendants, that they should inherit the world, did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith"),
- Rom. 4:2-5 ("For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness'"),

- Gal. 3:14 ("That in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith"),
- Gal. 3:6-7 ("Even as Abraham believed God, it was accounted to him for righteousness. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham"),
- Hebrews 11:31 ("By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believeth not"),
- Heb. 11:7 ("By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, took heed and constructed an ark for the saving of his household; by this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness which comes by faith"),
- and Rom. 4:20-24 ("Abraham...grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was 'reckoned to him as righteousness.' But the words, 'it was reckoned to him,' were written not for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be reckoned to us who believe in him that raised from the dead Jesus our Lord,...").

The major weakness in these verses from the perspective of salvation-by-works adherents, however, is that none of them clearly says you are saved by believing in Jesus. Yes, they allude to people being saved by faith prior to the cross. But, faith in what? That's the issue. It could very well be faith in God, which would include millions of non-Christians.

As far as this whole issue is concerned, it is important for freethinkers to not only be aware of key "salvation by faith" verses, but why some verses are too weak to apply. They should take special note of those few verses in which salvation by faith is deemed to be the only route to heaven, because they are the only comments upon which fundamentalists and other faith adherents can rely with any real degree of integrity. Next month's commentary will focus on Category #2, which is composed of all those verses which allege faith is a path to salvation, but not necessarily the only path to salvation. Other options are available.

(To Be Concluded Next Month)

EXCLUDED LITERATURE--One of the least discussed, but most important aspects having to do with biblical history, is the large number of books that vied for entry into what has come to be known as the Canon, but were excluded for one reason or another. Literally scores of books were considered for possible inclusion into the Bible, and nearly every writing had supporters to one degree or another. But, alas, religious politics had far more to do with the selection of what books gained admittance into Scripture than any adherence to divine inspiration or heavenly intervention. This is aptly described in a book entitled *The Origin and Growth of the Bible*. Because of the book's accuracy and poignancy, we are providing the following extended excerpt found on pages 164 through 169:

...no fewer than sixteen books are wanting from the OT which seemingly ought to be there; at least they are referred to in various places in the Bible as if they were equally

authoritative with books which are included in the Canon. So far as we know, all of these books, with one exception, are lost. Their names are: *The Book of the Wars of the Lord* (Num. 21:14), *The Book of Jasher* (Joshua 10:13 and 2 Sam. 1:18), *The Book of the Manner of the Kingdom* written by Samuel (1 Sam. 10:25), *The Books of Nathan and Gad* concerning King David (1 Chron. 29:29), *The Book of the Acts of Solomon* (1 Kings 11:41), *The Book of Enoch* (Jude 14 and 15), *The Books of Nathan, Ahijah, and Iddo* concerning King Solomon (2 Chron. 9:29), *Solomon's Songs, Parables, and Treatises on Natural History* (1 Kings 4:32), *The Book of Shemaiah* concerning King Rehoboam (2 Chron. 12:15), *The Book of Jehu* concerning Jehoshaphat (2 Chron. 20:34), *The Book of Isaiah* concerning King Uzziah (2 Chron. 26:22), *The Words of the Seers to King Manasseh* (2 Chron. 33:18-19), *The Book of Lamentations over King Josiah* (2 Chron. 35:25), *The Volume of Jeremiah* burned by Jehudi (Jer. 36:2, 6, 23), *The Chronicles of the Kings of Judah* (mentioned repeatedly in Kings), and *The Chronicles of the Kings of Israel* (mentioned repeatedly in Kings). Why were these books allowed to perish? Why were they left out of the OT? If scripture writers themselves referred to them as of equal authority with their own writings, how can a line be drawn between them and genuine scripture? Indeed, what is it that constitutes genuine scripture? But these sixteen books are not all that we get traces of.

A second list of 18 writings, still existing and generally known as the OT 'Pseudepigraphal' books, must also be noticed. Their names are as follows: *The Testament of Solomon, The History of Asenath, Joseph's wife, The Apocalypse of Baruch, The Book of Elias the Prophet, The Book of the Secrets of Enoch, The Third Book of Esdras, The Fourth Book of Esdras, The Ascension of Isaiah, The Book Jubilees, 'Little Genesis,' The Testament of Job, The Third and Fourth Books of Maccabees, The Fifth Book of Maccabees, The Assumption of Moses, The Preaching of Noah to the Antediluvians, The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, The Psalter of Solomon, and the Testament of Adam.* According to our standards today, the value of these books is not great. Some of them, however, we know exerted a good deal of influence upon early Christian thought, and were held in high esteem even by scholars like Origen.

Of much higher value is a third list of 14 books known as the OT Apocrypha. These are: *1 Esdras, 2 Esdras, Tobit, Judith, The rest of the chapters of the Book of Esther, The Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, The Song of the Three Holy Children, The History of Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, The Prayer of Manasseh, 1st Maccabees, and 2nd Maccabees.* These OT apocryphal books are all extant, and are more or less familiar to the public. They are found in the Septuagint, the translation of the OT into Greek, made a century or two before Christ. The Roman Catholic Church claims that they are true scripture, and prints them as a part of her Bible. Protestants, however, take the responsibility of casting them out; though now and then a Protestant Bible (generally a large one for family or pulpit use)...contains them. Whether these fourteen apocryphal books ought to be in the Bible or not is a question upon which scholars have never agreed, and upon which the Christian world today is about evenly divided. That some of them are superior not only as literature, but in respect to their moral and religious teachings, to several of the books that are now in the Bible, is

certain. For example, no unprejudiced mind can hesitate for a moment to place the religious value of the apocryphal Wisdom of Solomon or Ecclesiasticus above that of the canonical Esther or Ecclesiastes.

Passing now from the OT to the New, what do we find? Are the books that appear in our NT Canon all that were written in connection with the origin of the Christian movement? Or, if others were written, how many others? And was there any clear line by which the two classes were separated?

The number of NT apocryphal books or fragments that we know to have existed during the early centuries is very large. The names of no fewer than 109 such works (41 extant and 68 lost) are in our possession. A translation into English of the whole or a part of the 41 NT apocryphal writings that are extant is often seen printed in a volume, and circulated under the title of the NT Apocrypha. A partial list of these writings is as follows: *The Protevangelium of James*, *The Gospel of Thomas*, *The Gospel of the Infancy*, *The Gospel of Nicodemus*, *The Narrative of Joseph of Arimathaea*, *The Acts of Pilate*, *The General Epistle of Barnabas*, *The First and Second Epistles of Clement*, *The Apostolic Constitutions*, and *The First and Second Books of Hermas*. We have knowledge of these lost writings through quotations from them, or references to them, found in Christian authors of the first four centuries. The names of a few of these, with the writers who mention them, are as follows: *The Acts of Andrew* (mentioned by Eusebius, Epiphanius, and Gelasius), *The Gospel according to the Twelve Apostles* (Origen, Ambrose, and Jerome), *The Gospel of Barnabas* (Gelasius), *The Gospel of Basilides* (Origen, Ambrose, and Jerome),...*The Gospel of Matthias* (Origen, Ambrose, Eusebius, and Jerome), and the *Acts of John* (Eusebius, Athanasius, Augustine).

In reference to the same topic, another work entitled *The Freethinker's Textbook* states on page 240,

The number of books that claim admission to the canon is very considerable.... The following list will give some idea of the number of the apocryphal writings from which the four Gospels, and other books of the NT, finally emerge as canonical: Gospel according to the Hebrews, Gospel written by Judas Iscariot, Gospel of Peter, Gospel of Marcion, Gospel of Basilides, Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Tatian,..., Letter to Agbarus by Christ (extant), Epistle to Peter and Paul by Christ (extant), Hymn by Christ (extant), Magical Book by Christ (extant), Prayer by Christ (extant), Preaching by Peter, Revelation by Peter, Acts of Peter (and so on--Ed.).

And finally, on page 167 in a third work entitled *The Twilight of Christianity* Harry Barnes summarized the situation rather well when he said,

...it is quite possible that in the extant OT and nonbiblical writings of the Jews we have but a few fragments of the total literary product of the Hebrew peoples in the centuries preceding the Christian era. This matter of the free editing, alteration, rearrangement, fabrication, and even complete loss of books originally in the Bible, raises very important implications relative to the hypothesis of the divine dictation of

the Bible. If God had taken the time which he is assumed by the Fundamentalists to have devoted to the dictation of his word, it is scarcely likely that he would have allowed his earthly subjects to distort and even to lose these precious products of divine revelation.

We have pointed out that the traditional religionists hold that the Bible solely expresses the will of God, thus allowing no place for the intervention and interference of human subjectivity. In reality, however, there are few books in the Bible which have not been written to advance the cause of some specific race, class, dynasty, sect, or philosophy. The Pentateuch is devoted to a large extent to propaganda in behalf of the Jewish race and their tribal God, Yahweh. Deuteronomy embodied the effort at a great moral reconstruction among the Jews, as likewise did the books of Amos and other leading prophets.... If some of the books of the OT represent propaganda for the prophetic view of the Hebrew religion, others expound the interest and viewpoint of the priestly class. The same tendencies appear in the NT....

Thus, the point has been made. An extremely large number of ancient writings could easily have been included in the Canon, were it not for the politics involved. Many more books considered for entry could have been mentioned but, like bombs on a destroyed city, they would only bounce the rubble. Protracted lists of books often bearing esoteric titles are rather burdensome to navigate, to be sure, but this is one of those extrabiblical topics that can't be allowed to pass unnoticed in any responsible study of the Bible's validity, reliability, and alleged divinity.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #508 Continues from Last Month (Part q)

[Point #12 in our pamphlet was: How could we follow the 6th Commandment, even if we wanted to, when the authors of the various versions of the Bible can't even agree on whether the key word is "kill" or "murder." Surely they recognize a difference--ED.]

JM's Defense is:

In this objection Mr. McKinsey overlooks the original language and complains because the translators cannot agree on the meaning of the word. Well, if they cannot agree on what the word means, that does not alleviate Mr. McKinsey from the responsibility he has to go to the original language and/or other texts in the Bible which will explain this passage.... When the evidence is in, it can be seen that this commandment forbade murder.

The first piece of evidence that shows that this commandment forbids murder is the fact that Jesus, himself, interpreted this commandment to mean murder. In Matt. 19:16-18 one came to him and asked him what to do in order to inherit eternal life, and his answer was to keep the commandments which God gave to Moses. The person asked him which ones were to be kept, and Jesus replied: Thou shalt do no murder..." (v. 18). Jesus was giving the commandment that said: Thou shalt not kill..." (Ex. 20:13). Thus "kill" and "murder" are one and the same here.

Editor's Response to Letter #508 (Part q)

"Kill" and "murder" are most assuredly not the same here or anywhere else, JM. All murders are killings, but not all killings are murders. Second, you chose the version that provided the interpretation you desired, and ignored all contrary data. If you had done your homework, instead of focusing on mine, you would have noticed that the RSV, the NAB, the ASV, the JB, the LB, and the Lamsa Version of Matt. 19:18 say "kill" not "murder". As far as these versions are concerned, there is no reason to conclude Jesus is referring to murder rather than killing. Third, your slanted scholarship really comes to the fore when one realizes that you chose the only instance in the KJV in which Jesus used the word "murder." In all of the parallel accounts in Matt. 5:21, Mark 10:19, and Luke 18:20 Jesus says "kill." So, it is by no means true that Jesus is prohibiting "murder" rather than killing. In fact, in every Old and New Testament reference to the 6th Commandment, several key versions--the RSV, the ASV, the JB, and the Lamsa Version--always use the word "kill". At no time is the word "murder" employed. The King James Version, which you apparently prefer, refers to the 6th Commandment on 8 different occasions, and in only one verse, the one you cited for expediency's sake, does it mention "murder." Heavy reliance upon tactics of this kind by you and your religious cohorts explains in large measure why religious scholarship is so deceptive and unreliable. Tendentious reasoning permeates biblical apologetics and scriptural defenses throughout, as your strategy vividly illustrates.

Letter #508 Continues (Part r)

The second piece of evidence that shows that this commandment forbids murder is the fact that the meaning of the original word is murder. According to Strong, the word for "kill" in Exodus 20:13 is the word "ratsach" which means: "...to dash to pieces, i.e., kill (a human being) especially to murder:--put to death, kill, slay, murder."....

Editor's Response to Letter #508 (Part r)

Wrong again, JM. *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance* does not say that "ratsach" means to murder. It says that "murder" is only one of the options available. And the Hebraic experts translating the KJV, the RSV, the NAB, the ASV, and the Lamsa Versions felt the most appropriate and accurate term to employ was "kill" not "murder," because that is the word they used in Ex. 20:13 for the 6th Commandment. Apparently you feel your translators are more proficient. Upon what basis do you make that judgment?

Letter #508 Continues (Part s)

The third piece of evidence that shows that this commandment forbids murder is the overall context of the Bible. In both the old and new testaments, murder was what was condemned.... God forbids the taking of innocent human life without the proper authorization. There were times when God would order his people to wipe out whole nations of people, even though there were innocent people in those nations at the time, in order to keep the evil from growing worse and to give the Israelites the land they lived on. However, God was giving the order. Since God gave the life, he could take it away. Exodus 20:13 forbids the unlawful taking of human life. Since man did not give

it, man has no right to determine when and where human life should end. Only God has that right, and he can empower man to take human life....

Editor's Response to Letter #508 (Part s)

Since your paragraph reeks with problems, JM, let's take them one at a time. First, as we have already demonstrated, killing is condemned in Ex. 20:13, not murder. The commandment says Thou shalt not kill, not thou shalt not murder. Second, you claim that Ex. 20:13 forbids the unlawful taking of human life. Where is anything said about the "unlawful" taking of life? There are no qualifiers attached. It says don't kill, period. It does not say don't kill unlawfully. Please don't insert gratuitous provisos just to elude an imbroglio. Third, you admit that God killed innocent people, and if that is not grounds for condemnation and rejection, what is? Fourth, you say that God ordered the killing of innocent people "in order to keep the evil from growing worse." What kind of justice is that? Operating on that principle, we might just as well kill everyone in prison today in order to restrict the expansion of evil tomorrow. Fifth, how does the evil of innocent people become worse, when by definition they are innocent and have done no evil? Sixth, what right did the Israelites have to the land of those they conquered? God is fostering imperialistic aggression. Seventh, as far as you are concerned God can do anything he desires, whether immoral or not. In effect, you are worshipping a being that is above morality and decency. He is a law unto himself. As far as you are concerned, no act of God, no matter how heinous or appalling, is worthy of condemnation. Your allegiance, my friend, is not to right and wrong, good and bad, but power and domination. Eighth, you say that "man has no right to determine when and where human life should end." Then I assume you are a pacifist and/or a conscientious objector, and you are firmly opposed to the death penalty. If man has no right to determine when human life should end, then you must be for the abolishment of all military spending. After all, why spend a fortune on material and equipment you would never employ? And lastly, as far as God's empowering people to take the lives of others is concerned, do you know of any soldiers or law enforcement officials who would claim they were informed by God or received a revelation from on high that they could kill other individuals? I sure don't. (To Be Continued Next Month)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #522 from BY of Seminole, Florida

Dear Dennis.

I must commend you on your publication. I find it interesting, enlightening, and useful. For example, in my classroom discussions at the University of South Florida, where I am currently a graduate assistant who teaches freshman English, I have many students who think of the Bible in only the most innocuous and positive terms. Most are entirely unaware of their religion's history in our country. When we discussed current discrimination and the history of Biblical support for slavery, many of my students thought I was merely misinformed, until I quoted them chapter and verse directly from your publication!....

Editor's Response to Letter #522

Dear BY.

Letters like yours help make it all worthwhile. You are using BE commensurate with the original purpose for which it was created. As we have said so often, if people like you don't show Christians the errors of their ways, who will?

Letter # 523 from DM of San Diego, California

Dear Mr. McKinsey,

I am subscribing to your "BIBLE ERRANCY" newsletter. I am certainly looking forward to it. I am relatively new to Freethought, but I began to see the errors in the Bible while a fundamentalist in 1988. Furthermore, I am living Disproof of the Bible. For if I was once "saved" by Faith and truly "born again" - "a new creature" - then could I have "fallen away"? Well, I did, so those who believe in Eternal Security have a problem.

NOTE: BE subscribers whom others can contact are: Louis W. Cable, 102 Spyglass Drive, Lufkin, Texas 75901-7450

Marcella A. Comanda, 122 Muir Ave., Santa Clara, California 95051

Issue No. 123

March 1993

FAITH (Part 2)--Last month's commentary listed the most important verses having to do with salvation by faith before and after the Cross. This month we will conclude our analysis of this very important subject by noting all those verses that say you are saved by faith in Jesus Christ, but do not automatically exclude other avenues. Key verses in this regard are:

- John 3:15-16 ("That whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"),
- John 5:24 ("He that hears my word, and believes on him who sent me, has everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death into life"),
- John 6:35 ("I am the bread of life: he that comes to me shall never hunger; and he that believes on me shall never thirst"),
- John 6:47 ("I say unto you, He that believes on me has everlasting life"),
- John 10:9 ("I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved...."),

- John 11:25-26 ("Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever lives and believes in me shall never die"),
- Acts 13:39 ("And by him all that believe are justified from all things"),
- Rom. 1:16-17 ("I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one who believes.... The just shall live by faith"),
- Rom. 3:22 ("Even the righteousness of God which is by faith in Jesus Christ unto all them that believe"),
- Rom. 10:9-11 ("...if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God has raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believes unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. For the scripture saith, whosoever believes on him shall not be ashamed"),
- Gal. 3:11 ("...for The just shall live by faith"),
- Gal. 5:6 ("For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which works by love"),
- Heb. 10:38 ("Now the just shall live by faith"),
- Eph. 2:8-9 ("For by grace you are saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast"),
- Luke 7:50 ("...he said to the woman, Thy faith has saved thee; go in peace"),
- Luke 8:12 ("...lest they should believe and be saved"),
- John 4:13-14 ("Whosoever drinks of this water shall thirst again: But whosoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life"),
- John 6:40 ("And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which sees the Son, and believes on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up the last day"),
- John 8:12 ("I am the light of the world: he that follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the gift of life"),
- John 12:46 ("I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believes on me should not abide in darkness"),
- John 20:31 ("...that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name"),
- Acts 10:43 ("...that through his name whosoever believes in him shall receive remission of sins"),
- Rom. 3:30 ("Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith"),
- Rom. 5:1-2 ("Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: By whom also we have access by faith into this grace...."),
- Rom. 9:30-32 ("...the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, has not attained to the law of righteousness. Why? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law"),

- Rom. 10:4 ("For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believes"),
- Gal. 2:16 ("Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed Jesus, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified"),
- Gal. 3:26 ("For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus"),
- and lastly, 2 Tim. 3:15 ("the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus").

So, clearly a large number of verses say you are saved by faith but do not rule out other means.

The final group of faith-related verses merely imply that faith assists in the attainment of salvation, and for that reason are being listed last. They certainly do not say you are saved by faith only, nor do they say that faith is one of many paths to salvation. They are just too nebulous for that. But they do imply that faith is needed for salvation, and for that reason merit consideration. We are speaking of such verses as:

- Hab. 2:4 ("but the just shall live by his faith"),
- Luke 17:19 (Arise, go thy way: thy faith has made thee whole"),
- John 7:38 ("He that believes on me, as the scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water"),
- John 12:36 ("While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light"),
- Rom. 3:26 ("...and the justifier of him which believes in Jesus"),
- and 2 Cor. 5:7 ("For we walk by faith, and not by sight").

Other verses relevant to the issue but too imprecise for any kind of definite conclusion are John 1:12, 8:51, Rom. 3:24-25, 3:27-28, and 4:16.

That concludes an extended presentation of those verses which say you are saved by faith only, or faith is a path to salvation. Faith, like works, predestination, universalism, and whim, has more than enough verses available to establish its credentials as a viable option in the on-going debate over paths to salvation, and like the other avenues it, too, frustrates those who seek to prove the viability of one route only.

JUDAISM vs. CHRISTIANITY--Anyone familiar with the history of Judaism and Christianity knows the latter is an off-shoot of the former. All of the founders of Christianity, including Jesus, Peter, and Paul, were Jews, and elements of Judaism permeate Christianity throughout. Indeed, the Old Testament, which Jews refer to as The Bible, is an inseparable part of the Christian Bible. However, what is not so apparent is that Judaism rejects many key concepts in Christianity, and the reasons are more in concert with the words and intent of the Old Testament than Christians would

have people believe. What follows is an alphabetical listing from the Jewish perspective, and with a Jewish bias of some basic Christian concepts which Jews repudiate, and a brief explanation of the reasoning behind each rejection. In no sense can this presentation be viewed as an endorsement of Judaism, and we are only presenting these concepts in order to show that BE is by no means alone in its repudiation of many fundamental Christian beliefs.

The Atonement--Judaism feels that it is unjust to sacrifice a perfectly innocent Savior for the transgressions of sinners. "Vicarious atonement" is unacceptable to the Jew. Judaism can't understand why an "innocent sacrifice" is required to atone for the guilt of the sinner. The suggestion that simply forgiving sins is immoral is incomprehensible to the Jew.

Asceticism--Jewish piety does not consist in fasting, celibacy, solitude and other ascetic deprivations contrary to human nature and God's purpose. To the Jew, abstinence of any kind is sinful, for it is the rejection of the good things created by God's bounty. Far from being meritorious, it is sinful to weaken the body by ascetic practices detrimental to health. The care of the body and the preservation of health are required by Jewish law. Judaism supports the Golden Mean. The weakening of the body through fasts impairs also the faculties of the mind. Far from promoting spirituality, therefore, fasting really retards and arrests it.

Celibacy--Christianity disparages the "flesh" as the source of all evil and consequently glorifies celibacy. Judaism has a joyous affirmation of marriage and love.

The Devil--Judaism does not know a power of evil independent from and opposed to God. Jewish battles are with the "evil impulse", not the Devil.

Festivals--Persons are not glorified in the Jewish religion. No Jewish festival is centered in persons, not even Moses. Christian holidays are all centered in persons.

Grace--Christianity places "grace" above conduct and ethical effort in the quest for salvation. Christians are required to believe in Jesus and that he died for mankind's sins. This belief, and nothing else, opens wide the gates of the Christian paradise. Christians regard sin not as a challenge but as the inescapable fate of every human being from which there is only one deliverance: the grace of Jesus' sacrificial death. The Christian attains forgiveness by accepting Jesus Christ. Judaism rejects these concepts.

Images--Catholicism and Protestantism worship persons and images of persons. This violates the 2nd Commandment, which prohibits not only the worship of images but their creation. In addition to Jesus, Catholicism venerates a large and expanding group of saints and their relics, especially the mother of God. Protestantism adores only Jesus in addition to the Father. Judaism totally rejects the worship of any persons. Judaism rejects the offering up of prayers before any object, regardless of what it represents.

Incarnation--God is pure spirit, divorced from the slightest vestige of corporeality. Judaism totally rejects the incarnation.

Interpretation of Judaism--Jews totally reject the Christian belief that all the promises given to the Jews will henceforth apply to Christians only, and all confessors of Christianity are the true Israel of God. The Christian dogma of the "chosenness" of the Church, in place of the "chosen people" of the Old Covenant is central to Christianity and abhorrent to Judaism.

Jesus--

- (a) None of the Prophets of Israel ever taught on his own responsibility. The "I" of the Prophets is God; the "I" of Jesus, however, is he himself.
- (b) Jesus claimed a special nearness to God. Not even Moses ever claimed to be nearer to God than any other man.
- (c) Jesus claimed to have the right to abrogate some OT laws.
- (d) Prophets castigated others for sins but never forgave sins. Jesus, however, arrogated to himself the power to forgive sins, which Judaism reserves for God alone.
- (e) None of the prophets ever did a miracle in his own name. Credit went to God, not their own power and strength.
- (f) Unlike the OT prophets, Jesus did miracles to strengthen belief in himself, not God.

The Law--The laws of the Torah are to Judaism the quintessence of permanent goodness. Christianity, on the other hand, advances its claims on the strength that the "Law" has been superseded and abrogated by Faith. The Law has outlived its usefulness, according to Christians. Jews feel the Law is eternal and can never be superseded. This is the strongest element of dispute between Judaism and Christianity. Without the law, Judaism is nothing; with it, Jesus died for nothing.

Marriage--The NT disparages marriage as a necessary evil for the propagation of the race, and glorifies celibacy as the higher ideal. According to Judaism, marriage is not a necessary evil but a joyful consummation of the human destiny.

Miracles--Judaism has progressively disparaged miracles as props of faith. Judaism does not acknowledge miracles as proof of divine authority. Jews do not feel miracles prove anything. Truth can't be established by magic and wizardry. The Gospels use miracles as proof of Jesus' divine authority.

Monasticism--Jewish ethics are social, not individualistic. Little is gained for the world if one person achieves perfection and holiness. The Messianic ideal is that all nations and all individuals shall know peace, justice, and love. Consequently, the "saint" who withdraws as a hermit does not aid the advent of the messianic age. Jewish piety is not tested away from the turmoil of life, but in the heat of battle. Solitude is contrary to human psychology and detrimental to the realization of ethics. The monastic hermit is a sinner. It violates "Love thy neighbor as thyself." To the

Jew, beauty is not the lure of Satan, but the work of God. Although Judaism looks forward to a better world-to-come, it does not disdain this world.

The Old Testament--The Church adopted the Hebrew Bible (The Old Testament) mainly because the Church regarded it as a book of prophecies foretelling Jesus' career. The OT thus became, first and last, the prediction of the Messiahship of Jesus, in whom were supposedly fulfilled all the messianic promises of the Hebrew prophets. Differences in the interpretations of identical texts make the Christian version of the Hebrew Bible an altogether different book.

Original Sin--Christianity, in contrast to Judaism, is predicated on the doctrine of original sin, which implies the belief in ethical predestination. You must commit a positive act, otherwise you are condemned. Judaism rejects this concept, as well as the belief that all should be condemned for the act of one.

Poverty--Poverty is glorified by Christianity as a sacred and desirable state. To Jews, poverty is a stumbling block rather than a stimulus to piety. Jews feel wealth is more conducive to piety and ethics than poverty, for only when one's physical needs are provided for can one concentrate upon the spheres of religion and ethics. Christianity condemns the rich and exalts the poor. Catholics require priests to take a vow of poverty. In the OT there is no statement that houses, fields, and other possessions are in themselves bad and wicked.

Sacraments--There are 7 sacraments in the Catholic Church and 2 in the Protestant. Baptism and the Lord's Supper are recognized by all Christian denominations. Judaism has no sacraments. Judaism makes salvation depend solely upon the free will ethical efforts of the worshipers.

Savior--Judaism has never sanctioned doctrines implying an affirmation of the inequality of men before God. Before God, all men are equal, and there is no need for a mediating Savior. Christians teach that God is eternally distant, and man can enter a relationship with him solely and exclusively through the mediation of Jesus. This, Judaism rejects.

The Trinity--To Jews this concept is equivalent to polytheism. It is an adulteration of the Indivisible God. Unity of God precludes belief in any other creative force, such as Satan. God couldn't possibly be defined or represented in any bodily form.

So, in conclusion, we can clearly see from all of the above that Biblical Errancy is by no means alone in its rejection of many crucial Christian beliefs. Other key concepts could be analyzed, but the point has been made. Judaism, like BE, has major disagreements with Christianity. Much of Christianity is too ridiculous even for other religionists.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #508 from JM Continues from Last Month (Part t)

[Point #13 in our pamphlet was: We are told that the Bible has no scientific errors, yet it says the bat is a bird (Lev. 11:13,19), hares chew the cud (Lev. 11:5-6), and some fowl (Lev. 11:20-21) and insects (Lev. 11:22-23) have four legs--ED.]

JM's Defense is: Mr. McKinsey faults the Bible because it does not use 20th century terminology. He forgets that the Bible was written centuries before our modern scientific classifications ever came into existence. He refuses to take into consideration the classification of the time.

1. The bat, then, was called a fowl because it had wings and flew. I think that it is interesting to note that even the evolutionists recognize the fact that these classifications were different then, than they are today, but they do not say that those classifications outside the Bible were erroneous. For example the evolutionists talk about the early birds such as the Pteranodon and Quetzalcoatlus which were bird-like creatures that flew. According to *Dinosaur Discoveries* these creatures were "...like lizards in some ways, but they were also a lot like birds." The Pteranodon according to the *World Book* was classified as a reptile. Now these things were not birds, but they were bird-like and are often called the forerunners of birds. Even though the bird family and reptile family are two different families, many scientists, because of the similarities between the two, call birds "...feathered reptiles..." Now are scientists in error for calling birds, feathered reptiles? I do not believe that Mr. McKinsey would be so bold as to say that they are.

In early days when a thing had wings it was classified as a fowl, because of the similarities, just like birds are called "feathered reptiles" because of the similarities they hold with reptiles. Why would Mr. McKinsey accept one while rejecting the other? Simply because he needs to find something wrong with the Bible so he can discredit it, even if it is only in his own mind.

Editor's Response to Letter #508 (Part t)

Your explanations tend to ramble incoherently, JM. Half the time I am not sure what point you are trying to make. To begin with, you are trying to manipulate the word "fowl." The text in Leviticus includes the bat in a list of fowl or birds. The word "fowl" refers to birds and has always done so. What difference does it make what century this text of the Bible was written in? Translators of the KJ and many other versions are translating the word "fowl" from a Hebraic word which they equate with fowl, and they know that "fowl" is equivalent to the word "bird". Are you saying they can't translate? Second, you say that, "The bat, then, was called a fowl because it had wings and flew." Don't be ridiculous. Many large insects can fly, but that does not mean they are birds or were so classified. Third, scientific classification is not the issue. We are talking about "fowl", and that is a reference to "birds". Do you have any proof that those who wrote the Bible expanded the term dramatically and looked upon anything that flew as a fowl? Fourth, your attempt to play me off against scientists won't stand the strain. Scientists say the Pteranodon and Quetzalcoatlus were "bird like." They didn't say they were birds or fowl. They said they were "feathered-

reptiles". What is wrong with that? I accept one while rejecting the other, because referring to birds as "feathered-reptiles" is scientifically correct. On the other hand, referring to everything that flies as a fowl has never been an accurate observation.

Letter #508 Continues (Part u)

Hares that chew the cud. In the first place, Mr. McKinsey assumes that because we call a hare a rabbit, that hares have always been rabbits. However, *Smith's Bible Dictionary* says that "hare" was "of the squirrel kind...." Now this dictionary admits that this creature did not chew the cud, according to our standard of what a cud chewer is, but we need to get it right as to what this creature was. This dictionary says that in this area "there are no rabbits."

What is meant by "cheweth the cud"? This creature moved its jaws as though it did chew the cud. Many classifications at this time were based on appearance. The rabbit, had there been any in this part of the world, would have been classified as a "cud chewer" because it appeared to chew the cud....

Editor's Response to Letter #508 (Part u)

Your line of argumentation has become all but incoherent again, JM. Who cares whether rabbits are hares or vice versa? Neither chews the cud, so what difference does it make? In groping out of desperation, you entered the realm of irrelevancy. Your own dictionary, which you cited, admits that even when it was of the "squirrel kind", it did not chew the cud. Are you saying that when it was not of the "squirrel kind" it did chew the cud? Surely you are not that foolish. Remember, we are supposedly dealing with a perfect book, and when that perfect book says hares or rabbits, whichever you prefer, chew the cud, it is just plain wrong.

And what difference does the appearance make? The fact is that the hare or rabbit does not chew the cud, and any source that says they did, whether the Bible or otherwise, is wrong and that is that. Any classification based on appearance rather than reality is erroneous, regardless of the era involved.

Letter #508 Continues (Part v)

Fowls that have four legs. As we have already seen, the bat was classified as a fowl, and a bat does have four legs. There are other flying creatures (such as the Pteranodon, and whether Mr. McKinsey likes it or not, the Bible does speak of dinosaurs; Job 40:15-17) which had four legs that flew, thereby could be classified as a fowl. Even the evolutionists would not deny such....

Now with the preceding three objections Mr. McKinsey, if he is to prove that the Bible is in error, must prove that the Bible was in error with the classifications of the day in which it was written....

Editor's Response to Letter #508 (Part v)

You are wrong on every point, JM. The bat is not classified as a fowl, except in your biblical mythology. And where was it proven the bat has four legs? Or did I miss something? Second, what on earth does Job 40:15-17 have to do with dinosaurs, and

where does it say anything about four legged animals? It only refers to a behemoth that eats grass. That's a dinosaur? Are you serious? Your imagination is running wild. Third, could you cite one evolutionist who concedes the existence of 4-legged fowl that flew? Who are you talking about, and what animal are you referring to? And fourth, I don't have to prove the Bible was in error with the classifications of that day. If those classifications were wrong, and they were, then the Bible is in error. Moreover, just because man's classifications are in error does not allow God's to be. We are supposed to be dealing with a perfect book that is beyond time and space. It can't be erroneous. The Bible must be perfect at all times and under all conditions.

Letter #508 Continues (Part w)

Now concerning the insects which have only four legs. Mr. McKinsey, as well as all others of his faith which have made this claim, did not read, very carefully, what the Bible had to say. It says that certain creatures creep going on all fours. Such is the classification of the grasshopper, even today: "Grasshoppers as Food, The Locust is an important food in some parts of the world...the locust and the grasshopper were not included in the law that forbade the eating of flying and creeping creatures going 'on all fours'." (From "Grasshoppers," *The World Book*, 1963, Volume 7, page 320). Now, if there was error in the Bible concerning this, the *World Book* surely would have pointed the error out. Instead, it showed that the grasshopper was one of those creatures that, even though it had 6 legs, it only used four for creeping...."

Editor's Response to Letter #508 (Part w)

You keep referring to people not reading the Bible closely enough, JM, when that is precisely a mistake you repeat with remarkable regularity. In essence, your argument appears to be that the Bible does not say these insects only had four feet; it says they creep on 4 while having 6, a position that is without merit. Let me quote Leviticus 11:22-23 verbatim in the RSV. "Of them you may eat: the locust according to its kind, the bald locust according to its kind, the cricket according to its kind, and the grasshopper according to its kind. But all other winged insects which HAVE four feet are an abomination to you." Notice! It says that have 4 feet; it does not say they merely creep around on 4 feet. Moreover, could you cite one species of locust, beetle, or grasshopper that has 6 legs, while only walking on four and using two for hands? (To Be Continued Next Month)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #524 from LR of Baker City, Oregon

Dennis

. The State of Oregon has one of the lowest percentages of church membership in the US, but at the same time Oregon has a very militant and dangerous cadre of fundamentalists. A local self-made "minister" recently proclaimed through our newspaper that Secular Humanism is the cause of AIDS throughout the world, and the cause of the disintegration of our American society. In answer to such outrageous, bigoted ideas, I have been able to publish a couple of letters in the same newspaper, which says a lot for the newspaper. I confess that I have plagiarized, or at least

borrowed heavily from you. A whole lot of us out here in the trenches depend on you, Dennis. I hope you won't get discouraged.

Editor's Response to Letter #524

Dear LR.

Congratulations on using BE in precisely the manner intended. As I have said so often, if people like you don't correct the vast array of prevarications and propaganda that blankets this country, who will? The other side doesn't lack energy, and it's high time we exhibited some of our own. I depend on you as much as you depend on me. Without people like you, my efforts will ultimately be little more than a ripple in a river. Without people such as yourself, I'd be foolish to carry on a one-man struggle against hundreds of thousands, and seriously consider success a viable possibility. Without the mobilization and determination of thousands like yourself it can't be done. Far from being discouraged, I am more determined than ever, and have several major projects either in the works or being planned.

Correction: On page 3, 2nd column, 10th line from the bottom in last month's issue, the phrase "prejudiced mind" should have been "unprejudiced mind." The error completely altered the meaning of the sentence.

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PRAYER--Undoubtedly some of the most stupefying aspects of biblical teachings circulate around the whole area of prayer and the efficacy of supplications to a higher being. The entire topic reeks with statements that are in direct opposition to our daily experience. James 5:13-15 says, "Is any among you afflicted? let him pray.... Is any sick among you? let him call the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil.... And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up...." If that were true, hospitals and physicians would be superfluous. You could just have church elders pray over all those who are ill. But as all knowledgeable people know, many individuals have paid with their lives because they trusted this belief. They chose clergy over surgery and paid the supreme penalty for their naivete.

Even more absurd are statements that promise believers the moon if they will only persevere in the faith. Christians are told they will obtain anything they want, for example. Matt. 7:7-8 says, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. For every one that asks receives; and he that seeks finds; and to him that knocks it shall be opened." One should carefully note that no strings are attached, which only further divorces this statement from reality.

Equally absurd comments promise the believer powers comparable to those of superman, but qualifiers are attached. Matt. 21:21-22, along with Mark 11:23-24, says, "Jesus answered and said to them, Verily I say to you, If you have faith, and doubt not, you shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if you shall say to this mountain, Be removed, and be cast into the sea; it shall be done. And all

things, whatever you shall ask in prayer believing, you shall receive." So now, as long as you have faith, it can be done. A qualifier is attached. Several verses clearly say that you can do anything as long as it is done in Jesus' name. John 14:13-14 says, "Whatever you shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in my name, I will do it." And John 16:23-24 says, "Verily, verily, I say to you, Whatever you ask the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Hitherto you have asked nothing in my name: ask, and you shall receive, that your joy may be full." Another verse, 1 John 3:22, says that you will receive whatever you ask as long as you keep his commandments. So, Christians are repeatedly told that the world is their oyster as long as they pray, ask with faith or in Jesus's name, or keep the commandments. Although obligations are attached to most promises, that is by no means true of all.

However, the most obvious refutation of prayer's efficacy is apparent to anyone who has either engaged in prayer or witnessed prayer in action. In virtually every instance prayers go unfulfilled. [Those few that appear to be successful will be discussed later.] And they often fail miserably. Why is this? After all, didn't God's book promise the universe to anyone who would join the faith and ask in the name of Jesus? So what's the problem? This question has been posed to apologists for centuries, and their answers are no better now than they were 2,000 years ago. On page 112 in *Hard Questions* apologist Frank Colquhoun directly confronts the problem of why prayers go unanswered by saying, "Here then are two blunt reasons why our prayers don't seem to produce the goods. First, because we don't really ask in faith. That means that we don't believe God can answer this particular prayer even though we say it, just in case! Secondly, all too often, as we've already seen, we only ask for things to please ourselves, whether they are good for us or not. God answers the first kind by ignoring it, because frankly it isn't a real prayer at all. And he answers the second by saying 'No'. So, because men always tend to blame God when things go wrong, we say, 'He hasn't answered my prayer' when he certainly has! It's just that he hasn't answered it our way."

In other words, according to Colquhoun, God answered it, and the answer is "no." Although this may appear to be a plausible reply, the unmistakable fallacy in Colquhoun's line of reasoning lies in the fact that it conflicts with clear statements in Scripture. Matt. 7:7-8 and Luke 11:9-10 have no provisos, addenda or restrictions attached. All you have to do is ask, seek, and knock, and it's yours. There is no obligation or requirement to ask for something that does not please ourselves. In fact, why would somebody ask for something that didn't?

Secondly, whoever heard of a Christian asking something from God while believing God was too weak to respond? Colquhoun is accusing those who fail to have their prayers answered of not believing God is omnipotent.

Thirdly, Colquhoun conveniently ignored all those failed prayers offered by people who did have faith. What about them? Or is he going to contend that every unanswered prayer emanated from someone who lacked faith in God's powers? That is patently absurd on its face, in light of the fact that those who pray the most are nearly always those most convinced of God's potency.

On pages 204 and 205 in *The Bible Has the Answer*, apologists Morris and Clark provide the following response to the same question. "There are, however, certain

conditions to be met before we can rightly expect God to answer our prayers. The first is that there be no unconfessed sin in our lives. If we are deliberately living in disobedience to God's Word, then obviously we cannot expect Him to grant our requests."

Where on earth are they getting this nonsense? What conditions? As we saw earlier, some verses have no conditions whatever, and others merely require the supplicant to have faith, keep the commandments, or ask in the name of Jesus. And of these there is certainly no dearth. Nothing is said about "unconfessed sin", although it would no doubt be desirable from an apologetic perspective if there was. Morris and Clark continue, "No one has a right to pray to God for personal needs if he has ignored God's Son and the tremendous sacrifice He made for us on the cross.... We must also be in right relationship with the members of our own family. Another condition for answered prayer is faith that God will keep His Word.... Finally, one's purpose in prayer is important. Selfish, covetous prayers obviously are not pleasing to God."

Like Colquhoun, Morris and Clark have not only rewritten and supplemented Scripture to suit their own predilections, but ignored all of the prayers that have gone unanswered, even though the requirements Morris and Clark inserted into the text were adhered to. Everyone knows hardcore Christian believers who failed to have their prayers answered satisfactorily, although they met every requirement attached to prayer by Colquhoun, Morris and Clark.

Apologists often try to counteract the massive number of disappointments accompanying all of these prayer-related verses by relying on one lone verse, 1 John 5:14, which says, "This is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he hears us." The theory behind employment of this verse is that God will only grant prayers that are submitted according to His will. And since nearly all prayers go unrequited, nearly all prayers aren't being offered according to His will.

Two problems accompany this defense. First, no reservations or preconditions are attached to several of the verses we cited earlier, such as those in Matt. 7 and Luke 11. Anyone who insists upon interpreting 1 John 5:14 as having a condition attached, has only created a contradiction between it, on the one hand, and Matt. 7:7-8 and Luke 11:9-10, on the other. The latter have no reservations. Secondly, the verse says that if we ask according to God's will, he will hear us; it does not say we must ask according to His will in order to be heard. If I say a dog is an animal, I am not saying that in order for something to be an animal it must be a dog. First John 5:14 is saying that if I ask something in God's name it will be granted, but that does not mean I must ask it in his name in order for it to be granted. It does not say that it will be granted only if I ask in his name. The option of choosing other paths which could succeed as well is left open.

A few apologists also seek to escape through James 4:3, which says, "You ask, and receive not, because you ask amiss, that you may consume it upon your lusts." But it, too, is inapplicable, because it applies only to the particular group of people James is addressing, and it does not explain the failure of all those prayers submitted without lusts being involved. For most assuredly, every failed prayer is not involved in lusts.

Another response fed to those who are scripturally weak, but distressed by the number of ineffective prayers, is that you need to pray more. As incredible as it may be, that is precisely the tack taken by some ministers, priests and rabbis. According to them, unanswered prayers can be attributed to the fact that you didn't pray enough; you didn't pray hard enough; you didn't say the right prayer; you didn't have the right attitude or frame of mind; you weren't penitent enough, or you weren't sincere enough. In other words, by one rationale or another, the distraught supplicant is led to believe that he or she is the problem, not the inefficacy of prayers in general. One would think that after millions of failures, people would get the message. But millions don't. They keep trying to ram a square peg into a round hole. You would think that sooner or later they would realize that the problem lies not with the ineptitude of the supplicant, but with the insufficiency of prayer itself. It's like telling a drowning man that his problem lies in an inadequate supply of water. One can't help but think of the senior citizen with a very serious ailment who is told to pray by the local minister. She prays, but the illness worsens. She is subsequently told to pray more, but the sickness grows even more threatening. Finally the minister tells her to pray without surcease. So she prays so hard her sides hurt, but she dies anyway. Now, what do many religious people conclude from this? They often decide that she did not meet one of the prior criteria, while a sane man concludes that prayer is useless.

Prayer also suffers from the malady of selectivity. People will shout to the housetops about the one prayer that seemed to be answered, while quietly ignoring all those that collapsed. Not only do religious people focus on the few alleged successes, while ignoring a myriad of failures, but they fail to see that they have not established a cause and effect relationship between the desired event and the prayer. How do you know the prayer caused it? How do you know that it would not have happened, regardless? Just because I pray for an event that subsequently occurs does not mean the prayer caused it, any more than a loud bang causes the bullet to leave the barrel of a gun. Every time a loud bang occurs, a bullet goes out the barrel. But one would be foolish, indeed, to conclude that the bang, rather than the ignition of gun powder, caused the bullet to be expelled. When the subject of selectivity arises, along with the inability of superstitious people to see that reality is sending them a message contrary to that which they wish to hear, the following story comes to mind.

One day the son of an old farmer came in and said to his father, "One of the ewe lambs is dead. Well, said the father, that's all for the best. Twins never do very well anyhow. The next morning the son reported the death of the other lamb and the old man said, Well, that is all for the best, the old ewe will now give more wool. The next morning the son said, The old ewe is dead, too. Well, replied the old man, that may be for the best, but I don't see it this morning.

Like the old man, religious/superstitious people force interpretations on events that conflict with reality's message.

And lastly, another major problem with prayers is that the petitioner has taken it upon himself to ask God to alter his thoughts and behavior to fit the needs of an undeserving sinner. Ambrose Bierce described prayer as a request that the laws of the universe be annulled on behalf of a single petitioner confessedly unworthy. In a very real sense, every prayer denotes an attempt to affect, alter, or influence the activities of God. People who pray apparently don't realize that they are giving suggestions or

advice to an omniscient being. How is that for an immense display of intellectual pomposity, haughtiness, arrogance, and conceit! Yet, these same people will accuse freethinkers of being victims of their own egos. The words of Thomas Paine on page 44 in *The Age of Reason* summarize this predicament as well as any, "Mankind finds fault with everything. His selfishness is never satisfied; his ingratitude is never at an end. He directs the Almighty what to do, even in governing the universe. He prays dictatorially. When it is sunshine, he prays for rain, and when it is rain, he prays for sunshine. He follows the same idea in everything that he prays for; for what is the amount of all his prayers, but an attempt to make the Almighty change his mind, and act otherwise than he does? It is as if he were to say--You, God, know not so well as I."

You would think that those who pray would realize that if God wanted it done that way, he would so act; and if he does not want it done that way, then who are they to suggest otherwise?

JOSHUA--One of the more common Christian misconceptions is that Joshua wrote the Book of Joshua. Their conclusion is no doubt based on the fact that the book bears his name. But, unfortunately, several verses within the Book, itself, obviate any possibility of Joshua being the author. First, Joshua 24:29-31 deals a blow comparable to that dealt to the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch by the closing narrative in Deuteronomy. It states, "And it came to pass after these things, that Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died, being 110 years old. And they buried him in the border of his inheritance.... And Israel served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that overlived Joshua...." Obviously, Joshua could not have written an account of his own death. Second, Joshua 10:13 says, "And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. Is not this written in the Book of Jasher?" The Book of Jasher was not written until after the time of David, because 2 Samuel 1:18 says, "David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and over Jonathan his son: (Also he bade them teach the children of Judah the use of the bow: behold it is written in the book of Jasher)." For the author of the Book of Jasher to have known what David did, he would have to have written the book after David lived. Thus, Joshua, who lived long before David, could not have written Joshua 10:13. Third, Joshua 24:33 says, "Eleazar the son of Aaron died; and they buried him in a hill...." Eleazar died 6 years after Joshua, so Joshua could not have written this account. Fourth, it is hard to believe that Joshua would have written Joshua 6:27, which says, "So the Lord was with Joshua; and his fame was noised throughout all the country." Such lack of modesty and humility is hardly worthy of a great leader. Fifth, and lastly, Joshua 15:63 says, "But the Jebusites, the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the people of Judah could not drive out; so the Jebusites dwell with the people of Judah at Jerusalem to this day." The Israelites did not dwell in Jerusalem until after the time of David. Jerusalem did not come into the hands of the Jews, until subdued by David as is shown in 2 Sam. 5:4 and Chronicles. This passage in Joshua, therefore, could not have been written until after the death of Joshua. Judges 1:1 and 1:8 say, "After the death of Joshua it came to pass...the children of Judah had fought against Jerusalem, and taken it, and smitten it with the edge of the sword, and set the city on fire" and also show that Jerusalem was not taken

until after the death of Joshua. So how could Joshua have written Joshua 15:63?

Similar problems confront those who allege David was the author of Psalms. How, for instance, could David have written Psalm 137:1, which says, "By the rivers of Babylon we sat down, yea, we wept when we remembered Zion" when it refers to an event which did not happen until 400 years after David died, namely, the Babylonian Captivity?

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #508 Continues from Last Month (Part x)

[Point #14 in our pamphlet was: Matt. 27:9-10 quotes a prophecy made by Jeremy the prophet. Yet, no biblicalist has ever been able to show me where it lies in the Book of Jeremiah--ED.]

JM's Defense is: This one is really absurd. Mr McKinsey thinks that if something Jeremiah spoke is not written in the Book of Jeremiah, that he did not say it. The passage is found in Zechariah 11:12. The prophet Zechariah, "makes use of the older prophets, especially Jeremiah, hence the Jewish saying that 'the spirit of Jeremiah dwelt in Zechariah'." Mr. McKinsey must really be hard up to drag this one up as a legitimate objection to the Bible. He just had to find something wrong with the Bible.

Editor's Response to Letter #508 (Part x)

The only absurdity involved lies in your explanation, JM. I asked you where the comment could be found in Jeremiah and you said it can be found in Zechariah, which is only a backhanded way of admitting it isn't there. In other words, Matthew lied. I'd rest my case but you threw out some additional tidbits. If you had taken the time to read back issues of *Biblical Errancy*, especially those having to do with Accommodations, you would have seen that the prophecy is not to be found in Zechariah, either. The facts in the two cases don't match, and for that reason Zechariah 11:12 is inapplicable. In addition, who has whose spirit is irrelevant. We are dealing with a quotation that is directly attributable to an OT prophet, a comment by Jeremiah which, in fact, does not exist.

Letter #508 Continues (Part y)

[Point #15 in our pamphlet was: Heaven is supposed to be a perfect place. Yet, it experienced a war in Rev. 12:7. How can there be a war in a perfect place, and if it happened before why couldn't it occur again? Why would I want to go to a place in which war can occur? That's exactly what I am trying to escape, aren't you?--ED.]

JM's Defense is: The war in Revelation 12:7 was not a carnal war where tanks and guns were used, or even swords. This was a vision to show how Satan rebelled against God. This was a spiritual war. This is the very kind of war that Mr. McKinsey thrives on in his publication *Biblical Errancy*. When one reads this publication, one can see that Mr. McKinsey's statement is not only false, but it is false to the point that he goes around waging (spiritual) war upon those who believe that the Bible is the inspired

word of God. Tell us, Mr. McKinsey, has anyone ever forced you to debate them? I think not! Mr. McKinsey loves a good fight, and he knows it.

Editor's Response to Letter #508 (Part y)

What difference does the kind of war make? It was a war, wasn't it? And I don't remember saying or even implying it was fought with tanks and guns. I said Revelation 12:7 alleges there was a war in heaven. I fail to see what part of the statement is false. Would you be so kind as to elucidate? Most of your paragraph isn't even relevant to the issue. In fact, your comment, "Has anyone ever forced you to debate them," borders on the fatuous. You quickly leaped from a defense of the Bible to an attack upon my motives. I don't love a good fight. I love an effective exposure of deception, propaganda, prevarication, and subterfuge. We don't wage war upon "those who"; we critique a "book which".

Letter #508 Continues (Part z)

Why will spiritual war not happen in heaven again? Simply because the only people that will be in heaven will be those who are safe (babies, children under the age of accountability, and mental deficients), those who faithfully served God on earth, and angels who faithfully served him in heaven. In short, there will be no one there to cause spiritual war. An atheist would not be satisfied in heaven for five minutes, because if he was not interested in serving God a few years on earth, he certainly will not be satisfied with serving him in eternity. This is merely a quibble that Mr. McKinsey produces because he needs to find something wrong in the Bible.

Editor's Response to Letter #508 (Part z)

If there is anything this question is not, JM, it is a quibble. It goes to the crux of the whole issue. The entire thrust of Christian teachings with all the concomitant baggage (Jesus, salvation, original sin, the resurrection, faith, works, etc.) is geared toward the attainment of heaven. And if you tell me a war occurred in nirvana, that can't help but raise major concerns. A war in the very place which billions of Christians seek to enter is a quibble? Are you serious? Don't be ridiculous! It's a consideration of major importance, and Christians understandably seek to minimize its impact. In fact, they would just as soon not even talk about the issue, or this verse in particular, if at all possible. Secondly, you say it could not occur again because of the nature of those allowed to enter. But weren't these the kinds of people who occupied heaven prior to the first war? Third, a question that has been asked many times in BE deserves repeating. Where does the Bible say anything about an "Age of Accountability"? And fourth, I really wish you and your compatriots would stop impugning my motives by alleging that I work very hard to find biblical shortcomings. I assure you that I don't have to work very hard to find an incredible number of things wrong with Scripture. The Bible is a veritable goldmine of contradictions, errors, and fallacies. As I have said so often, it contains more holes than a backdoor screen. So, after all is said and done, my original question--Why couldn't a war in heaven occur again?--still stands.(To Be Continued Next Month)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #525 from LC of Lufkin, Texas

Dear Dennis.

I am writing in regard to letter #520 in BE issue #119. The writer, HB of Alexandria, Virginia, suggested that you conduct a critical exposé of the Ten Commandments. You pointed out that BE had already provided a critique of the divine Decalog. In that regard, I'm sure HB will be carefully reviewing back issues in the weeks ahead. However, there is one question concerning these paragons of virtue that is almost never addressed.

From the maze of intricate, incomprehensible and often contradictory rules with which the Pentateuch is filled, scripture readers can barely manage to extract the Ten Commandments. To make things even more confusing, there are two clearly defined sets of commandments listed in the Book of Exodus. One set is given in Ex. 20:1-17. Another quite different set is given in Ex. 34:14-26. The Exodus 20 set is the one universally accepted. But oddly enough, it is the set given in Exodus 34 that is identified as the real Ten Commandments (Ex. 34:27-28). This set bears little resemblance to the Exodus 20 set, and is absolutely irrelevant in today's world. Dennis, your knowledge of things biblical is much greater than mine. So, please, if you can, answer the question, "Which set is the real McCoy?"

...I recently undertook a review of literature relating to the Ten Commandments and compiled a short paper pointing out some of their more ludicrous aspects. Not only are the Ten Commandments (both sets) shown to be bad law, it soon becomes obvious to any objective reader that the entire Exodus story is nothing more than out-and-out fiction. It never happened!

I believe HB would find my paper helpful in rebutting Bible believers. If he or she will contact me at (409) 637-1026, I will be happy to provide a copy at no expense.

Editor's Response to Letter #525

Dear LC.

You correctly noted that there is a set of commandments listed in Exodus 20 and another set in Exodus 34. Although they are similar in regard to such matters as worshipping God and honoring the sabbath, a far larger number of differences are quite apparent. The key points, however, are that although Exodus 20 relates the list of what most people consider the Ten Commandments, only the list in Exodus 34 is actually called the Ten Commandments (Ex. 34:28) and only the list in Ex. 34 was carved on tablets of stone. So far, your argument is reasonably sound. The problem is that Deut. 5 has a list that is almost identical to that found in Ex. 20, and is located between Deut. 4:13, which refers to the Ten Commandments and two tablets of stone, and Deut. 10:1 and 10:4, which also refer to the Ten Commandments and two tablets of stone. So that could mean that the commandments in Deut. 5, which are the same as those in Ex. 20, are the real Ten Commandments. However, the waters are muddied even further by the fact that Deut. 4 has a list of commandments that resemble those in Ex. 34, which implies that the rules most people know as the Ten Commandments are not the real Ten Commandments after all. The word "commandments" is thrown around rather loosely in Exodus, and especially Deuteronomy, and the question

becomes which set of rules among the batches available are the real Ten Commandments? The actual phrase "The Ten Commandments" is only used three times (Ex. 34:28, Deut. 4:13, and Deut. 10:4) and never in regard to the group of laws most people associate with the Ten Commandments. Determining which set of commandments were carved in two tables of stone does not solve the problem, because those in Ex. 34, Deut. 4, Deut. 5, and Deut. 10 were all so treated. Like so much of the OT narrative, the problem is something of a muddle. But that is to be expected from a book composed of conflicting accounts of the same events by different authors. I discovered this discrepancy over 15 years ago, and you might want to approach with caution. More bothersome than anything else is the fact that the commandments found in Ex. 20 and Deut. 5, which nearly all denominations refer to as the Ten Commandments, are never referred to as "The Ten Commandments."

May 1993

JESUS & THE MESSIANIC AGE (PART 1)

According to Christian teachings and apologetic writings, Jesus is the savior of the world; he was the long-awaited messiah who fulfilled all the OT messianic predictions and prophecies. Prior issues of BE clearly showed that Jesus could in no way be viewed as the fulfillment of the OT messianic prophecies. Far too many specifications and qualifications were beyond his pale of operations and endowments. Simply put, he didn't fill the bill. Another major consideration that rules out any possibility of Jesus being the messiah is that his arrival failed to usher in the Messianic Age. Not only is the messiah required to fulfill all the OT messianic prophecies, but he must also generate the arrival of heaven on earth. With the world as it is today, one can safely say that this aspect of his credentials has failed miserably. If there is anything the world is not, it is a heavenly paradise.

Jesus claimed to be the Messiah. Of that there can be no doubt. John 4:25-26 says, "The woman saith to him, I know that Messiah cometh, which is called Christ: when he is come, he will tell us all things. Jesus saith to her, I that speak to thee am he." And Mark 14:61-62 says, "But he held his peace, and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked him, and said to him, Art thou the Christ, the Son of the Blessed? And Jesus said, I am...." That is about as definitive as one can be. Matt. 16:15-20 says,

He (Jesus--Ed.) saith to them, But whom say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said to him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it to thee, but my Father which is in heaven.... Then charged he his disciples that they should tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ.

Although done indirectly, Jesus also claims to be the Messiah in Matt. 26:63-65 and Luke 22:67-71.

So, in essence, there is no denying the fact that Jesus, himself, not just his followers, claimed he was the Messiah. The problem with this, however, and the reason he is so soundly rejected by all branches of Judaism and objective outside observers of the biblical requirements for the Messiahship, is that Jesus failed to usher in the kind of era that was to be the culmination of all mankind's hopes. He did not bring in the following which must accompany the Messiah's arrival.

- **THE FINAL END OF SIN**--Jer. 3:17 ("At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord; and all nations shall be gathered to it...neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart"), Zeph. 3:15 ("...thou shalt not see evil any more"), Ezek. 36:25-27 ("Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your

idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you shall keep my judgments, and do them"), Ezek. 36:33, 37:23-24, Zeph. 3:13, Isaiah 60:21, and Jer. 50:20;

- **THE END OF SUFFERING**--Isa. 65:19 ("I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying");
- **PEACE AND TRANQUILITY WILL REIGN**--Isa. 2:4, 65:19, Micah 4:3 ("And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more"), Hosea 2:18 ("in that day will I make a covenant with the beasts of the field, and the fowls of the heaven...and I will break the bow and the sword and the battle out of the earth, and will make them to lie down safely"), Ezek. 39:9-10 ("They that dwell in the cities of Israel shall go forth, and shall set on fire and burn the weapons, both the shields and the bucklers, the bows and the arrows, and the handstaves, and the spears, and they shall burn them with fire seven years...and they shall burn the weapons with fire..."), Isa. 9:6, and Zech. 9:10;
- **ONE CREED AND ONE RELIGION**--Isa, 66:23 ("And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the Lord"), Zech. 14:16 ("And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles"), Zech. 8:23 ("Thus saith the Lord of hosts; In those days it shall come to pass, that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you"), Zech. 14:9 ("And the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one"), Psalm 86:9 ("All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord; and shall glorify thy name"), Isa. 11:9 ("...for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea"), Mal. 1:11, Isa. 2:2, 14:1, 45:14, 24, 22-23, 52:1, 54:5, 60:2-6, 14-16, John 10:16, Joel 3:17, and Jer. 31:34;
- **ONLY ONE KINGDOM AND ONE KING**--Isa. 60:11-12 ("Therefore thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night; that men may bring to thee the forces of the Gentiles, and that their kings may be brought. For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted"), Zech. 14:9 ("And the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one Lord, and his name one"), Dan. 2:44 ("And the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever"), Isa. 43:5-6 ("Fear not: for I am with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; I will say to the north, Give up;

and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth"), Isa. 11:12 ("And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth"), Dan. 7:27, Ezek. 37:21-22, 39:28, and Deut. 30:3-5;

- **PEACE BETWEEN THE FEROCIOUS AND THE DOCILE**--Isa. 11:6-9 ("The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the suckling child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea"), Isa. 65:25, Ezek. 34:25, 28, and Hosea 2:18;
- **THE DEAD WILL BE RESURRECTED**--Isa. 26:19 ("The dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead"), Dan. 12:2 ("And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt"), and Deut. 32:39; **IDOLATROUS IMAGES, FALSE PROPHETS, AND THE SPIRIT OF PROFANITY WILL VANISH**--Isa. 2:18 ("And the idols he shall utterly abolish"), Zech. 13:2 ("And it shall come to pass in that day, saith the Lord of hosts, that I will cut off the names of the idols out of the land, and they shall no more be remembered: and also I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land"), Isa. 42:17 ("They shall be turned back, they shall be greatly ashamed, that trust in graven images, that say to the molten images, Ye are our gods"), Psalm 97:7, and Zeph. 2:11;
- **THE MOUNT OF OLIVES WILL SPLIT IN TWO**--Zech. 14:4 ("...the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south");
- **LIVING WATER WAS TO ISSUE FROM THE SITE OF THE TEMPLE**--Ezek. 47:1-2;
- **THE WARS OF GOD AND MAGOG**--Ezek. chapters 38 and 39, and
- **THE COVENANT SHALL BE RENEWED AS SANCTIFICATION FOR THE ISRAELITES**-- Ezek. 37:26-29 ("Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them: and I will place them, and multiply them, and will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them: yet, I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And the heathen shall know that I the Lord do sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in the midst of them for evermore"), Ezek. 39:29 ("Neither will I hide my face anymore from them: for I have poured out my spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord God"), Joel 3:20-21 ("But Judah shall dwell for ever, and Jerusalem from generation to generation. For I will cleanse their blood that I have not cleansed: for the Lord dwelleth in Zion"), Jer. 31:34 ("And they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, and

every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more"), Ezek. 2:10, 43:7, 48:35, and Joel 2:27-28.

(To Be Concluded Next Month)

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #508 from JM Continues from Last Month (Part aa)

[Point #16 in our pamphlet was: Believers are told in Mark 16:17-18 that they can drink any deadly thing and it shall not hurt them. But I don't think you would be naive enough to drink any arsenic offered. Perhaps I'm wrong and you would be willing to test the Book's veracity?--lay it on the line so to speak!--ED.]

JM's Defense is: Mr. McKinsey's problem, here, is that he did not allow for the totality of Biblical teaching on the matter. Mark 16:15-20 deals with two conditions. [1] It deals with a condition which was obligatory and permanent. "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, and he that believeth not shall be damned" (verses 15, 16). [2] It also deals with a condition which was optional and temporary. It was not commanded that they exercise spiritual gifts, but they did have them so they could confirm the word. It was temporary in that some day these spiritual gifts would be done away with. The Bible spoke of a time when these things would cease: "But when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away." (1 Cor. 13:10). The "in part" thing was the spiritual gifts, thus the perfect (complete) thing was the completed written revelation.

Understanding this, we can see that we cannot drink deadly poisons, or handle snakes, which if they bite us, we will not be hurt. Mr. McKinsey's lack of understanding of this subject and Bible knowledge in general does not make the Bible wrong.

Editor's Response to Letter #508 (Part aa)

Well, here you are again on the horns of a dilemma, JM! Your problem is obvious. The Bible says any believer can drink any deadly thing without being hurt and we both know that's utterly ridiculous. You wouldn't drink a large quantity of arsenic any more than I would. You aren't suicidal. So, to escape the situation you propose a theoretical concoction of your own, which is flawed throughout. First, upon what grounds do you allege that part of Mark 16:15-20 is temporary and the remainder is permanent? There is nothing whatever in the text itself that justifies this distinction. Where does Mark 16 say that "some day these spiritual gifts would be done away with"? Second, since Mark 16 doesn't even imply, much less state, these powers would cease, you race off to another part of Scripture for confirmation and cite 1 Cor. 13:10 which says, "But when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away." According to you, the "in part" thing is the spiritual gifts, when nothing scriptural justifies such a connection, and according to you, the "perfect" thing is completed written scripture, which is not substantiated by scripture either.

Third, if Scripture is "perfect", as you allege, and it has not come, then how could the "in part" have existed? The "in part" is part of Scripture, according to your interpretation. How could it have existed prior to Scripture and be abolished with the arrival of Scripture, when it is part of Scripture? Fourth, most apologists contend that Jesus, not Scripture, is the "perfect" that is to come. Apparently you decided that if Jesus were deemed to be the "perfect", then Mark 16 could easily be refuted by merely noting the large number of miracles that continued to happen after Jesus left the scene. So, you chose the more dishonest strategy of referring to Scripture as the "perfect." But many of your own compatriots contend that all the autographs were completed at a very early date, even though afterwards men, such as Peter and Paul, continued to heal miraculously, speak in tongues, etc. And lastly, 1 Cor. 13:8 says, "...as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away." It says that prophesying, speaking in tongues, and knowledge will pass away. It does not specifically state that believers can no longer safely drink any deadly thing or play with deadly serpents. Even if the "perfect" did mean Scripture, which you failed to prove, how do you know the phrase "in part" included deadly potions and serpents? The only credible definition of the nebulous phrase "in part" is found in 1 Cor. 13:8-9 and would seem to exclude the very acts you want to include. It mentions prophecies, tongues, and knowledge, but nothing is said about deadly potions, other miracles, or serpents.

Anyone who is reasonably well acquainted with Scripture can understand your strong reluctance to apply the word "perfect" in 1 Cor. 13:10 to Jesus, as most apologists do. After all, even after he departed the scene via the Ascension, all of the following continued to occur.

- (a) People continued to speak in tongues in Acts 2:4, 10:45-46, 19:6, 1 Cor. 14:5, 14:18, 12:10, and 12:28;
- (b) People continued to prophesy in Acts 19:6, 1 Cor. 14:1-5, 12:10, 12:28, and Rom. 12:6;
- (c) People continued to cure by the laying on of hands in Acts 5:12, 9:17-18, 14:3, 19:11, and 28:8, and
- (d) gifts continued in 1 Cor. 12:4, 9, 28, 31, and Rom. 12:6.

He couldn't be the "perfect" because the "in part" had not ceased to occur.

Letter #508 from JM Continues (Part bb)

[Point #18 in our pamphlet was: According to the text there are 29 cities listed in Joshua 15:21-32 (RSV). One need only count them to see that biblical math is not to be trusted. The total is 36.

JM's Defense is: Mr. McKinsey did not read very carefully what the Bible said. It did not say that there were only 29 names. It said: "...all the cities are twenty and nine, with their villages" (Joshua 15:32) (Underline added by jdm). This simply states that there are 29 cities. Now if one counts he will count 36 names. The resolution is that there are 29 cities and 7 villages. Really, Mr. McKinsey, you ought to read the Bible more carefully. Most of your difficulties with the Bible would disappear if you would.

Editor's Response to Letter #508 (Part bb)

Again, JM, your stream of "logic" eludes me. If anyone needs to read Scripture more closely, it's you. Let's quote the text verbatim. Joshua 15:21-32 says, "The cities belonging to the tribe of the people of Judah in the extreme South, toward the boundary of Edom, were...(36 names are mentioned in the RSV followed by) in all, twenty-nine cities, with their villages." The text says "the cities" and lists 36 names. That means 36 cities, not 29. You would have us believe that only 29 of the names were of cities and 7 were of villages. Do you have any evidence for this arbitrary division? Where does the text even imply, much less state, that some of the names applied to villages? The 21st verse says "the uttermost cities," the word "villages" isn't even mentioned, and then lists the names, the clear intention being that all the names that were to follow were of cities. In essence, your explanation is without substance, because you are alleging the 21st verse is lying when it says, "The cities belonging to the tribe...were (and 36 names follow). According to you 7 of the names are not of cities at all but of villages.

In addition, Joshua 15:33-41 lists 16 cities and closes by saying, "Sixteen cities with their villages" which is correct. There are 16. So where are the villages in this list? Your rationalization collapses. The same problem arises with respect to Joshua 15:42-44. Nine names are followed by "Nine cities with their villages." Again, none of them could be a village. Both clearly show that villages are not being listed separately (To Be Continued)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #526 from NS of Richmond, Indiana

Dear Dennis.

After several letters expounding the glories of religion in our local paper, I became angry at the religious clap-trap being published and thought you might like to see the results of a letter I had published (which was copied straight from BE, hope you don't mind).

...Anyhow, this is to let you know that there are those of us who are committed to publicly exposing the Bible and all is not lost here in Richmond. I have the help of a delightful old fellow named BF, who also takes BE, and is quite a biblical scholar. But without BE I could never carry on these debates. I am learning, slowly, on my own, but as you know, it takes time! Thanks again for BE and for your never-ending expertise.

Letter #527 from BB of Cambridge, Mass. (Part a)

Dear Dennis

.... Enclosed...you will find a letter I wrote in defense of your conviction, which was demonized by a Pastor Veader. The Pastor asserted that you were trying to justify your perversion through a campaign against God. No evidence of said perversion was presented or of an anti-God campaign. It was all supposed, because you are skeptical of the inerrancy of the Bible. He went on to claim that the entire western modern

world was built on protestantism, which is just more uncritical emotionalism, all of which I felt I had to refute with logic, scripture, and the most Reverend Martin Luther. Now he probably believes I'm demonic. Tough cookies! (What follows is a copy of the letter I sent to Pastor Veader--Ed.)

Dear Pastor Veader:

Your response to my letter to Mr. McKinsey's BIBLE ERRANCY flyer was so hateful I was reluctant to reply to it. But, I have conviction too, and it is my hope that we can engage in a reasonable argument. It is unreasonable to say that all non-Christians are demonic, corrupt, perverse, vile, and destined for Hell. It is readily evident that non-Christians are hard working, decent people, who are raised and live in loving, nurturing families. The apostle Paul was aware of this: "For when the Gentiles who have not the law, do by nature those things that are of the law; these having not the law are a law to themselves" (Rom. 2:14). I know Mr. McKinsey is not vile or corrupt, that he is a good husband and makes his living at a 9 to 5 job. His flyer is a supplementary income. Your attack on Mr. McKinsey's character was unfounded and typical of the clergy, who promote doctrine not for debate and logical thinking, but for blind belief and conformity. Skepticism is the essence of virtue, unwilling to be fooled or misled, and willing to stand firmly on the basis of ideas that have been thought through, but which are still open to growth.

The western modern world was built on the Renaissance: the rebirth of Greek and Roman philosophy and the beginning of humanism. The substitution of emotionalism for truth was the great error of the 16th century revolt. As Martin Luther said in (Grisar, *Rev. Martin Luther*, iv., 386-407), "There are as many sects and beliefs as there are heads. This fellow will have nothing to do with baptism; another denies the Sacraments, a third believes that there is another world between this and the Last Day. Some teach that Christ is not God; some say this; some say that. There is no rustic so rude but that, if he dreams or fancies anything, it must be the whisper of the Holy Ghost, and he himself a prophet."

It is argued by theists that if miracles have happened, they are the direct result of God's mind acting on matter. But, if a Divine mind can act directly on matter to produce miraculous effects, there is no reason to assume the human mind cannot do so. In both cases minds would be involved. One may claim that God's mind is different from the human mind. But, this claim assumes what needs to be proven. We do not see a person perform a miracle. But, then, we do not see God performing miracles either. In fact, we don't see God at all. In this argument his very existence is inferred merely from the presence of miracles. Human minds are known to exist, but the existence of God's mind is in dispute. It is more reasonable to assume that when someone desires a miracle and a miraculous-seeming event occurs, it does so not because of God, but because that person did it...

Editor's Response to Letter #527 (Part a)

Dear BB.

We appreciate your defense and are somewhat surprised since our prior phone conversations led me to believe that you were religiously oriented. Apparently logic,

reason, and common sense could no longer be avoided and you decided to move toward the world of prudence and good mental health.

I would only offer a couple of minor corrections to your analysis of our status. My hours are 8 to 4 and BE provides no supplementary income of any consequence. On the whole we just about break even. Incidentally, without having ever met Mr. Veader, I am confident my morality is comparable to or superior to his.

Letter #527 Continues (Part b)

There were some Jehovah's Witnesses here on Saturday, January 23rd: a mother and daughter duo. The daughter was ten years old and looked at the floor, while her mother handed me a pamphlet about how the end of the world was near and I was going to become worm meat if I didn't become a Jehovah's Witness. So, I asked the mother why we are being punished for Adam's sin and if we aren't, then why did Yahweh promise a Redeemer, who would redeem us from Adam's sin (Gen. 3:15)? Then, I added, doesn't Original Sin contradict Deut. 24:16 and Ezek. 18:20? The daughter perked up and smiled broadly at me, while her mother wrote down the scripture I had cited. The mother promised to return the next Saturday. They never showed....

Editor's Response to Letter #527 (Part b)

You have inadvertently touched on a very important aspect relevant to what BE is all about, BB. That little girl you referred to has probably been brainwashed all her life to believe that the Bible is the inerrant word of God, and her life should be subservient to its maxims. She is probably tired, if not sick, of hearing about religion in general and the Bible in particular. If she has any critical skills at all, she probably has serious doubts and reservations about many things she has been taught. She would probably like to tell people what she really thinks, but doesn't dare for several reasons. She loves and/or respects her parents, and doesn't wish to hurt their feelings. She probably has an honest-to-god justified fear of what will happen to her if she tries to deviate from the proscribed path. She knows she doesn't have sufficient knowledge about the Bible or its inadequacies to expose the book, so she goes along with whatever is said. And she has probably been so intimidated and browbeaten that she doesn't dare challenge the validity of what she has been told out of fear of being demeaned, degraded, and put down. A child of that age is very concerned about his or her self-image and self-concept. And what could be more damaging and hurtful than being told you are raising stupid, ignorant, or devil-inspired questions? And finally, because of so much indoctrination, she is probably gripped by the lingering fear that perhaps her mother is correct and hell does await the Bible's critics.

When you asked that little girl's mother some poignant questions for which the little girl could see her mother had no answer, you did what any thoughtful, questioning child would like to do: you doubted the truthfulness of even the mother's most prized possession. No doubt there are many aspects of scripture the child just doesn't "buy," but she has always been discouraged from questioning the Bible's validity and never encouraged to critique its fundamental concepts. You did it for her, and for that you

got a smile. I don't think most freethinkers realize how important the kind of service BE provides is to many individuals.

Letter #528 from BF of Tallahassee, Florida

Dear Dennis.

I don't want to embarrass you, but if we had any sense in this country we would declare you a "national treasure" and be done with it. I am absolutely convinced that (perhaps not in our lifetime) you will be recognized world-wide for the work you are doing. And not only that, your name will be written above that of Paine, Ingersoll, Russell, et. al. I am privileged to be able to obtain your works firsthand, and yes, honored to be able to correspond with the living genius behind it all.... You have my everlasting thanks and gratitude.....

Editor's Response to Letter #528

Dear BF.

I can't tell you how much I appreciate comments as complimentary as this. It does my heart good to know that my efforts are improving the lives of others, and hopefully I am worthy of the accolades you so generously bestow.

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JESUS & THE MESSIANIC AGE (PART 2)

This month's commentary will conclude the listing begun last month of all the events that were supposed to occur in concert with the arrival of the true Messiah. Jesus couldn't be the Messiah because he failed to usher in the kind of era that was to be the culmination of mankind's hopes. Along with those events listed last month the following must accompany the Messiah's arrival:

- THE LAND WAS TO BE DIVIDED ACCORDING TO THE 12 TRIBES AFTER THE CAPTIVITY--Ezek. 47:13-21;
- THE TEMPLE WAS TO BE REBUILT--Ezek. chapters 40 to 46;
- THE ARRIVAL OF ELIJAH--Mal. 4:5 ("Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord");
- THE GOING UP OF THE REMNANT OF THE NATIONS TO JERUSALEM FOR WORSHIP--Zech. 14:16 ("And it shall come to pass, that every one that is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall even go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the feast of tabernacles");

- JERUSALEM WAS TO BE SAFELY INHABITED--Zech. 14:11 ("And men shall dwell in it, and there shall be no more utter destruction; but Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited");
- EGYPT SHALL BE A DESOLATION--Joel 3:19 ("Egypt shall be a desolation, and Edom shall be a desolate wilderness, for the violence against the children of Judah...");
- MESSIAH'S ARRIVAL WAS TO BE PRECEDED BY AN EARTHQUAKE--Haggai 2:6-7 ("For thus saith the Lord of hosts; Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come: and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts");
- MESSIAH WAS TO BE THE DESIRE OF ALL NATIONS--Haggai 2:7 ("And I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come....");
- GOD WILL SMITE THE EARTH WITH THE ROD OF HIS MOUTH AND...SLAY THE WICKED--Isa. 11:4;
- THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL WILL FEAR THE LORD AND SEEK DAVID THEIR KING--Hosea 3:5 ("Afterward shall the children of Israel return, and seek the Lord their God, and David their king; and shall fear the Lord and his goodness in the latter days") and Jer. 30:9 ("But they shall serve the Lord their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up unto them");
- ALL POWERS OPPOSING ISRAEL WILL BE POWERLESS--Zech. 12:8-9 ("In that day shall the Lord defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; and he that is feeble among them at that day shall be as David; and the house of David shall be as God, as the angel of the Lord before them. And it shall come to pass in that day, that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem"), Zech 2:5 and Zech. 9:8;
- THE COMING OF THE MESSIAH WILL BE IN THE LAST DAYS--Deut. 4:29-30,
- And lastly, THE MESSIAH'S DOMINION WOULD STRETCH FROM SEA TO SEA--Zech. 9:10
 - ("...and he shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion shall be from sea to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth"),
 - Psalm 72:8 ("He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth"),
 - Dan. 7:14 ("And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed"),
 - Dan. 7:27 ("...the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him"),
 - and Psalm 72:11 ("Yea, all kings shall fall down before him: all nations shall serve him").

The conclusion to be drawn from all of the above is unmistakable. Jesus couldn't possibly be the long-awaited Messiah because of the large number of events that did NOT accompany his arrival, events that must accompany the arrival of the true Messiah according to prophecy.

We are by no means the first people in history to realize that Jesus didn't fill the bill. Throughout the last 2,000 years countless scholars have noted the wide assortment of deficiencies in the messianic credentials of Jesus of Nazareth. On page 75 in a chapter entitled "The Continuation of the Debate in the Middle Ages" from a book discussing the conflict between Judaism and Christianity, we find the following reference to the Jewish scholar and critic of Christianity, Abraham Troki:

Next, Troki collects all the signs of the onset of the messianic age, which were accepted by rabbinic and Karaite Jews from the Middle Ages down to the emancipation. Given the expectation of these signs, derived from prophecies literally understood, Jesus' messiahship could NOT be taken seriously. These are the following predictions of the prophets, still unfulfilled:

- [1] the gathering of the ten tribes under a Davidic king (Ezek. 37:21-22);
- [2] the battle between Gog and Magog (Ezek. 38 and 39);
- [3] the cleaving of the Mount of Olives (Zech. 14:4);
- [4] the drying up of the river in Egypt at the time of gathering of the dispersed (Isa. 11:15);
- [5] the issuing of living water from the site of the temple in Jerusalem (Ezek. 47:1);
- [6] ...ten men from other nations take hold of the hem of a Jew's coat and say to him: "We will go with you, for we have heard that God is with you" (Zech. 8:23);
- [7] the going up of the remnant of the nations to Jerusalem for worship (Zech. 14:16);
- [8] the appearance there of the nations on sabbaths and new moons (end of Isaiah);
- [9] the expulsion of idols, false prophets, and unclean spirits from the land (Zech. 13:2, Isa. 42:17);
- [10] in the whole world there shall be but one faith, that of Israel (Isa. 52:1, 60:1);
- [11] in the whole world there shall be but one kingdom, the kingdom of the Israelites as God's saints (Num. 24:17, Isa. 60:10-12, Dan. 7:27);
- [12] eternal peace (Isa. 2:4, Micah 4:3);
- [13] peace between wild beasts and domestic animals (Isa. 11:6-9);
- [14] the final end of sin (Ezek. 36:33-37, 37:23-24, Zeph. 3:13);
- [15] the end of suffering (Isa. 65:19);
- [16] renewal of the covenant as sanctification for the Israelites (Ezek. 37:26-28, Jer. 31:34);
- [17] the arrival of Elijah (Mal. 4:5);
- [18] the building of the future temple (Ezek. chapters 40-46);
- [19] the division of the land according to the twelve tribes (Ezek. 47:13), and lastly,
- [20] the resurrection of the dead (Isa. 26:19, Dan. 12:2).

Beyond doubt these and similar prophecies have not yet been fulfilled, and of necessity must yet be fulfilled; for God is not a man that he should lie.

The similarities between Troki's list and that provided in BE's most recent commentaries are all too obvious.

Before closing, we might note that the common Christian defense to all of the above is wholly without merit. When pressed on this issue, Christian scholars will concede that the arrival of Jesus did not usher in that which was predicted and his credentials seem tarnished, but another appearance will rectify the situation. What wasn't fulfilled the first time will be completed during his second time around. The obvious flaw in this transparent subterfuge is that there is absolutely nothing in the OT alluding to an alleged "Second Coming." As far as the OT is concerned, there is one messiah and that's all, and he is coming once and that's it. We would challenge any Christian to provide so much as one scintilla of OT prophetic commentary to the effect that the messiah would come twice.

AGE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

Anyone reasonably well acquainted with Scripture knows that injustices and inequities abound therein. Humanity suffers for what Adam did; Jesus pays the ultimate price for what humanity does, and untold numbers of OT children pay the supreme penalty for the misbehavior of their parents, even though Deut. 24:16 says, "...children shall not be punished for the sins of their fathers." But nowhere is injustice more apparent than in the fact that babies, infants, and children who die at a young age are condemned to hell because of conditions over which they have absolutely no control. In John 14:6 Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." John 3:18 says, "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God." John 3:38 says, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abides on him." And 1 John 5:12 says, "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." All four of these verses clearly state that NO man, not some men, not most men, not many men, but NO man comes to God without accepting Jesus as his savior. Therefore, every person, without exception, must accept Jesus as his personal savior in order to reach the Pearly Gates. And since deceased babies, infants, and young children can never make a commitment to Jesus, they are unjustly condemned to hell because of conditions over which they had absolutely no control.

Because of this dilemma and others that are showered on theologians by children, the former have concocted a dishonest and unbiblical concept known as the Age of Accountability. According to apologists, children below this indeterminate age are excused from all the obligations that burden adults and will not be punished for deeds committed, or expectations unfilled, while on earth. They retain a kind of purity that exempts them from the normal obligations that plague those above the Age of Accountability. The problem with this whole idea is that it is not only unbiblical but flies directly in the face of clear biblical teachings to the contrary. Nowhere does the Bible make exceptions for those under a certain age, and nowhere does the Bible

describe fetuses, babies, and children in any terms other than that of sinners in need of purification. From a biblical perspective, as the following verses effectively demonstrate, infants, babies, and fetuses are no purer than anyone else.

- Psalm 58:3 says, "The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies." Notice it says they are wicked, speaking lies, "as soon as they be born."
- Job 14:4 says, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one." Yet, many apologists would have us believe that somehow newborns are free from sin and impurity after birth and for that reason cannot be condemned until they reach the Age of Accountability.
- Rom. 5:12 ("Wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned"),
- Psalm 14:2 ("The lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand and seek God. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that does good, no not one"),
- Rom. 3:23 ("For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God"),
- 1 John 1:10 ("If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us"),
- Rom. 3:10 ("There is none righteous, no not one"),
- 1 John 1:8 ("If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us"),
- Eccle. 7:20 ("For there is not a just man upon earth, that does good, and sins not"),
- and Prov. 20:9 ("Who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin"),

clearly show that no one, regardless of age, is pure and sinless. Without exception, ALL have sinned. Therefore all will be judged by the same criteria and are under the same obligations. See also: Mark 10:18, 1 John 5:19, 1 Kings 8:46, Rom. 3:12, 7:18-19, Isa. 53:6, 64:6, Gal. 3:22, and Psalm 143:2

The Age of Accountability concept is nothing more than a transparent ruse devised by those seeking to hide the obvious injustices inflicted upon the young and defenseless by a heartless book. It is one of those ideas that should be eliminated before being allowed to exit the starting gate. The Bible makes no exceptions for those too young to comply, and all rationalizations to the contrary are without merit. The Age of Accountability concept is little more than a subterfuge designed to give scripture an aura of compassion and equity allegedly accompanied by strong considerations for extenuating circumstances. Biblicists talk about the book as if it were rational and fair when precisely the opposite is true.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #508 from JM continues from last month (Part cc)

[Point #19 in our pamphlet was: Surely you don't believe Eccle 1:9 in the RSV which

says, "What has been is what will be, and what has been done, is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun"? How many cities had an atomic bomb dropped on them prior to 1945, and how many people walked on the moon before 1969?--ED.]

JM's Defense is: It is really embarrassing to have to respond to objections such as this. If this is the best he has to offer, he should just quit. Mr. McKinsey did not allow for the context. The writer is not saying that nothing new will ever happen. He points out that people are vain. (v.2) People work to make a profit. (v.3) One generation dies and another takes its place. (v.4) The sun rises and the sun sets. (v.5) The wind blows to the south and then to the north. (v.6) The rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not filled up. (v.7) Everything is full of labor. The eye is not satisfied with what it sees, nor the ear with what it hears. (v.8) This simply shows the regularity of life. Man is on a cycle which ends and begins over and over again....

Editor's Response to Letter #508 (Part cc)

The scholarship of apologists such as yourself never ceases to amaze me, JM. Like so many of your compatriots, if you don't like the script you either rewrite, reinterpret, or ignore it. What does the text say? THERE IS NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN. Could the author have been more clear? I don't see how. Yet, you not only allege the author is "not saying that nothing new will ever happen," which he most assuredly is claiming, but try to defend your pathetic position by listing a series of acts that are decidedly repetitious by your own admission. How does your listing of a series of monotonous and repetitive acts prove that there is, in fact, something new under the sun? By referring to the "regularity of life" and the repetitive cycle in which man is involved, you are only substantiating the position of the author who said there is nothing new under the sun. In effect, you are agreeing with his observation. Yet, you earlier stated he was not saying there is nothing new under the sun. I quoted an author as saying one thing, while you said he meant the opposite. You then proceed to provide evidence that proves he meant what I said. As I have said before, your "logic" is a sight to behold. Your explanation is nothing more than a rambling stream of pseudo-thought. If this is the best you have to offer, the bowling leagues have some vacancies you might want to consider. I'm still awaiting an answer to my original question. How many cities endured atomic attack prior to 1945 and how many people visited the moon prior to 1969? By failing to provide an adequate response, you have only helped to prove that new and unique events do arise. There is something new under the sun after all.

Letter #508 from JM Continues from Last Month (Part dd)

[Point #20 in our pamphlet was: If the Bible is our moral guide, then how can it make pornographic statements such as: "...they may eat their own dung and drink their own piss with you" (2 Kings 18:27)? Is that what you want your children reading in Sunday School?--ED.]

JM's Defense is: Mr. McKinsey labors hard to find something wrong with the Bible because he has already made up his mind that it is not inspired. Here we have the results of a long and drawn out war in which the remaining soldiers are scraping the bottom of the barrel (so to speak) just to stay alive and continue the fight. They eat

and drink their own waste because the supplies have run out and this is all there is left to keep them alive.

If Mr. McKinsey thinks this is pornographic, I wonder what he thinks about the PG-13, R and X rated movies that are being pushed off on the public by allowing them to be rented in video rental stores every day? Will he say that these are pornographic and should not be rented? What about the movies on T.V., where language is often worse than these words? Is this pornographic? I am sure that Mr. McKinsey would find very little wrong with these. Why, then, does he consider the Bible pornographic? Because he has to find an argument against it, and he is at the point that any old thing will do.

Editor's Response to Letter #508 (Part dd)

To begin with, JM, I really wish you and your allies would stop alleging that I have to "labor hard" to find things wrong with the Bible. I can assure you that few comments are further from the truth. Finding problems within Scripture is easy, almost to the point of being ridiculous. Second, my mind was not made up "prior to" the analysis; my mind was made up by the analysis. Anyone who has objectively studied the evidence without any preconceptions or indoctrinations could come to only one conclusion. Third, if I am scraping the bottom of the barrel, it's only because that is where one must go in order to discuss the Bible. Fourth, I noticed you said, "They eat and drink their own waste...." What's wrong? Can't stand the Bible's terminology? Are you choking on the Bible's four-letter words? We both know the Bible did not say "waste." Fifth, who cares why they are eating the stuff; that's irrelevant. We are talking about terminology; don't try to shift our focus to another topic. Sixth, you state, "If Mr. McKinsey thinks this is pornographic...." What do you mean, "if." You mean you have doubts? "Piss" is not filthy language? Where did you grow up? If it isn't filthy language, then why did you choose the word "waste," instead? Seventh, what do you mean by saying that I am "at the point that any old thing will do"? Apparently a 50,000 watt radio station in Atlanta, Georgia doesn't think it is "any old thing." I was promptly censored when I used the word "piss" on the air, and all I was doing was quoting the "good book." Eighth, don't try to put me on the defensive by putting me in the position of defending movie ratings and content. Your statement that, "I am sure that Mr. McKinsey would find very little wrong with these" is wholly inaccurate. I am disturbed by any situation in which labels must be put on movies before you can know if they are reasonably appropriate for viewing, and I'm also bothered by the tremendous amount of trash and violence currently circulating in abundance and masquerading under the rubric of artistic freedom and creativity. But my views aren't the issue; your book's profanity is. So, let's stay on the issue. Ninth, don't try to implicitly excuse, justify, or minimize the Bible's contents because the content of movies and television is reprehensible. And lastly, you need not engage in hyperbole by saying, "Why, then, does he consider the Bible pornographic?" Where have I ever said the Bible is pornographic? There are undoubtedly pornographic statements contained therein, but that doesn't mean the entire book is pornographic.

Letter #508 from JM Continues (Part ee)

Would I want my child reading this on Sunday? Yes! Providing that he is taught why these words were used, it would be perfectly acceptable. They are not used in a

pornographic way; they were used to speak of bodily functions and the last extremities of a prolonged siege. I have even quoted this language from the pulpit. The Bible uses the word "ass" to speak of the donkey; men, today, make it dirty and filthy. The Bible speaks of "hell" to refer to either the grave, the realm of the unseen for the wicked, or eternal punishment for the wicked. Men, today, use it as a slang and dirty word. The problem is not with the Bible, it is with our attitude in how we use certain words. If one finds these words offensive, another translation can be used."

Editor's Response to Letter #508 (Part ee)

All you are doing, JM, is resorting to the old "you are taking it out of context" defense. Do you realize how many novelists, writers, poets, musicians, painters, playwrights, composers, sculptors, photographers, and artists could make the same argument when their works are attacked as pornographic by others? I can only conclude that you have no objection to your children reading, viewing, and hearing their works as well. After all, you have already admitted you don't mind your child reading the word "piss" in Sunday School as long as it is viewed in context and "providing that he is taught why these words were used." Shouldn't those whose works you and your compatriots attack be accorded the same opportunity to explain and justify their product?

(To Be Concluded Next Month)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #529 from NS of Richmond, Indiana

Dear Dennis

.... Whether you know it or not, Biblical Errancy has become a major thing in my later years. Much time is spent at the computer, not only writing letters, but attempting to get things in some sort of order on discs. I am very dedicated to the cause, and feel I must speak out. Like you, I realize there are a lot of sick people in the world. I replied to most of the letters (Letters written to NS in response to NS's letters to the editor published in NS's local newspaper--Ed.) personally, but a couple didn't even merit a reply, for they are so encased in Christian fundamentals that getting them to read the Bible with any objectivity would be in direct proportion to my donning a tutu and dancing "Swan Lake".

With ammunition such as the Bible, BE, Robert Ingersoll, *Forgery in Christianity*, *Deceptions and Myths in the Bible*, *The Bible Handbook*, etc., it isn't too hard to shoot down most arguments. Even with their feet encased in cement, it must give some of them pause when they read actual contradictions, murderous laws and acts, which I'm sure most didn't even realize existed. One lady who wrote that her beloved God DID NOT ignore his own commandments, and they weren't even made for Him to begin with was so ridiculous (and wide open) I thought she did merit a reply. I patiently listed many broken commandments (quite a job within itself) along with an analysis of Josh McDowell and others like him.... I also listed various and sundry other despicable deeds her God did and a short history of where the Bible comes from and mailed them to her with my return address....

Letter #530 from CH of Spartanburg, South Carolina

Dear Mr. McKinsey,

I support your effort wholeheartedly. I wish to assure you that one can be a Christian in the truest sense of the word without relying on the Bible as one's only source of Truth. Our sense of spirituality has too often been degenerated to a blind reverence of the Bible--bibliolatry. I wish more people were involved in healing our country's bigotry, greed, self-righteousness and ignorance, cultivated by inaccurate and disingenuous uses of the Bible. What a travesty -- spreading hatred in the name of Love. Keep up the good work.

Editor's Response to Letter #530

Although your support is most appreciated, CH, I think you are trying to put distance between yourself and the Bible when there is little room to spare. If, indeed, you are a Christian in the 'truest sense of the word,' then you are going to be plagued by a multitude of biblical problems that all Christians must confront, even those who reject biblical inerrancy. Christian liberals, for example, cannot escape the problems posed by John 14:6, Rom. 3:23, Rev. 12:7, Original Sin, the Resurrection, God's injustice and so on, ad infinitum. You can't leave the Bible and be a Christian, and the more biblical material you reject, the less of a Christian you become. Many people are trying to remain Christians while conceding all the contradictions and problems we have highlighted over the last ten years. It can't be done without being disingenuous and intellectually schizoid.

Letter #531 from BF of Tallahassee, Florida

Dear Dennis.

You continue to mesmerize me with your knowledge, debating skills, and logic....

Editor's Response to Letter #531 from BF

Dear BF.

I am humbly appreciative for your most gracious accolades. I would be less than candid were I not to admit that commendations go a long way toward keeping our spirits high and our determination energized. Knowing one is appreciated and efforts are not expended in vain are major stimuli to our whole program.

Letter #532 from HM of Bellbrook, Ohio

Dear Dennis

.... I must compliment you on the remarkable way you handle yourself in a face-to-face or voice-to-voice debate. I wish I could stay as cool and calm as your are in confrontations with fundamentalists, but I'm inclined to blow my stack at the least bit of intimidation. By the way, on one of your tapes you read a lengthy list of "deeds" performed by God which made the Devil look like Shirley Temple. You excluded the chapter and verse numbers. Is there any way I can obtain the complete list?

Editor's Response to Letter #532

Dear HM.

Over the years my obsequious, condescending, mild-mannered approach to religious apologists has gradually faded and I think you would find my recent radio

appearances to be far more in keeping with the spirit you express. I don't blow my stack but biblicists would do well to be prepared if they seek to defend the Bible or attack the validity of this publication. My strategy and tactics have changed significantly. I now realize one can overdo the Mr. Nice Guy approach. Come what may, I'm now more inclined to tell it like it is.

As far as the reprehensible deeds of God are concerned, chapter and verse references can be found in the commentaries of Issues 115-120. In addition, a brief synopsis can be found near the end of the third issue.

Issue No. 127

July 1993

The June issue of BE marked a milestone in the history of this publication. For all practical purposes, we have exhausted the contents of our 5 large notebooks filled with information on the errors, contradictions, and fallacies of the Bible. Ten and one half years were required, but success has been achieved. Although commentaries will continue to appear in BE, future emphasis will now be upon book reviews, dissecting apologetic literature, answering apologetic defenses, responding to apologetic and sympathetic letters, and generally broadening our focus to include more extrabiblical material. Anyone who has all of our prior issues possesses what is probably the most comprehensive, the most thoroughly researched, the most poignant, the most accurate refutation of the Bible in the entire English-speaking world, if not the entire world. At least, we are not aware of anything more compendious or encyclopedic. But there is a limit to how much can be exposed in the manner we have employed, and that point has been reached. In effect the first phase of our entire effort has been successfully accomplished. A massive, all-inclusive volume of materials devoted to an exposure of the Bible's failings is now available for all to read. Over the years I have been asked by scores of people to write a book, but anyone who has read all of our back issues has, in effect, read several books and, consequently, I have felt little need to engage in what would essentially amount to a duplication of that which has already been produced. Other matters were more pressing. In the future, however, writing a book will be considered.

BE's new area of concentration will be as important as the first and unfortunately is the arena in which so many members of the freethought movement have come up short over the years. Opponents of the Bible have often collected a sizable amount of data but seemed lost as to how it should be employed. An effective and on-going program of debate, discussion, proselytization, education, etc. has been noticeably lacking, and that we intend to address much more extensively. It does no good to gather material that is not going to be employed in an effective and on-going manner. If you don't take it to the other side, almost nothing will be accomplished, because

there is almost no chance they are going to come to ideas they have been taught to view as erroneous.

We can also happily announce that, as of last month, we concluded the second phase of our effort. FINALLY, they have arrived; they are here; they made it. After almost two years in the making, we have managed to put the heart, the essence, the nucleus of 10 1/2 years of BE COMMENTARIES onto 24 audio tapes of approximately 90 minutes each. A lot of time and effort went into constructing something that could be used by those who are visually-impaired, want to read as little as possible, want something to hear while driving, have friends, relatives, or acquaintances who refuse to read biblical criticisms, or have special needs of one sort or another. Audio/visual materials have become extremely important in spreading the message, and we have long felt a need to propagate BE by this type of medium. Unlike all prior A/V materials, these were specifically created for distribution and consumption. Because we have always felt an obligation to prove our case as would a lawyer in court, these audio commentaries, like BE commentaries throughout the years, are well supplied with facts and figures gleaned from tremendous research over several decades. So, in effect, the second phase has been successfully concluded also.

Now we are about to enter the third, and probably most challenging, phase of our program--the production and distribution of video tapes for broadcast on public access cable TV. Tentative plans are to create tapes that could then be circulated to supporters who would be willing to play them regularly on their local access station. We plan to call upon those who volunteered several years ago to participate but were never contacted. To them we extend our apologies, but time just wasn't available.

Unfortunately, this will be the most expensive activity undertaken so far. To begin with, we need a studio or place in which to record, volunteers to operate the equipment, an editing machine, someone who knows the intricacies of editing, a video-camcorder, a video tape duplicator, and other accessories needed for an effective presentation. We have been told that start-up equipment alone will total at least \$2,000 to \$4,000 and that the Sony TR 101 Hi-8 would fit our needs fine. We would appreciate hearing from anyone who can aid in regard to these considerations. Unfortunately, unlike many people, we do not live in an area in which the local cablevision station will provide equipment and facilities for those who seek to create a program. Many factors will have to fall into place for this undertaking to work successfully, not the least of which is getting air-times at sensible hours on a regular basis.

Although in the planning stage for many years, this third major project has been held in abeyance for several reasons. If I had gone straight to cablevision, viewers would have called or written for additional information, and I had no material available for distribution. Now that body of material exists in abundance. Second, we live in an audio-visual age, and the number of people who read serious material on a regular basis is only a small percentage of the population in general. When people come home from work or school, they turn on the TV and that is where the mass audience is. Preachers and evangelists are well aware of this fact, and don't race to TV just to see

their faces on screens. If we produced cablevision programs, people would be far more likely to request additional A/V materials, such as audio tapes, rather than literature. For that reason audio tapes covering the essence of BE had to be available also. Many will listen to what you have to say, but they are not going to put forth any effort to read. Those tapes are now available also. And finally, the amounts of time and money that have to be invested have been a major hindrance.

In any event, the basics are in place. We have the literature and the audio tapes. Now we need videos, public access, a mass audience, speaking engagements, debates, exposure, and expansion. The third phase will be the most difficult because of several factors, over which I have little or no control. It won't get off the ground until every facet is in place, and how long this will take is anyone's guess. Approximately 8 years ago we briefly engaged in a project of this nature and found that even such factors as finding a suitable recording location and appropriate video lighting facilities can be a real challenge.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #508 from JM continues from last month (Part ff)

[Point #21 in our pamphlet was: If God created everything (Col. 1:16, Eph. 3:9, Rev. 4:11, John 1:3), then he created the world's evil (Isa. 45:7, Lam. 3:38). Thus, he should be held responsible--ED.]

JM's Defense is: This gets back to objection #3. God made everything, but he did not make it evil. Satan rebelled against God, and Adam and Eve allowed sin to come into the world through their disobedience. Man uses things that God gave for good, to make evil things. This is hardly God's fault, and it is unfair to blame God with it.

Editor's Response to Letter #508 (Part ff)

Again, JW, we see that logic is not one of your strong suits. Either God created everything or he didn't. There is no in between. Scripture says in Col. 1:16 and Eph. 3:9 that God created everything and you also stated, "God created everything." That settles the matter. In groping for an answer, you say God created everything but he didn't create evil. That's a contradiction. If Satan rebelled against God, and Adam and Eve allowed sin to come into the world, then God did not create everything. But you are drifting off into the secondary consideration of how sin came about according to Christian theology, which is irrelevant. What matters is that God either is or is not the source.

Letter #508 Continues (Part gg)

...There are places in the Bible, however, that seem to indicate that God does do evil.... How can these things be reconciled with the fact that God does not do evil? Simply by realizing that whatever God allows, is attributed to him. God is the ultimate source of power and authority. This being the case, we need to realize that even evil must be allowed by God, or else it would not exist. Thus in that sense God creates evil. When one looks at the overall context of the Bible, there is no problem at all.

The figure of speech used here is "anthropopatheia" or the ascribing of human attributes to God....

Editor's Response to Letter #508 (Part gg)

Don't be silly, JM; of course there is a problem and your "God allows" subterfuge just won't fly. You not only said he created everything, which by definition means he must have created evil, but key verses clearly show that God did not just "allow" evil, he created it, he's the source, it's his idea. Through a subtle ruse you are trying to say he didn't create everything. You might want to read our commentary on God in the July 1992 issue of BE. There aren't just places in the Bible that "seem" to indicate that God does evil. There are verses that flatly state he is the source. Biblical readers are not ascribing attributes to God; the Bible is, and it is doing so in no uncertain terms.

Letter #508 Continues (Part hh)

[Point #22 in our pamphlet was: In Psalm 139:7-11 we are told God is everywhere. If so, why would God need to come down to earth to see a city (Gen. 11:5) when he is already here and how could Satan leave the presence of the Lord (Job 1:2, 2:7)?--ED.]

JM's Defense is: Again the figure of speech "anthropopatheia" is used here, in another one of its aspects. God does not need to come down to see what is going on, but he is said to come down so that man may understand him. Satan cannot literally leave the presence of the Lord, but he is said to be able so that men could understand God.

Editor's Response to Letter #508 (Part hh)

You can bring in more irrelevant verbiage, JM! Who cares why he came down or if he needs to come down at all. That doesn't address the basic problem. How can he come down if he is already here? That's the issue! Don't try to change the focus. And where are you getting this stuff about his coming down "so that man may understand him"? Where is that in Scripture, or is this another concoction? And what do you mean, "Satan cannot literally leave the presence of the Lord"? Don't you believe Job 1:12 ("So Satan went forth from the presence of the Lord") or do you prefer to interpret as you see fit? Aren't you fundamentalists the ones who constantly complain about Christian liberals leaving the literal interpretation of Scripture when they're in a bind? And here you are, practicing the same dishonest scholarship. If you spent as much time reading and accepting the book as is, as you do in interpreting and redefining for expediency's sake, you'd be far better off. This "anthropopatheia" nonsense you keep tossing out is nothing more than a subterfuge to escape an impasse.

Letter #508 Continues (Part ii)

[Point #23 in our pamphlet was: For justice to exist, punishment must fit the crime. No matter how many bad deeds one commits in this world, there is a limit. Yet, hell's punishment is infinite--ED.]

JM's Defense is: The reason that Mr. McKinsey sees a problem here is because he does not understand the nature of sin and of God. There is also a limit to what man can do because he is finite. If man was infinite I have a feeling that the punishment for crimes would be greater than what they are. God is an infinite being, who cannot

make allowances for sin. God is of purer eyes than to behold sin, and he cannot allow it. Mr. McKinsey does not see the terrible nature of sin in the eyes of God because he does not think that sin is very bad. To him, and people like him, sin is nothing more than a child's disregard for parental rule. In God's eyes even this is terrible (for children old enough to know right from wrong.)

Yet, hell is infinitely greater than any punishment we as humans could inflict upon evil-doers. However, it needs to be remembered that God does not want any to perish, but all to come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:9). It was terrible enough that God had to give his Son as the only way from sin back to God. If one refuses to accept the gracious gift of God's sacrifice, then God will punish them eternally. Why, because the price paid was infinitely greater than anything we could ever have offered. God gave his sinless Son that we might have life.

Editor's Response to Letter #508 (Part ii)

What a rambling entanglement of vapid gobbledygook! First, you state that, "If man was infinite I have a feeling that the punishment for crimes would be greater than what they are," which is nothing more than speculation on your part and does nothing to excuse God's behavior. Even more important, how could the punishment be any greater, when it's already infinite? For goodness sake, what do you want? How could man's becoming infinite extend the punishment any further, when one's residency in hell is already eternal? Second, you state, "God is an infinite being, who cannot make allowances for sin," when he obviously must; otherwise, everyone will end up in hell forever. Third, the crux of your argument seems to be that God is so pure that all sin is horrific in God's eyes. Consequently, only infinite punishment is justified. Don't be absurd. That's no answer. That has nothing to do with justice. You mean that because God is so offended, infinite punishment is appropriate? God makes no allowances for degrees of culpability? That's a just God! I repeat my original question. How is God fitting the crime to the punishment, and where's the justice? Fourth, I take great exception to your wholly unjustified remark that, "Mr. McKinsey does not think that sin is very bad." Quite the contrary, I find the amount of antisocial behavior prevalent throughout our society to be nothing short of appalling, and I can't help but note that people of the most profound religious convictions are in charge of the political/social/economic/ideological scene while it runs rampant. And I have never looked upon felonious acts such as murder and rape as "nothing more than a child's disregard for parental rule." Are you serious? Where are you getting this poison? Fifth, you state that, "if one refuses to accept the gracious gift of God's sacrifice, then God will punish them eternally." How utterly outrageous! You mean the mere act of simply failing to accept a gift merits as much punishment as if one had committed the most heinous crimes imaginable? If you look upon this whole arrangement as just, I only hope I never enter a courtroom in which you are the judge.

Letter #508 Continues (Part jj)

[The 24th and final point in our pamphlet entitled "THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD?" was: And lastly, in Acts 20:35 Paul told people to "remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" Since Jesus never made such a biblical statement, isn't Paul guilty of deception?--ED.]

JM's Defense is: Mr. McKinsey labors to find something wrong with the Bible in bringing up this objection. Who said that if Jesus made such a statement that it would ever have to be recorded? John said: "Many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book...." (John 20:30). If Jesus did many other signs which were not written, would it not be reasonable to say that Jesus said many things which were not written? Paul was speaking to the Ephesian elders who had no doubt been taught many of the sayings of Jesus (by the apostles) which had not been written down.

Editor's Response to Letter #508 (Part jj)

After all these months, JM, you've finally made a point that has some degree of credibility. As long as you and your compatriots are willing to admit that there is no such statement by Jesus anywhere in the Bible; as long as you and your cohorts are willing to promise that you will never again use this quotation by Paul without telling your listeners that the alleged comment by Jesus is nowhere to be found in the Bible, and as long as you are willing to admit that you are assuming Paul is correctly quoting an extrabiblical comment by Jesus which he managed to come across somehow, I am willing to concede that Paul might be correct. But that is a big "might." Even before placing this problem into my pamphlet, I realized biblicists would probably use your defense. But I inserted it anyway, because I felt the problem was of such importance as to merit consideration, and I knew how I would respond. I think most people will see your transparent defense for what it really is, a rationalization. But if they don't, they have at least been made aware of the problem.

Letter #508 Concludes After Nearly One Year (Part kk)

So where are the great problems that are supposed to make us tremble in our boots? Where are the iron-clad arguments that conclusively destroy the credibility of the Bible? Mr. McKinsey started out by saying that these difficulties could not be solved, only rationalized. Well, he can call it what he wants, but we would like to see him respond, point by point to the responses we have given. Maybe he will write another tract answering these responses. It is our hope and prayer that someone will see the truth by reading this booklet and come to God, or have his faith strengthened. If this is done, we will be paid back a hundred fold.

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #508 (Part kk)

If you didn't tremble in your boots, JM, it's probably because you were too busy drowning in them. Your entire pamphlet is anemic, deceptive, and erroneous, and only substantiates the truth of my original comment: These problems can't be solved, only rationalized. You hoped that I would write a reply to your document and respond to your points one by one. I trust you aren't disappointed, in light of the fact that every issue of BE since September 1992 has exposed one or more points in your booklet entitled "Still a Perfect Work of Harmony" which attacked my pamphlet, "The Bible is God's Word?" You ask: Where are the iron-clad arguments that destroy the credibility of the Bible? Take off your Christian blindfold, and you'll see wreckage strewn all about. Like winds from Hurricane Andrew, even if you personally can't see them, objective observers can sure see the results of their force and destruction. Contrary to the title of your publication, if there is one thing the Bible is not, it's a

"Perfect Work of Harmony". It's anything but. As I have said so often, the Bible has more holes in it than a backdoor screen.

Letter #533 from NB of Tucson, Arizona (Part a)

Dear Dennis.

I am a loyal subscriber to B.E., but let me say at the outset that I am not a "Biblicist", "Religionist", literalist, or fundamentalist, though I do believe in God....

I wrote this letter in reference to B.E. #120, p. 5, second column, about the "stalls" and "baths". I see no reason why copyists' errors may not have been involved in the former case, as the Hebrew system of writing numbers involved the use of modified forms of Hebrew letters, with little dots written above them to indicate orders of magnitude. Thus, a single omitted dot could make the difference between 4,000 and 40,000.

Editor's Response to Letter #533 (Part a)

Dear NB. The copyist error defense is simply not going to save the day in this instance, or hundreds of others that are often cited. The reasoning in this regard is relatively simple. First, although the alleged originals no longer exist, there are thousands of manuscripts claiming to be accurate copies of the alleged originals. When scholars decided to write the following versions--KJ, RS, ML, AS, NASB, MT, LV, JB, NIV, TEV, NWT, and etc.--they went through either some, many, most, or all of the manuscripts, compared what was said in each, reached a common consensus, and chose to use 40,000 in 1 Kings 4:26 and 4,000 in 2 Chron. 9:25. In order for there to have been a copyist error, the same incorrect figure had to have been copied in scores if not hundreds and thousands of manuscripts, certainly not one or two. Are you saying hundreds, if not thousands, of copyists made precisely the same error when they copied 1 Kings 4:26 and 2 Chron. 9:25 from the autographs? They not only copied incorrectly but made the same erroneous change? Christians love to talk about odds. What do you think are the odds of that happening? No doubt they are comparable to the figures biblicists throw around when it comes to the percentage possibility of Jesus' fulfilling all the OT messianic prophecies. The attempt by biblicists to pawn this problem off on one lone copyist or scribe in some monastery somewhere who happened to make one simple mistake is rather amusing, in light of the fact that thousands of manuscripts are involved with the same verse. Second, even if there were a copyist mistake, you could never be sure which figure was copied incorrectly. Was it the 40,000 figure that should have been 4,000 or the 4,000 figure that should have been 40,000? Because you could never know for sure, you might just as well expunge these two parts of the Bible. One is definitely incorrect, and you'll never know which. Third, and very important, is the fact that the manuscripts contradict one another, and until the original is produced, the contradiction stands. Biblicists are asking us to ignore a contradiction staring us in the face, in favor of a theory that can in no way be substantiated. The fact is that the contradiction stands, and will continue standing until evidence is produced to the contrary. The burden of proof lies on he who alleges. Because the contradiction is clear and obvious, I am under no obligation to prove a contradiction exists in manuscripts which biblicists

can't even prove existed. Biblicists, on the other hand, are obligated to prove there was no contradiction in the original writings, which they are wholly incapable of doing.

Letter #533 Concludes (Part b)

I have far more serious problems with the "baths." You say: "Nothing is said about a container." I almost fell off my chair when I read that. If there was no container, then what held the "molten sea" of 1 Kings 7:23? I seem to recall your having some fun with the fact that the Israelites seemed to think that "pi" is equal to 3, whereas "everybody" knows that it is 3.1416... In fact, they were not very sophisticated mathematically, unlike the Egyptians, who a millenium before Solomon had an approximation to "pi" that was accurate to four decimal places, by far the best in the ancient world.... But where is it said that the "molten sea" was circular? 1 Kings 7:23 says only that it was "round all about, and his height was five cubits."

It appears that you have no idea of what a "bath," in this context, is. Well...a "bath" was an old Hebrew unit of volume equal to approximately 10 U.S. gallons. This leads to a very serious problem, which I will get to in a moment. But first, did you seriously interpret "baths," as "bathtubs"? I find this positively mind-blowing if you did.

Now, suppose that instead of being circular, the container was elliptical in cross-section. (At this point NB went into some mathematical calculations along with a graph--Ed.)....

Editor's Response to Letter #533 (Part b)

Read the text more closely, NB, and you'll see that your elliptical theory won't hold up. First Kings 7:23 says, "And he made a molten sea, ten cubits from the one brim to the other: it was round all about, and his height was five cubits: and a line of 30 cubits did compass it round about." If it was round all about, and one brim to the other always measured 10 cubits, then how could it have been anything other than a circle? For all practical purposes that eliminates the elliptical option and renders all your calculations moot. As I said originally, you can't have a circle with a diameter of 10 cubits and a circumference of 30 cubits.

As far as the "container" question is concerned and the accident you nearly had with your chair, I would rewrite the section about the container by simply omitting it. Everything from "And what container are you talking about" to "Even if what you said were relevant, which it isn't" should have been omitted. There was a container, the molten sea, in which the baths were contained, that's true. You are by no means the only reader who wrote a letter to us to express disagreement with what I said in regards to the baths. I stand corrected, and admit I should have read that section more closely. But my original argument and that which follows this omission, are still valid. I've never claimed perfection, but I'm light-years ahead of my competition.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #534 from DM of Supply, NC

Dear Dennis.

Great Issues! I just love them! You are brilliant! I love to see you sock it to em. Keep it up!....

Letter #535 from GS of Clearfield, Penn.

Dear Mr. McKinsey

.... Your publication is very informative and much-needed in our society. I commend you and wish you the best of luck in your endeavors.

Letter #536 from JB of Portland, Oregon

Dear Mr. McKinsey.

Your publication has been the subject of much comment on America on Line's bulletin board regarding Bible contradictions. As a militant atheist, I am presently intrigued by the subject of biblical errancy, lies and contradictions. What I have seen of your efforts has impressed me, and I believe that I would like to both subscribe and obtain back copies....

EDITOR'S NOTE: Because of a significant number of inquiries and new subscribers, we wish to send a special thanks to all those who have been putting extracts from BE on computer bulletin boards around the nation. Apparently this is an excellent means by which to advertise, and all subscribers are free to put any of our material on any computer boards they deem suitable, as long as the name and address of the source is publicized as well.

Issue No. 128

August 1993

We have always had a policy of periodically devoting an entire issue of BE to letters from our readers, and in keeping with that tradition have decided to devote this month's issue to correspondence.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #537 from GM of Oulu, Finland (Part a)

Dear Mr. McKinsey.

I read with interest the sample issues of Biblical Errancy you sent me, and I would like to make a few remarks. One of the copies of Biblical Errancy I received bears the title "Sample Issue" and has no date or progressive number; therefore I assume that as a rule this copy is sent to all inquirers. I want to concentrate for this time on this sample issue. I believe that several of the arguments against Christianity contained in it are unfair, and for honesty's sake should be removed from the issue. I cannot discuss all issues in one letter, so for this time I will focus on a few of them only.

THE RESURRECTION

You ask, "Why should the Resurrection be of such significance as that ascribed to it for example by Paul in 1 Cor. 15:14?" After all, you observe, the Bible tells of other people being raised from the dead. Since I happen to believe that what Paul says is true, I will try to show that this argument is not in line with the stated aims of your periodical, and therefore should be removed from it.

First of all, I am surprised that you apparently are not aware of the fact that according to the Bible Jesus' resurrection was unique in that it was not a mere resuscitation of a corpse. All the Biblical characters you mention were raised from the dead, but after that they grew old and died once again. Jesus, on the other hand, was raised from the dead in order to be alive forever (Rev. 1:18, Rom. 6:9, Heb. 7:25). The claim that Jesus will never die again, if nothing else, does make the resurrection of Jesus unique in the Bible, is consistent with the statement of Paul, and flies in the face of your claim that other people were raised from the dead in the same sense Jesus was.

Editor's Response to Letter #537 (Part a)

Dear GM.

Apparently I am going to have to start suggesting that people read prior issues of BE before they send us critical letters. This topic was covered long ago. To begin with, Paul says it is the resurrection that matters, not the fact that Jesus never died again. What Pauline verses are you referring to when you say that Jesus' act of never dying again is what really mattered to Paul? Paul never said that. In First Corinthians he said it's the resurrection that counts, not the fact that Jesus never died again. Secondly, how do you know that Jairus' daughter, the widow at Nain's son, Lazarus, and others who rose from the dead died again? How do you know they didn't go straight to Heaven like Elijah in his chariot? How can you be sure they didn't ascend to Heaven like Enoch? You say "the others grew old and died once again." What scriptural verses are you citing to prove that they died again, or is this mere conjecture on your part? Some of your argument rests on a gratuitous assumption. Thirdly, if the resurrection of Jesus was more than just the mere revival of a corpse, then how do you know that is not applicable to the others as well? And lastly, you cite Rev. 1:18, Heb. 7:25 and Rom. 6:9 to prove that Jesus was raised from the dead to be alive forevermore. Yet, according to Christian theology, we are all going to be raised from the dead to live forevermore in either Heaven, Hell, Purgatory or elsewhere. In fact, everyone is immortal whether desired or not. So Jesus is by no means unique in this regard.

Letter #537 Continues (Part b)

In fact, Paul teaches elsewhere that Jesus' resurrection was **THE FIRST** of this kind to ever occur in history. Col. 1:18 says, "And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all [things] he might have the preeminence. First Cor. 15:20 says, "But now is Christ risen from the dead, [and] become the firstfruits of them that slept. And 1 Cor. 15:23 says, "But every man [will rise from the dead] in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.

Editor's Response to Letter #537 (Part b)

You have misconstrued these verses, GM. In fact, you would do well to steer clear of them entirely. They say that Christ was the first to rise from the dead, period. Nowhere do they say that his resurrection was the first "of this kind." No biblical distinction is drawn between the nature of his resurrection and those of others. All three verses you cite clearly state that Christ was the first to rise from the dead, and both the Old and New Testaments clearly refute the validity of that claim. Many biblical figures rose before him. Secondly, how could Jesus have a beginning or be firstborn if he is God, the eternal? Thirdly, Paul says it's the resurrection that counts, the fact that Jesus rose from the dead, period, not the fact that his was the first in a long series of resurrections.

Letter #537 Continues (Part c)

In addition, Jesus' resurrection was unique in that He raised Himself from the dead (or, if you don't believe it, He claimed He would - John 10:17-18). No other character in the Bible raised himself from the dead, nor did anyone else claim to be able to do so. Far from being similar to other "resurrections," Jesus' resurrection was something that had never happened before, and that has not happened ever since.

Editor's Response to Letter #537 (Part c)

The more you talk, GM, the further your quaggy descent. The Bible repeatedly states in no uncertain terms that Jesus was raised from the dead by God; he did not raise himself. Verses which clearly prove as much are: Acts 3:15 ("And killed the Prince of life, whom God has raised from the dead...."), Acts 13:30 ("But God raised him from the dead"), Gal. 1:1 ("...but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead...."), Acts. 4:10, 2:32, 5:30, and many others. Also note that verses like Gal. 1:1 draw a clear distinction between Jesus and God the Father. So don't try the old trinitarian shell-game of equating the two and saying that Jesus is God and therefore raised himself. Either he is God or he isn't. He can't be both simultaneously. If he is God, he couldn't have died to begin with, since God can't die. If he isn't, then these verses clearly show that he did not raise himself.

On top of everything else, you claim Jesus' predicted in John 10:17-18 that he would raise himself, which many verses show to be an erroneous prognostication. In essence, you've inadvertently exposed Jesus as a false prophet. You'd do well to avoid these verses as well.

Letter #537 Continues (Part d)

Furthermore, the body with which Jesus was raised, although the same body he had before the resurrection (the scars were still there), was according to Paul a spiritual body, which he says is radically different from a physical body (1 Cor. 15:35-53). (Here as elsewhere, you can believe what Paul says or disbelieve it, but you cannot say it is a fallacy or an error or a contradiction.)

This fact too is consistent with the idea that Jesus' resurrection was completely different from, say, that of Lazarus, and it is inconsistent with your opinion that what started Christianity was just another resuscitation like many others.

Incidentally, there is a serious mistake in your list of biblical resuscitations. What happened to Samuel (1 Sam. 28) and to Moses and Elijah (Luke 9) is neither a

resurrection nor a resuscitation. Rather, their disembodied spirits were made visible to people; their bodies will be raised only when Jesus comes back.

Editor's Response to Letter #537 (Part d)

In the 15th chapter of first Corinthians to which you refer, Paul is talking about a spiritual body which all will have when they rise from the dead. He is not referring to the body of Jesus alone. The very first verse of 1 Cor. 15:35-53 says, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they (Notice it says "they") come?," and is clearly referring to people in general, not Jesus in particular, as the other verses demonstrate as well. You can't use these verses to prove that the resurrection of Jesus was different from that of Lazarus, for example. The bodies which Jesus and Lazarus had after their resurrections were the same physical bodies they had before their demise and, according to Paul, any spiritual quality attached to one will accompany the other also.

Where did I ever use the word "resuscitation" or even imply that "what started Christianity was just another resuscitation." Can you show one instance in all of our prior issues where I ever used the word "resuscitation"? Biblicists throw that word around freely, and I've never used it. You've created a straw-man.

And can you provide any biblical testimony to the effect that Samuel, Moses, and Elijah appeared only as disembodied spirits? Samuel says to Saul in 1 Sam. 28:15, "Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up?" Luke 9:30 says, "Behold, two men talked with him, Moses and Elijah! They were splendid in appearance, glorious to see...." Where do these or related verses state that the appearances of Samuel, Moses, and Elijah were in something other than a physical body? You have inserted into the text a conjecture that is not only unwarranted but, even more important, unprovable. (TO BE CONTINUED)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #538 from VC of Hood River, Oregon

In response to letter #528 (May 1993) from BF of Tallahassee:

My sentiments exactly and he says it so well. I have all the BE issues. I reread them occasionally. I've underlined my favorite parts and made notations in the margins. My heirs have been instructed to save these and pass them on down through our progeny.

Letter #539 from JT of Hughesville, Penn.

Dear Dennis.

I don't know whether an elephant ever forgets, but I've forgotten to write you lately to tell you what a superb job I think you're doing with "Biblical Errancy." It took BF's letter (#528) in Issue 125 to bring me to my senses. Mea culpa!

Let me just say that "BE" is one of the few publications I can't wait to get in the mail. I wish each issue were a hundred pages long! I look forward to many more numbers to come. You've got the fundies on the run, Dennis! Now, let's close in for the kill!

Letter #540 from HLM of Bellbrook, Ohio

Dear Dennis....

You should be pleased to learn that I personally answer just about every religious editorial that appears in the *Dayton Daily News*, including an occasional one by David E. Kepple who is allowed far too much religious influence in that paper. Along with my personal remarks to these people, I include a copy of your pamphlets. I am yet to receive a reply from anyone!

Allow me to make a few suggestions, if you will, Dennis, regarding the format of B.E. I enjoy reading contradictions in the Bible, but somehow your heavy reliance on contradictions alone doesn't appear to affect theists in the way I hoped it would. That's why I like the philosophical approach better. Your sample copy dealing with the flood and the resurrection is the best type of ammunition you've ever presented, because you point out the ridiculous aspects of the stories. This isn't so easy to combat.

But contradictions, particularly those dealing with numbers are simply passed off by theists as translation errors. They don't appear to shake a person's faith in the least. Your flood account is a pure gem.... Please consider more newsletters in that vein. I've enclosed with this letter a page of questions that you might like to sift through for possible use in future editions of BE. Thank you for your time and keep spreading the word. Jehovah's Witnesses aren't the only ones who can command attention.

(Some of the questions you might use are--Ed.). Do you not agree that the Catholic Church is being terribly hypocritical by bowing to statues of worship when Lev. 26:1 clearly states: "You shall not erect an idol or a sacred pillar for yourselves, nor shall you set up a stone figure for worship in your land." This verse is found in both the King James version and Saint Joseph's New Catholic Edition. I have a former Catholic friend who left the church when she saw the hypocrisy of that verse....

Christians love the song "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands." Yet, in 1 John 5:19 we learn that "the whole world is lying in the power of the wicked one." I've always suspected that God and Satan were one and the same. I think this proves it.

Editor's Response to Letter #540

Dear HLM.

As we have mentioned before, BE is by no means confined to contradictions alone. It focuses on any and all problems having to do with the validity of the Bible, and that would involve a wide assortment of failings, including problems, errors, fallacies, contradictions, inaccuracies, immoralities, pseudo-science, etc. Contradictions are not the only avenue of assault. They should be viewed as crucial but by no means exhaustive.

Letter #541 from Anonymous of Virginia

Dear Dennis.

This morning when I talked to you by phone, I had "spread" 42 of the last 100 BE pamphlets that I recently ordered. It's 6:32 PM and ALL of the BE pamphlets have been distributed.... it's a privilege to distribute your stuff. I hope you get some subscribers out of this distribution, but even if you don't, a lot of people have seen THE TRUTH that they would not have seen otherwise. So it gives me a good feeling to know that maybe I have helped rescue some people from a life of mental illness. And I feel I have struck 100 more winning blows for the precious little girl in Letter #527 of May 1993 BE. Dennis, it's slow, but we can even help the chronically mentally ill. You may be the greatest force for sanity that the world has ever seen or will ever see. You are certainly a great champion--maybe the greatest ever--for the defenseless. I'm starting to rank you with Charles Dickens (after your reply to letter 527 which showed your tenderness toward that precious little girl with the grateful smile. Dennis, if she knew what you are doing for her, she would wish to hug you till it hurt and cover your cheek with sweet little kisses). I send my everlasting thanks to the writer of letter 527. Please send me 100 more pamphlets.

Editor's Response to Letter #541

Dear Anonymous. What can I say. You leave me speechless. Letters 527 and 528 in the May issue generated great interest and correspondence as your letter and those of others clearly show.

Letter #542 from AH of Sonoma, California

Dear Dennis. I wrote a letter to the editor of our local paper where I used items from your pamphlet entitled *THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD?*, and this guy, Michael, wrote in with jokes and lies. When I responded, the editor refused to print my rebuttal.

Actually I was amazed that he printed my first letter where I said there are over 300 contradictions in the bible.JK, a local pastor, wrote an article asking if the Bible was reliable. Of course, he answered his own letter by saying yes. I am writing him telling him to expect a copy of BE. Since the local editor won't print but one side of Christianity, I will ask him to debate you in your magazine. Best Wishes.

Editor's Response to Letter #542

Dear AH.

We appreciate your assistance, and please let everyone know that we stand ready to debate all biblicists at any time.

Letter #543 from BY of Seminole, Florida

Dear Dennis.

I am happily renewing my subscription to BE. I find it enlightening and a delightful source of arguments for debating those fervent Christians who cannot see beyond their precious "Book." I have also put said arguments to use in more public forums; the Atheists of Florida, Inc., produces a public-access show that has been broadcast in the Miami and Tampa areas, and will soon be in Wisconsin as well.

I also found the arguments useful when discoursing with "non-Biblical Christians" such as CH who wrote the letter in issue 126. One such liberal non-fundamentalist priest "Father" Leo Booth, has gained a measure of fame through talk show appearances promoting his book, *When God Becomes a Drug: Breaking the Chains of Religious Addiction*. Other local skeptics and I faced off with the "father" on a Tampa talk-show broadcast on a local CBS affiliate. Using your publication as a source for many of our questions, we placed Booth in positions for which he had no sensible answers, and no doubt did our part to hamper sales of his book locally. Additionally, several in the studio audience admitted that they were questioning the basis of their preacher's claims at face value. I doubt we've started a revolution, but every seed of doubt planted may someday bloom!

At any rate, I too have gone beyond the point of being "apologetic" for my atheism and skepticism; I think the Christians owe us all an apology for the horrendous deeds done (by humans, not through any supernatural means) in the name of their God over the last two or three thousand years. My favorite response to those who hit me with the "God bless you [you poor misguided soul], I'll pray for you" bit as a parting shot or offhand response is: Jesus Kills, are you still an accessory?"

Editor's Response to Letter #543

Dear BY.

Like so many others who have written to us, you are using BE in the manner intended. Keep up the good work!

Letter #544 from BF of Tallahassee, Florida

Dear Dennis.

Enclosed please find my check for a 2-year renewal of my subscription. I three-hole punched all of my BE's and put them in a big ring binder and started from Vol. 1 reading them all over again. This time more scholarly; taking notes and putting the more salient points on 3 X 5 cards to study while waiting in traffic, the dentist's office, etc. I figure in 18 months to two years I'll be ready to take some embryonic steps in debating fundies on their own turf. I do not wish to start before I am ready.

I sure wish we could form national and regional clinics or workshops to study debating strategy; role playing etc. to bring back to local areas and teach others of a like mind. Other than BE and Till's periodical are there any other publications you could recommend?

Editor's Response to Letter #544

Your strategy resembles that which I outlined in my speech contained in Issues 58, 59, and 60. You might want to reread them and see what you think. As far as other publications are concerned, I can't think of any that operate like Biblical Errancy except possibly Golding's *Biblical Polemics*, which is published in Israel, and F. Till's *Skeptical Review*. If you learn of any, please let me know.

Letter #545 from DS of Tiffin, Ohio

Dear Dennis....

I fully agree with your contention that to not battle the Biblicists in their own court is foolish. The only way one can confront them with reality is on their own front porch. One problem: once they seem to realize that you just might be right they stay away. It's hard to get a second shot at them. Also, no sports team can be called a winner if it can't win on the road. We rationalists had better hit the road and win a few.

Letter #546 from DM of Pasadena, California

Dear Mr. McKinsey....

BE has put out a lot of good information, especially in its major themes of recent editions, and I hope that you will keep up the good work. One bit of advice: Devote half the usual space to commenting on how stupid, incoherently rambling, idiotic, spaced-out, ridiculous, ignorant, or out-of-the-ballpark some of the letters are. Such comments have a way of multiplying until they occupy an inappropriately large space, whereupon they cast more bad light on you than your opponents.

Editor's Response to Letter #546

Dear DM.

Although your observation is to be taken in a spirit of camaraderie, I do think you have over-stated the point. Perhaps my memory is inadequate, but I don't remember ever having referred to my opponents as stupid, idiotic, ignorant, or spaced out. Terms of opprobrium have never been my stock and trade, even though they have crossed my mind on different occasions. Words such as rambling and ridiculous, however, have been employed in several instances and were directed toward the arguments of others as opposed to individuals per se. If you had been subjected to as many denunciatory comments over the last 10 years as I, you would probably have a greater appreciation for the amount of composure and forbearance we have managed to display. Be that as it may, you correctly concluded that mutual vilifications have a way of multiplying when allowed to continue unchecked. I hope we never have, and never will, cross into the arena of castigation and backbiting. My apologies to any who may feel the wall has been breached.

Letter #547 from JC of Birmingham, Alabama

Mr. McKinsey....

Received the material--most informative, especially the WSB audio tape. You have truly undertaken the more important work of our age.... You really should charge more for your excellent material.

Editor's Response to Letter #547

Your compliments are appreciated and you are probably correct. Our rates should be higher, but our primary emphasis has always been on getting the message out. In that same vein, many people have told me that with my knowledge of the Bible I could

make a fortune as a preacher. Of course, my heart would not be in an undertaking of that kind, and monetary considerations would be the only motivation. That hardly sounds enjoyable, and I'd have a hard time looking in mirrors. Several years ago a Seventh-Day Adventist minister said his church would be willing to finance me in any manner deemed necessary should I decide to become a minister (Read: propagandist) for his denomination.

Letter #548 from SM of Torrance, California

Dear Dennis.

Wow! This stuff's dynamite! A friend passed along copies of your issues #125 and #126 to me, and I am impressed by your no-nonsense approach.... I debated a Creationist last week, and I found that the audience of Baptist fundamentalists were particularly attentive as I used your style to shred the Genesis account of Creation and Noah's Flood (or as I call it, the Jehovah Genocide)... Keep up the good work!

Letter #549 from GN of Scottsdale, Arizona

Dear Dennis.

I notice in this month's BE that you are having a debate about pornography in the Bible. I've found one. Perhaps you already know about it. At Genesis 24:2 Abraham is having his servant swear an oath to him about finding a wife for his son Isaac. It says, "Please place you hand under my thigh." In the footnote of my Bible it says, "procreative organ." Even the translators were reluctant to use the right word, "penis." Can't you just picture this repulsive scene? I imagine that the Bible has been cleaned up considerably over the years. I'm sure that "piss" will eventually be taken out of it in future translations.

What about all those men having concubines (women they lived with, had sex with, but were not married to)? I don't see how anyone can deny that the Bible is pornographic. If they do, then I believe that they don't really know what it says, especially when it comes to Lot offering his virgin daughters to the wicked men of Sodom to rape and brutalize, and then having an incestuous relationship with them in a drunken stupor. Wonder how JM cleans up this story to tell to his children. Another story that would shock the socks off a little kid is that of Abraham and Isaac. It seems to me that Christian kids would have a hard time sleeping at night, never knowing when their Daddy might hear the voice of God demanding them as a human sacrifice. There's also the matter of stories about the pregnant bellies of women's bodies being ripped open. The Bible certainly is not a book for children. Talk about violence on TV; nothing matches the violence in unholy scripture.

EDITOR'S NOTE: On Saturday June 26, 1993 Church of Christ Minister Don Boyer and I debated in Richmond, Indiana for 2 and one half hours. Don has his own column in the local conservative newspaper, the Richmond *PALLADIUM-ITEM*, and virtually challenged anyone to contest the Bible's validity. One of our subscribers contacted me and I called Boyer to arrange a discussion. He and one of our subscribers was kind enough to send me the following "Letter to the Editor" written by someone whom we do not know named John Kowalec, which appeared in the paper.

"I attended the debate held at Indiana University East auditorium Saturday, June 26. The performance by Don Boyer in my opinion was deplorable. The use of devious diversions and subtlety to prove his argument flopped, and helped to bolster his opponent's claims. I guess the above is the stock in trade used by Christian clergy to befuddle all unwary superstitious people; then they can lead them like sheep to slaughter.

On the other hand, Dennis McKinsey laid out his agenda, put forth his argument and affirmed all his assertions, and won the debate by a land-slide. Yes, the Bible in the hands of Christian zealots is a dangerous tool. By it, more crime has been committed, more people murdered, tortured and tormented than anything else used since the beginning of time. Witness the crusades, the pogroms, the Holocaust; today it's ethnic cleansing, all done in the name of Christianity, which is derived from the mythical book called the Bible. And let us not forget Jonestown and Waco, Texas.

Christianity is one of the greatest scams perpetrated on a nation of people. It has caused people to debase and mutilate themselves through its techniques. As it is written, "the blind leading the blind, both shall fall into the ditch."

Issue No. 129

September 1993

Evidence to substantiate BE's position on a myriad of topics can be found not only in sympathetic literature but that of fundamentalist writers as well. In 1990 Bethany House Publishers, a conservative Christian organization based in Minneapolis, Minnesota published a voluminous text of 500 pages, entitled *Today's Handbook for Solving Bible Difficulties* by David E. O'Brien. The author received his M. Div. from Bethel Theological Seminary, his M.A. in OT from Wheaton Graduate School, and a B.A. in history. In addition, he has taught Bible College classes on the OT and seminar workshops on hermeneutics, and was a Consulting Editor of *Today's Bible Dictionary* and *Today's Handbook of Bible Times and Customs*. Although he says on page 217, "I believe in an infallible Bible," and his text is unabashedly apologetic in tone, many comments are worthy of note. In regard to translations of the Bible he says

on page 45, "If the question is, do our present versions of the Bible contain mistakes, I'm afraid the answer is yes. When it comes to numbers, the ancient texts have suffered a great deal.... I could list numerous places where numbers have gotten changed, omitted, enlarged, or shrunk.... There are numerous places where the precise reading of a particular text is uncertain. That's particularly true when it comes to numbers." Another revealing comment on translating is found on page 114 where O'Brien says, "Translation is an incredibly complicated process. That beloved phrase of some preachers, 'If you could only read it in the original language....' contains a kernel of truth. (Most of us preachers can't actually read it in the original language, either, but we like our congregations to think we can!)." And still another translating confession is found on page 281 where he says in regard to the free will versus determinism problem, "Using one of the basic rules of interpretation, the clearest, simplest reading of Romans 9 is that God predestines and those who are predestined play no active part in the Divine decree. As a lifelong Arminian (one who stresses man's free will as opposed to Calvinistic predestination--Ed.), it grieves me to admit this, but that's the simplest reading of the text. Read in this way, Paul is presenting a picture of the sovereign God of the universe making such decisions as please Him, for reasons that only He can know or understand, and carrying out those decisions without the consent, cooperation, or resistance of the people involved." And that's the same good and just God we are supposed to love and adore.

When asked why the sexually salacious book entitled *The Song of Solomon* is in the Bible, O'Brien said on pages 146-48, "...the rabbis looked beneath the surface of the literal text and discovered a powerful and uplifting allegory.... This was a spiritual song about the love of God for His people Israel.... (For the early fathers of the church--Ed.)...it became an allegory of the love of Christ for His church. Both of these (are--Ed.) efforts to slide out from under the burden of a book that no one was willing to accept as literal.... There is absolutely no evidence the *Song of Songs* is an allegory.... By allegorizing our interpretation, we can make anything say anything.... And there's the rub. Such a text, when subjected to the imaginations of allegorizing interpreters, can indeed taste after each man's liking. There is no truth if our understanding is as subjective as that. The form of the text must shape the interpretation of the text, or there is no control outside the interpreter for what the text might be made to say." On the next page he pins down his friends even further by saying, "It means that we're not free to take a NT idea back to the Old and reinterpret the OT to teach the NT idea." As he says on page 213, "It's a mistake to sink footings and build a skyscraper on the swamp of speculation." If only more apologists were as frank!

In answer to someone who asked what was Paul's thorn in the flesh (2 Cor. 12:7-9), he says on page 64, "Because Paul never actually described the thorn in the flesh, any attempt to identify it must rely on a lot of deduction and will never establish its identity with certainty."

In answer to Christians who try to excuse Noah's drunkenness by saying it was the innocent result of drinking what he thought was wholesome grape juice, O'Brien says on page 185, "It does Scripture no honor to invent ways to make offensive events

palatable to us when Scripture itself records them and makes no effort to sanitize them."

On page 365 O'Brien is asked: If the Bible teaches that drinking is a sin, why did Jesus turn water into wine (John 2:1-11), and why did Paul tell Timothy to drink wine for his stomach (1 Timothy 5:23)? His answer represents a marked departure from the common apologetic rationalizations one can expect to hear in response to this inquiry. He states, "I've read all the arguments about unfermented grape juice and how fermentation doesn't take place naturally in the climate of Palestine, and I have to tell you--they're based more on wishful thinking than on linguistic study or scientific understanding. Jesus turned the water into real wine. I know this makes some believers nervous. I know it makes some hostile. 'How can I counsel alcoholics not to drink if you're telling them drinking isn't a sin?' they ask. I wish the Bible did teach that drinking is a sin, but it doesn't. It contains numerous warnings against the abuse of alcohol, but nowhere does it say it's a sin. And we are not free to make the Bible say what it doesn't say just to make our decisions easier. For me there is a profound principle at work here." And on the next page he relates Principle Number 37 which is: 'Don't bend and twist the meaning of the biblical text to avoid an unpleasant conclusion.' Too bad few apologists follow his advice. On page 366 he states, "the Bible does not say that drinking of alcohol is a sin.... Did the overseer at the banquet think mere grape juice would dull the wedding guests' taste buds? Did Paul warn against overindulgence in grape juice (Eph. 5:18)? Did Noah drink too much grape juice (Gen. 9:21)? Is grape juice a mocker (Prov. 20:1)? Did Jeremiah liken himself to a man overtaken by grape juice (Jer. 23:9)?"

In regard to famous OT biblical figures O'Brien makes the following candid statement on page 233, "When we read the Bible, we assume that all the great people of Scripture would make wonderful deacons or elders in our American church. But in fact, there's hardly a person in the OT who would even be allowed to join most of our churches without some major modifications in behavior." Later on page 260 he says, "Keep in mind the fact that very few of God's chosen instruments were without fault, or even serious sin. Moses was a murderer. David was an adulterer and a murderer. Jacob was a con-man and Abraham was a liar. Jonah was a racist who rebelled at the idea that God would forgive the Assyrians. And what about Peter's impulsiveness and the contentious spirits displayed by James and John?"

In regard to the impossibility of rich people entering the kingdom of heaven as related in Luke 18:23-25, O'Brien said on page 138, "Some teach that Jesus was talking about the small door in the city gate of Jerusalem called the 'needle's eye.' This is a common explanation of Jesus' saying. That's not what he was getting at though.... there's never been any evidence, either textual or archeological, that such a gate ever existed. There were smaller gates, each with its own name. But none of those names was 'the needle's eye'."

So, in summary, it's apparent that we are by no means alone in our critique of biblical comments and defenses. Sometimes even the Bible's staunchest proponents are willing to concede the obvious.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #537 Continues from Last Month (Part e)

While commenting on 1 Cor. 15:14 you ask "Why should [Jesus'] Resurrection be of such significance?" and "Why, then, attribute so much importance to the Resurrection?" ...as if the Bible didn't say why! And yet Paul is quite clear: only three verses later he says that the reason why Jesus' resurrection is vital to Christianity is that if it did not take place Christians are still in their sins (1 Cor. 15:17). This seems to me an eminent reason for considering the Resurrection a vital doctrine for Christianity--whose central message is that sinners can have their sins forgiven. This is Paul's answer to your question. Now you may believe or disbelieve what Paul says, but you have no right in suggesting that in the Bible the Resurrection is given so much importance without a reason, and that therefore Paul's statement is fallacious. Your argument is not only invalid: it is misleading for a reader of *Biblical Errancy* not acquainted with the Bible (like BY of Seminole, Florida, who trusts your Periodical when he/she quotes the Bible--BE #122).

Editor's Response to Letter #537 (Part e)

Some how or other, GM, you don't seem to understand the problem. Despite having been stated many times in different ways, it has apparently eluded your grasp. So let me reiterate the dilemma in no uncertain terms. You say Jesus was resurrected. I say, SO WHAT, BIG DEAL. Why make a big case out of an accomplishment that was performed by many in earlier biblical accounts? So he rose from the dead! From a biblical perspective that hardly merits an applause, much less a standing ovation. You still haven't shown how this was an achievement exceeded by none. And if it wasn't truly unique, why should the validity of Christianity or the fate of millions rest on its occurrence? My argument is neither invalid nor misleading. Quite the contrary, BY is well within the bounds of wisdom and propriety to rely on our analysis.

Letter #537 Continues (Part f)

At this point I fail to see how Paul's statement in 1 Cor. 15 can be proved at all to be an error or a contradiction or a fallacy. What proofs can you offer that would deny the truth of Paul's statement that if the resurrection did not take place Christians are still in their sins and that their faith is vain?

Editor's Response to Letter #537 (Part f)

You are trying to shift the burden of proof, my friend. I am asking you to demonstrate why he would attribute so much importance to a relatively innocuous event. Biblically speaking, rising from the dead was nothing to shout about. You ask me to provide proofs that would deny the truth of Paul's statement that if the resurrection did not take place Christians are still in their sins and their faith is vain, when that isn't the dilemma at all. You keep hitting a strawman. I agree, that is what Paul said. I'm asking you to show why that event is a turning point in history and should merit the importance Paul attributes to it. The burden of proof lies on you.

Letter #537 Continues (Part g)

To this please don't answer that the burden of proof is for Christians, for 1 Cor. 15:14 and 17 are statements, just like "Jesus died for our sins", "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth", or even "God does not exist" that CANNOT be proved or disproved, but only believed or disbelieved.

Your Periodical's stated aim, on the other hand, is to focus "on Biblical ERRORS, CONTRADICTIONS, and FALLACIES". If you don't find proofs for your opinion that 1 Cor. 14:14 is an error or a fallacy or a contradiction, please remove that entire paragraph from your Sample Periodical. As an alternative I suggest that you either change the aim of your Periodical, or that you include in it all biblical statements that imply God exists, and claim that they are all fallacies until a Christian proves them.

Editor's Response to Letter #537 (Part g)

Biblical Errancy focuses on ANY AND ALL PROBLEMS having to do with the validity of the Bible, which would include errors, contradictions, and fallacies. We are by no means narrowly focused on contradictions alone as some people erroneously believe. In this particular instance, we ask how the Bible can be a book of logic and reason as its adherents proclaim, when it attributes unique importance to an event performed by one individual that had been performed by many others years earlier. In effect, we are dealing with a fallacy, namely, the assertion that the Bible is consistent. It attributes importance to one resurrection while denying equal importance to other resurrections performed previously. The statement to which you refer regarding God creating the heavens and the earth is not analogous because it is a mere assertion based upon nothing other than faith. The comment regarding Jesus dying for our sins is analogous and was covered in prior issues, because it is contradicted by other biblical comments demonstrating the opposite. While on the cross Jesus certainly did not exhibit behavior that would lead one to believe he was willingly dying for our sins.

The essence of your argument, which you feel compelled to repeat in different ways, appears to be that our subcaption should read: The only national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, fallacies, and problems in general.... We have always looked upon the word "fallacies" as a general term encompassing just about everything not included in errors and contradictions and that would include problems in general. You, on the other hand, are trying to restrict it to a rather narrow definition. If that were to be allowed, in effect, we would be conceding the validity of your contentions until we disproved their reliability. As we have said so often, **THE BURDEN OF PROOF LIES ON HE WHO ALLEGES**. That means, for example, that you are obligated to prove the resurrection of Jesus is of greater importance than that of others. We aren't obligated to accept it just because Paul says it was. Quite the contrary, we can and should reject it until you can prove he was right.

You say 1 Cor. 15:14 and 17 are statements, just like 'In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth' that **CANNOT** be proved or disproved, but only believed or disbelieved. But you don't seem to realize that these statements are fallacious until proven to be true. When will you religionists ever learn that "belief", "faith", and assertions by people you hold in high esteem are **NOT** proof, and are not to be accepted as such; they never have been and they never will be. And until these statements are proven to be true, they will remain under the heading of fallacies. There is no reason to alter our subcaption as you so desire. Just because Paul said it, doesn't make it so any more than an African witch doctor should be believed on his authority alone.

You say that the statement "God does not exist" **CANNOT** be proved or disproved, but only be believed or disbelieved. False again! You and your compatriots are the ones who keep bringing up the subject of God, so it is up to you to demonstrate the existence of this being. And until you are able to do so, the statement "God Exists" is false. You should have read all the prior issues of BE before sending your letter, GM, because this subject has been covered several times before. As I have said so often before, if your premise were true, then every crackpot theory imaginable would be valid until proven to be false. How would I prove, for example, that beings do not live within the planet Jupiter as some would allege? According to you, "faith" or "belief" in their existence or an assertion to that effect by someone you hold in high regard would mean they, in fact, do live there until I prove the contrary. Your thought processes would open the world to a Pandora's box of wild delusions. Is it any wonder that the word "religion" is little more than a euphemism for "superstition"? (TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT MONTH)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #550 from KB of Los Angeles, California (Part a)

Dennis McKinsey.

Issue #127 arrived yesterday, July 13. All sorts of congratulations for having stuck it out for these past ten and a half years, which is about as long as Atheists United has been around, since the middle of 1982.... I suggest that now is the time to catch up on that promise made to your readers some time ago and devote at least one issue of BE a year to publishing letters, and only letters, with your responses. Indeed, I suggest, as an often respondent to BE, as though I had no motive at all in getting my deathless prose into print, that you now devote the next and how many after that issues to getting those letters that have swollen your files to running over onto the floor, and give your readers that expected and well deserved feed-back of their contributions to freethought.

Editor's Response to Letter #550

Dear KB.

Thanks for your congratulations, but we have always had a policy of devoting an entire issue to letters from our readers. That has been in effect for many years, was continued last month, and will be even more prominent in months to come. You probably just forgot.

Letter #550 Concludes (Part b)

I am relieved that the extended response to the worthless diatribe of "JM" is finally over. As I have said in the past, you should give up addressing the likes of JM directly, but use their material as examples of "inerrancy thinking" and give indirect quotes and respond to them succinctly. Avoid direct address, keep to the issues regardless of how stupid a person reveals himself to be. Telling a person that his response is stupid only takes up valuable BE space! As I say, give your readers who have written you the exposure they deserve, or don't. Fill BE pages with BE readers!

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #550 (Part b)

Although your long support of BE is most welcome, KB, we have a significant difference in strategy and tactics. A major aspect of this periodical has always been dialogue and debate with the opposition. Indeed, that goes to the very heart of this publication. In the subcaption itself is the phrase "while providing a hearing for apologists." The whole idea is to debate and expose the opposition on their own territory in their own subject. If you expect to debate somebody without quoting him verbatim, what do you think his response is going to be? If you leave out parts of his extensive argument, what do you think his response is going to be? If you talk about what strikes your fancy rather than what interests him or turns him on, what do you think your effect is going to be? If you give up "addressing the likes of JM directly," how are you going to conduct a forceful, direct, poignant, effective, devastating assault indirectly? I've never seen two people box indirectly, nor have I ever seen two football teams slam one another indirectly. With all due respect, we aren't involved in

a game of cricket or horseshoes. We are playing for big stakes in a subject that is of great importance to millions of people and of even greater significance than economics or politics to others. Make no mistake about it. We are engaged in serious business! You have to deal with people where they are, not where you would like them to be. And you have to talk with them on subjects that are of greatest interest to them, not what is of greatest interest to you or tickles your funnybone. The philosophy you are expressing has accounted for more freethought group and individual failures than any other factor that comes to mind. The most obvious result of this theory is that many groups of our persuasion end up having the same people say the same things to the same people, and preaching to the choir is certainly not the way to go. In fact, that is precisely what should be placed near the bottom of the agenda. But, unfortunately, that is often of highest priority. From your perspective the response of JM is a "worthless diatribe," but from his viewpoint it is anything but. In fact, he provided several rationalizations that are typical of the very stock and trade of biblicists' arguments and he probably extracted a few from their writings. By confronting him on his own book, I not only corrected his errors but provided reasons for all others who may be so inclined to pause and reconsider the error of their ways.

In addition, you say I should give my readers the exposure they deserve or don't and fill BE pages with BE readers. What does this mean? Are you saying I should only insert letters that are sympathetic to my philosophy? What do you think would be the response of biblicists who read this newsletter based upon groundrules of that nature? Besides turning part of our subcaption into a prevarication, BE would become little more than a one-sided propaganda organ not unlike those of its opponents. If it means I should insert letters from the opposition, then how should I insert them? Should they be quoted word-for-word, paragraph by paragraph, page by page, or should things be omitted? And who makes the latter decision? Even more important, what do you think my opponent is going to say when I start deleting comments? I can hear the yells now. "You left out my strongest arguments or you omitted the key words. Your presentation is both slanted and biased." We have scrupulously avoided vulnerability of this nature since day one. Remember when I said in my speech (See: Issues 58-60) that before you fire something over you had better know what lies in the other side's arsenal. If you don't consider their arguments ahead of time, then you are headed for misery, if not catastrophe.

When you say that I should "give up addressing the likes of JM directly...give indirect quotes and respond to them succinctly. Avoid direct address...." you are propounding a philosophy that is not only far from this publication, but could only result in its demise were it to be implemented. BE is a forum of debate and discussion, not a one-sided propaganda agency. I hope you take my response in the spirit intended, but you struck a chord by expressing an ideology that is all too common among many freethinkers.

Not long ago a subscriber told me that a prominent representative of a freethought publication objected to my critique of the Bible because it was deemed to be too negative. My critic expressed the belief that attacking the Bible only alienated Christians by creating ill-will and hatred. This person felt that if you don't criticize the

Bible, people will be more open to what you have to say and less repelled by your arguments. Unfortunately this philosophy expresses the sentiments of too many people in the freethought movement and is exactly what you don't want to do. The person so inclined couldn't be further from the truth if he or she tried. Christians have been indoctrinated with a mass of beliefs that are the very antithesis of what freethought represents, and any delusion that the two can somehow be melded into a harmonious relationship in the same individual is absurd. One must sound the death-knell over the other. They are utterly incompatible, and people are not going to be oozed into freethought by some sort of mass mollification, masked under the heading of universal brotherhood, common values, and mutual tolerance. That's a pipe dream. Telling them what they want to hear in order to get them to listen won't carry the day. Telling them that which is not too far from what they have been hearing all along isn't going to get the job done. As I have said so often, why would they come to hear our position when they are already convinced they have truth and we have error? And how are they going to know they are living under multiple delusions, if the numerous delusions under which they operate are not brought to their attention. Who is going to perform that role? That's certainly not what ministers, priests, and rabbis are paid to do. If you think the latter are going to provide a balanced presentation, forget it. **BEFORE PEOPLE ARE GOING TO LISTEN TO US THEY MUST FIRST BE SHOWN THE ERROR OF THEIR WAYS**, and that's why I teach a kind of Sunday-School-In-Reverse. That's why I tell them all the things they should have heard in Sunday School but didn't. That's why I return to the fundamentals upon which they are operating and viewing the world and begin anew. Any other program is doomed to failure from the outset because it is not materially altering or affecting the basic concepts upon which all decisions are premised. That's why churches know it is so important to indoctrinate and "brainwash" the very young. Before constructing a new building in a city, what is the first thing you have to do? You have to destroy. You have to destroy either the structure that is already in place or you have to bring in a bull-dozer or other earth-moving equipment to destroy the vegetation and ground configuration that already exists on the plot of land to be used. One way or the other, destruction must precede construction. They are inseparable, and the same is no less true of philosophies and ideologies. Before you can start people thinking differently, you must first destroy the way they are thinking.

Of course, all of the above is said in a spirit of camaraderie, and I hope it will be taken as such.

Letter #551 from RS of Sherman Oaks, California

Dear Dennis.

It's a great pleasure to renew my subscription again. I have been a dedicated BE fan every since I began to read it. Over the past couple of years, I have put the material to good use, too. Some of the Biblicists I've met may never be the same. I dialogue with Biblicists, hear them out, and discuss what I have learned through BE. Many are

surprised to see that their arguments collapse so quickly. Some counter with sophisticated apologetic arguments; yet these are easily and effectively refuted with information from BE. BE is effective. It causes Biblicists to re-think age-old beliefs, and would-be Biblicists to reject them altogether. Judging by your letters, many are as dedicated to spreading BE as I am.

I am excited about the latest product from BE -- audio tapes! I have received taped sermons from Christians, but I never had anything to send back. Thanks to BE, that situation will be remedied! I was wondering if you had BE on a wordprocessor, and if you had considered placing an IBM disk version on the market like the *Skeptical Review* does. I would love to have the information on my computer. With the information on computer, I could arrange it by subject, Bible verse, etc. It would help me considerably in composing speeches, rebuttals to letters, etc. Furthermore, have you considered putting BE on a computer bulletin board?

Editor's Response to Letter #551

I'm glad to see that you, too, are using BE in the manner intended, RS. Keep up the good work. As far as computer bulletin boards and putting everything on a wordprocessor are concerned, I just don't have the time. Please believe me when I say I have too many balls in the air now. You are by no means the only one to make these suggestions.

Issue No. 130

October 1993

ARCHER'S ENCYCLOPEDIA--(Part 1) One of the most well known and comprehensive biblical defenses written in recent years is entitled *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* by Gleason Archer, professor of OT and Semitic Studies at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Illinois. Because the book is one of the most prominent apologetic works available, a study of some of that which is contained therein is appropriate in order to minimize its negative effects on unwary minds. Archer clearly believes he has generated a volume of immense importance because he states on page 11, "I candidly believe I have been confronted with just about all the biblical difficulties under discussion in theological circles today--especially those pertaining to the interpretation and defense of Scripture." If that comment is true, then theological circles are dramatically restricted in their coverage because the amount of substantive material omitted from his work would fill volumes. In any event, so many statements and biblical defenses by Archer are fraught with flaws that several issues of this publication will have reviews devoted to exposing some of their inadequacies. Among those worthy of mention are the following.

On page 25 Archer states, "As we have already seen, Christ accepted as literally true (1) the historicity of Adam, (2) the rescue of Noah and his family by the ark, (3) the literal accuracy of Moses' interview with God at the burning bush, (4) the feeding of Moses' congregation by manna from heaven, (5) the historicity of Jonah's deliverance, and (6) the repentance of the pagan population of Nineveh in response to Jonah's preaching. Nothing could be clearer than that our divine Savior believed in the literal truthfulness of the entire OT record, whether those accounts dealt with doctrinal matters, matters of science, or history." Archer was on firm footing until the last sentence. Just because Jesus believed in the 6 events listed does not mean he believed in thousands of other biblical events that are to be found from Genesis to Malachi. He made a grandiose leap in logic that is wholly unsupportable by Scripture.

On page 86 Archer is asked, "In Genesis 9:24-28, why did Noah curse his youngest son and say that Canaan should be a slave? Was this the beginning of slavery? Was slavery all right in the sight of God?" After explaining why Noah cursed Ham and minimizing the impact of same, Archer correctly stated that, "As to the moral status of slavery in ancient times, it must be recognized that it was practiced by every ancient people of which we have any historical record: Egyptians, Sumerians, Babylonians, Assyrians, Phoenicians, Syrians, Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Greeks, Romans, and all the rest. Slavery was as integral a part of ancient culture as commerce, taxation, or temple service." But then he said, "Not until the more exalted concept of man and his innate dignity as a person created in the image of God had permeated the world as a product of Bible teaching did a strong sentiment arise in Christendom in criticism of slavery and a questioning of its right to exist." Few comments are more at variance with reality. Slavery was abolished despite the Bible and Christianity, not because of them. Indeed, both the Old and New Testaments are strong proponents of slavery as several prior issues of BE clearly showed. Numerous verses in each regulate, direct, and condone the administration of slavery while none advocate its abolition. Support for slavery is all too obvious. In defense of the biblical stance on slavery Archer states, "Hebrew slaves were required under Mosaic law to be set free after six years of service; they could not be made to serve out their entire lives as slaves unless they willingly chose to remain so, out of love for their masters" (Ex. 21:2-7). What Archer neglects to mention is that these verses in no way advocate the abolishment of slavery. They merely regulate its operation and administration. Restriction does not equal abolition. And second, liberation after 6 years only applies to Hebrew slaves, their blood brothers, which were undoubtedly a small fraction of all the slaves they possessed.

Archer concludes by saying, "Yet there was inherent in the biblical concept of man as a person fashioned in the image of God and a candidate for heaven...a dynamic principle that undermined slavery." This diverges markedly from reality because slaves by definition are owned by others. Slaves were not viewed as human beings but as property. In effect, one biblical mandate overrules another. One says people are created in the image of God, while another says slaves are not people because they are property. If they aren't people, there is no need for them to be treated as such or for them to be considered creatures created in the image of God. If A is owned by B, B will never look upon A as his equal or a person, and the Bible wholly supports this

conclusion. The Bible can never be a force for the liberation of mankind until, among other things, it denounces slavery and deems former slaves to be on a par with all other human beings, all of which would necessitate a revision of Scripture.

On page 96 Archer is asked how God could condemn human sacrifice in Leviticus 18 and 20 and yet command it in Genesis 22, or at least accept it in Judges 11? Archer states, "It is a mistake to interpret Genesis 22:2 as a command by God for Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac on the altar. On the contrary, God actually (through his angel at least) restrained Abraham's hand just as he was about to plunge the knife into his son's body...." Archer's answer is little more than a deceptive shift in focus. True, Abraham's hand was restrained and the execution did not occur. But that was not the question. The question was how God could have given the order to begin with. He ordered a man to engage in human sacrifice and the man fully intended to comply with his wishes. Just because God stopped him at the last moment does not excuse or justify the original order. The question is how the original order could have been given by a "just" God, a god who condemned human sacrifice in Leviticus 18 and 20. Archer concludes by saying, "It is logically indefensible to assume that God would expect or condone infant sacrifice on the part of Abraham or Jephthah, or any other of his servants, after such a stern prohibition of it in the Mosaic law." No, it is not logically indefensible. It's quite possible as long as one has not been indoctrinated to believe that biblical contradictions are an impossibility. In Judges 11:30-31 Jephthah vowed to the Lord that if the latter would allow him to defeat the Ammonites he would sacrifice to the Lord as a burnt offering whatever came out of his house to greet him upon his return from victory. The 34th verse shows that his only child, his daughter, came out to meet him as he returned victorious and the 39th verse says he "did with her according to his vow which he had vowed." The Lord did not restrain this man's hand, so it is not illogical to assume God would expect or condone infant sacrifice, and there is little to be gained by only focusing only upon the Lord's prevention of that which was fully contemplated by Abraham.

On top of everything else, Archer ignores verses even more potent than that found in God's order to Abraham such as Exodus 22:29-30 which says, "Thou shalt not delay to offer the first of thy ripe fruits, and of thy liquors: the firstborn of thy sons shalt thou give unto me. Likewise shalt thou do with thine oxen, and with thy sheep...." And we all know what happened to oxen and sheep on a regular basis in the OT. So, for Archer to say that it is "logically indefensible" to assume God would order human sacrifice is ridiculous. (To Be Continued)

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #537 Continues from Last Month (Part h)

Regarding the FLOOD. Just some observations on your paragraph. Question (c) How would a flood destroy all sea animals?

Answer: It wouldn't! Why don't you read carefully what the Bible says? You have underlined almost every word in the verses you quote, except those words that answer your question! So I will take again the same verses you quoted and I will underline the words that answer the question:

"And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein [is] the breath of life, from under heaven; [and] every thing that [is] in the earth shall die." (Genesis 6:17)

"For yet seven days, and I will cause it to rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights; and every living substance that I have made will I destroy from off the face of the earth." (Genesis 7:4)

I trust you are familiar with the fact that the Bible distinguishes between earth and sea (Ex. 20:11).

Editor's Response to Letter #537 (Part h)

You are exhibiting the kind of reasoning that has caused biblical scholarship to be held in such low esteem by so many people for so many centuries, my friend. You cite Gen. 6:17 which says, "I will cause it to rain upon the earth." According to your restriction of the word "earth" to the land mass only, it did not rain on the oceans. How utterly preposterous! You mean there was a wall of water beginning at the ocean's edge that covered land only and was held back somehow? Or do you mean that it rained only on the land portion of the globe and the water then flowed over the seas? In either case, I believe you have reached the outer limits on this one. If TV's *The Twilight Zone* is ever revived, you would do well to apply for a position as a script writer. I'm surprised you didn't say that when Gen. 6:17 says everything that is in the earth shall die, it was only referring to worms, moles and other underground creatures. The sky is the limit when your imagination runs wild. According to you, then, when Gen. 1:17 says, "And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly...fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of the heaven" fowl fly above land only, and when Gen. 2:1 says, "the heavens and the earth were finished..." the seas were not finished. When Abraham says in Gen. 14:22, "I have lift my hand to the Lord, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth," God did not possess the seas? And when Gen. 18:25 says, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right," God is not the judge of the seas? Anyone unwilling to concede that the word "earth" refers to the entire planet, not just the land portion, has entered a troublesome swamp, indeed. As is so often true, when biblicists try to reconcile one aspect of the Bible with another, they often wreck havoc upon a third.

Letter #537 Continues (Part i)

Question (d) How did animals that are restricted to certain parts of the earth get to the Ark? They would have had to have crossed vast oceans (plus other similar questions).

Answer: You are assuming that before the Flood geography was similar to what we see today. This idea does NOT come from the Bible, but from some other source. In fact the Bible teaches that the world was destroyed by the Flood (Gen. 6:13, 2 Peter 3:6), and that therefore we have no way of knowing how it was like. There is nothing absurd in the idea, for example, that animals were distributed evenly before the Flood. What is relevant here is that if you stick to the biblical text there is nothing contradictory in the story. Actually, in the beginning of your discussion on the Flood you promised you would do just that--forget the scientific issues, and stick to the Bible. However what you did forget, it seems to me, was your own promise.

Editor's Response to Letter #537 (Part i)

How could animals be distributed evenly, GM? You have completely ignored the climatic factor. How could animals that can only live in the tropics live alongside animals that can only live in the arctic? And how could the specialized vegetation upon which many depend be interspersed as well? Bamboo and eucalyptus, for example, the only food for some animals, would last no time at all in another climate. You might as well have said the climates were evenly distributed. Secondly, as I have said so often, BE does not deal only with biblical contradictions. Its scope is much broader and focuses on any and all problems having to do with the validity of the Bible. So your comment that "if you stick to the biblical text there is nothing contradictory in the story" is quite irrelevant, because I never said that internal biblical contradictions were involved. In fact, I specifically said "BE will concentrate on the great number of difficulties, impossibilities, and unanswered questions accompanying the biblical account." Where is the word "contradiction" even mentioned in the section on the Flood in the Sample Issue? You accuse me of saying something I never said and then proceed to disprove it. Thirdly, you state that at the beginning of my discussion of the Flood I promised to "forget the scientific issues, and stick to the Bible." You then say I forgot my own promise. Unfortunately, you didn't read very carefully. On the front page is clearly written, "BE will not discuss the scientific data used by proponents (of the Bible--Ed.) to support their beliefs." Notice it says the scientific data used by "proponents" would not be used. I didn't say I would not use any scientific considerations whatever. That does not mean, on the other hand, that only the scientific data of opponents would be employed but only that the scientific questions that would be asked by any student of science would be posed. And one need only reread the section to see that that is exactly what occurred.

Letter #537 Continues (Part j)

Secondly, God told Noah that the animals would come to him, and the animals did come. Period. How? From where? When? These are interesting questions, but have nothing to do with errors, fallacies or contradictions in the Bible, although they may be of interest to Christian scientists. You may not know how, when and from where your family migrated to America, but this does not make the story of your family an error or a fallacy or a contradiction.

Editor's Response to Letter #537 (Part j)

For some unknown reason hundreds, if not thousands, of animals from all over the world began simultaneously to march to an ark in the Middle East. You wish to attribute this to an act of God. So be it! But be sure to make this clear to your students. Don't leave them with the impression that this can be explained rationally or by natural forces. Be sure it is confined to the realm of theological mythology and students are made aware of the rational difficulties involved. I'm sure your concern for precision will not let this slip your mind.

Like so many Christian analogies your reference to my ancestors is inapplicable. Thousands, if not millions of Europeans, did not simultaneously march to ships like mindless zombies for no apparent reason. Immigration to America has been occurring for decades and the reasons are generally quite obvious. They nearly always have something to do with economics and higher standards of living. That is hardly comparable to hundreds of animals meandering to an ark as if to a magnet.

Letter #537 Continues (Part k)

When you ask, "How were animals prevented from killing their natural prey?" you again assume something that does not come from the biblical text, namely that carnivorous attitudes were present in the antediluvian world. The Bible says clearly that this was not the case: animals ate grass (Gen. 1:29-30), man himself was allowed to eat flesh only after the Flood (Gen. 9:3), animals began to fear man only after the Flood (Gen. 9:2). This is in perfect harmony with the story that animals and men could live together for a year in the Ark without serious danger for the weak creatures. I see no errors, no contradictions, no logical fallacies in this fact that the animals came to Noah, or that they stayed together: do you? If you don't, I suggest you remove these two arguments too from your Sample Issue.

Editor's Response to Letter #537 (Part k)

You sure want to rewrite my sample issue, GM. Do I see any errors, contradictions, or fallacies? Of course! Error lies in the fact that you are claiming there were no

carnivorous animals on the earth before the Flood. No cats, no dogs, no sharks, no seals, no frogs, no spiders in other words no flesh-eaters, and that would include snakes. But wasn't the serpent in Gen. 3:1-14 a kind of snake? Wasn't he a meat eater? Tyrannasaurus Rex and many other carnivorous dinosaurs and prehistoric creatures must be figments of folklore according to you. If you insist on ruling out any carnivorous activity prior to, and during, the Flood, then just make sure these difficulties are brought home to your students who will probably find your rationalization hard to swallow. Secondly, if the world was idyllic prior to the Flood, then how can Gen. 4:4 say, "and Abel brought the fatty cuts of meat from his best lambs, and presented them to the Lord." A period in which animals were slaughtered certainly doesn't sound heavenly, especially from the perspective of the animals involved. That's an idyllic world in which carnivorous attitudes weren't present? It's also important to note that according to Gen. 4:4-5 ("And the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering; But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect") Abel's offering of sacrificed animals was preferred by God over Cain's offering of the fruit of the ground. Thirdly, animals sacrificed to God were normally eaten in order to complete the sacrifice. Isn't that carnivorous activity? Or are you saying and substantiating biblically that nothing slaughtered and sacrificed prior to the Flood was eaten? And lastly, in light of the fact that Cain slew Abel, conditions prior to the Flood couldn't have been as heavenly for the human animal as you would have us believe either. Incidentally, according to your mythology, all carnivorous plants, such as the Pitcher Plant, the drosera (sundew), and the Venus Fly-trap, had to have been nonexistent prior to the Flood as well.

Letter #537 Continues (Part 1)

...In the end of Question (e) you write: "These are only a few of the problems associated with the Flood that believers must address" (emphasis mine). Three observations are in order:

1. That in the Bible there are interesting problems no believer doubts. No honest believer has ever claimed that he has all answers to all questions. Neither has the astronomer or the biologist or the archeologist or the linguist. However none of the latter decides to give up with his profession only for the reason that there are open questions: on the contrary, open questions are what make their job exciting. A theory is abandoned not because there are open questions, but if it is proved to be wrong.

Editor's Response to Letter #537 (Part 1)

Don't try to soft-pedal your dilemma, GM. The problems under discussion are not just "open questions." They are blatant problems that either contradict other parts of scripture and/or directly conflict with science and/or logic. Again you have submitted another invalid analogy. The scientists you listed are not defending data that

counteracts logic, other valid data, or their own pronouncements. If there is any group that deals with open questions, it is the scientific community, while you and your compatriots deal with open conflicts and impossibilities.

Letter #537 Continues (Part m)

This leads me to my second point. Your periodical's stated aim is precisely to present "biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies." That is, you willingly take the burden to offer proofs that the Bible contains such things. I don't see then why you waste the reader's time in listing questions about the Flood that are not errors nor logical fallacies nor textual contradictions. Therefore I suggest that you remove all these useless sentences about the Flood from your Sample Issue.

Editor's Response to Letter #537 (Part m)

The time of readers is never wasted when they are being exposed to the Bible's inadequacies. I know you would like for these questions to be kept under wraps but I'm unwilling to oblige. Contrary to your assertion, the questions submitted fall within the category of biblical fallacies and errors and will not be removed from the Sample Issue. There is no obligation on our part to remain entirely within the Bible nor did we ever state we intended to do so. Where did you get the impression from the subcaption of this periodical that we will remain totally confined to the Bible alone. BE addresses any and all problems bearing on the Bible's validity and that could very well entail the incorporation of extrabiblical material or considerations. Scientific data and logical difficulties are certainly not going to be ignored. Based upon your misreading of our subcaption, you would have people believe that unless something in the Bible contradicts another part of the Bible it is out-of-bounds and can not be included within BE. Wrong! As we have said so often, BE deals with any and all problems bearing on the Bible's validity and that may or may not entail concentration on the Bible alone. If your interpretation of our subcaption were valid, we could never have presented much of that which can be found in our issues on biblical history, historicity, geography, math, science, differing versions, etc.

Letter #537 Concludes (Part n)

Please note that I am not suggesting that you remove arguments that I am afraid to address: I have addressed, though shortly, some of them, I am more than willing to discuss at length the problems you raise--but not in a context of biblical errancy, for the simple reason thatÿÿ these are problems, not fallacies.

Nor am I suggesting that you remove everything from your Sample Issue: some questions you ask in the paragraph "Contradictions" do qualify as possible or apparent fallacies; but for honesty's sake please remove all the things that are not what your Periodical claims to be about, and are thus irrelevant, as well as all alleged biblical fallacies that are shown by readers not to be fallacies at all. When you have done that, then we can start talking about what is left.

If you decide to remove fallacious arguments from your Sample Issue, the latter will surely appear less impressive. However, I trust you do not intend to dazzle the unaware and unlearned reader using a mass of arguments that have been already answered and that you know are fallacious or irrelevant.

I am looking forward to receiving your answer and I hope we can start a fruitful dialogue. Please forgive me for the mistakes I have surely made. English is not my mother language. Thank you for your kind attention.

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #537 (Part n)

You say you won't discuss them within the context of BE because they are problems, not fallacies. As I have already stated, BE deals with any and all problems having to do with the Bible's validity and those are incorporated into what I refer to as fallacies. Perhaps I should use the word "problems" instead of "fallacies" in the subcaption or use both simultaneously in order to make our position clearer. But I don't think so. People know what is intended, and to refer to fallacies as mere problems would be to concede the very point in dispute. In effect, I'd be accepting your position that they are mere problems and will remain as such until proven to be fallacies, when they are fallacies and will remain such until proven to be mere problems. Again, as I have said so often, the burden of proof lies on he who alleges. You are obligated to prove that the events occurred as you and your book allege, while scientists are obligated to prove that they occur as the scientific community believes. And where do you think the vast preponderance of the evidence lies. You won't find very many scientific creationist laboratories complete with fossils, artifacts, and other physical remains. Instead you will find a body of pseudo-scientists trying to prove their theory is true by casting doubts on contentions of the other side. They fail to realize that even if they could thoroughly disprove the theory of evolution, that would by no means prove their theory was correct. Disproving another theory does not prove yours is automatically true, not by a long ways. Creationists must not only disprove the other side but substantiate their own assertions by something other than words in a mythological and superstitious book and, unfortunately for them, they are unable to do either. Because you have misread, misunderstood, and misinterpreted what our "Periodical claims to be about," your "irrelevant" argument is without standing. I'd be glad to remove "all alleged biblical fallacies that are shown by readers not to be fallacies at all" as soon as you provide some good examples, and what "fallacious arguments" are you referring to that have already been answered and you feel should be removed?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #552 from JA of Cambridge, Mass.

To Whom It May Concern: I learned about your magazine in a small leaflet. "The Bible is God's Word?" which I picked up this morning on the Boston subway system. I was very excited to hear of your magazine as I have been thinking about the subject of biblical inconsistency for some time and wondering where I can learn more about it. Please send a copy of your magazine and subscription information to me.

Letter #553 from JB of Portland, Oregon

Dear Mr. McKinsey.... I would like for my subscription to commence with Issue number 125.... Doctor (name deleted--Ed.) was the first person to suggest that I subscribe to your publication. He recommended you very highly. Then I saw a sample copy at our local Center for Rational Thought and I was convinced that I had to subscribe. I don't know how you do it but I hope you keep it up! I am a retired lawyer who is experienced in the examination of documents and I really appreciate your cutting analyses.

Issue No. 131

November 1993

ARCHER'S ENCYCLOPEDIA--(Part 2) On page 113 Archer is asked: Why did God slay all the firstborn Egyptians when the Egyptian people had no control over Pharaoh's decision not to allow the Israelites to leave his country which can be found in Ex. 12:29-30? Archer responds by saying, "There is no way for nations to be dealt with other than on a collective basis. The fortunes of the citizens of any country are bound up with the government that guides their national policy, whether that government be a democracy, a party dictatorship, or monarchy...." Archer subtly evades the fact that there was no need for the nation to be dealt with at all. The Egyptian people did not commit the deed and, thus, should not be saddled with any punishment. Rulers may go to war and bring defeat and destruction on their people, but that bears no relation to a nation of people being punished by an omnipotent god for what one leader did. We are talking about the administration of justice, and fundamental to all systems of fair play is that those who do the crime should do the time. A people who are decimated because their leader led them into a disastrous

encounter are not being punished by anybody. That is simply the outcome of the decision to go to war. It may have been a wrong decision on the part of the ruler and an even worse decision on the part of his nation to follow in lockstep, but defeat is a far more appropriate term than punishment, especially when national sentiment favored the ruler's decision.

Later on page 114 Archer states, "A loss of life in the family of the king alone--or even in the households of his aristocracy--would scarcely have sufficed to compel Egypt to grant a release of the entire Israelite nation and all its cattle. Nothing short of an all-inclusive calamity visited on the entire people would serve to bring about the deliverance of God's people from the bondage they had suffered in Egypt." In reality, the sequence of events in Exodus strongly imply precisely the opposite is true. It was not until the pharaoh's son was killed that the pharaoh conceded defeat. Evidence strongly indicates that if the lives of the pharaoh's son or other family members had been clearly and unequivocally at stake from the outset all of the plagues and loss of life could have been avoided.

On page 121 Archer is asked one of the most common questions addressed to Christians over the centuries: Why is there so much killing of human beings mentioned in the Bible, along with the frequent references to animal sacrifice on the altar, and how does this square with the divine command "Thou shalt not kill" in Exodus 20:13? Archer begins by saying, "Since the Bible is a book about man in his state of sin, and since there is so much violence and bloodshed in human society, it was inevitable that frequent mention of manslaughter should occur in Scripture." Notice his sly shift to the word "manslaughter" which isn't even at issue. We are talking about killing and murder, not manslaughter, as he well knows. Manslaughter is not the problem by any means. He continues, "But much confusion has arisen from the misleading translation of Exodus 20:13 that occurs in most English versions. The Hebrew original uses a specific word for murder (rasah) in this 6th commandment and should be rendered 'You shall not murder'." If Archer were to consult the section entitled the Hebrew/Chaldee Dictionary in Strong's Exhaustive Concordance he would see the following with reference to the word "kill" in Exodus 20:13: (from--Ed.) "ratsach; a primitive root; properly to dash to pieces, i.e., kill (a human being), especially to murder:--put to death, kill, manslay, murder." Why does he believe the word should be translated as murder? If anything it should be "kill," and there is certainly nothing to justify the allegation that "kill" is a "misleading translation." According to Strong, the Hebrew word means kill in the broadest sense, not in the narrow sense of murder only, and there is no justification in saying that "the 6th commandment should be rendered as 'you shall not murder'." Archer tries to restrict the word's coverage to murder by saying, "This is no prohibition against capital punishment for capital crimes, since it is not a general term for the taking of life, such as our English word 'kill'." Wrong again! Nothing was said about capital punishment. According to Strong the relevant word is a general term and those who translated the word as "kill" were wholly justified in doing so.

If murder is the proper translation of the Hebrew word, then that same Hebrew word creates the following problem in Num. 35:27 in which God says, "(if--Ed.)...the

revenger of blood kill the slayer; he shall not be guilty of blood." In this instance, the Hebrew word is translated as "kill," and if it should be translated as murder, then according to Archer God is saying a man who murdered another should be found not guilty of blood. In sum and substance, Archer is saying he knows Hebrew better than committees of experts who translated many of the most prominent versions on the market.

Later Archer makes the incredible statement that, "Violence and bloodshed are occasionally mentioned in the record of man's history throughout Scripture, but never with approval." Is he serious! Violence and bloodshed are rampant throughout the OT and often mentioned with approval, especially in historical books such as Joshua. One need only read the Commentary in Issue #116 to see that God not only killed repeatedly but ordered others to kill as well. Since God was often the instigator, one can safely assume violence and bloodshed met with his approval.

Archer says violence and bloodshed were never met with approval but then says, "Yet, there were specific situations when entire communities (such as Jericho) or entire tribes (such as the Amalekites) were to be exterminated by the Israelites in obedience to God's command." So, violence and bloodshed were carried out with God's approval after all.

Archer proceeds to justify all of this mayhem by saying, "In each case these offenders had gone so far in degeneracy and moral depravity that their continued presence would result in spreading the dreadful cancer of sin among God's covenant people. Just as the wise surgeon removes dangerous cancer from his patient's body by use of the scalpel, so God employed the Israelites to remove such dangerous malignancies from human society." But what had these tribes done that had not been committed by the Israelites as well? The latter constantly violated one or another of God's laws and asked forgiveness either before or after punishment. The Israelite record of violating divine decrees was reprehensible and, thus, they deserved God's vengeance as much as anyone. According to Archer God used a scalpel that was no cleaner than the disease being excised.

Archer concludes by saying the sacrifice of animals symbolized the coming sacrifice of the Son of God on the cross, and he justifies animal sacrifice by quoting one of the most inaccurate comments in the entire NT, Hebrews 9:22, which says, "Without the shedding of blood, there is no remission of sins." Yet, sins were repeatedly forgiven in the OT by methods other than bloody sacrifices. Blood was by no means the only means by which sins could be forgiven. Lev. 5:11-13 states flour can make atonement for the soul. Money can atone for the soul according to Exodus 30:15-16; jewelry can atone for the soul as is apparent from Num. 31:50, and in Num. 14:17-20 and Hosea 14:3 we find that prayer can atone for the soul.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #554 from SF of York, Penn. (Part a)

(A Christian apologist sent a subscriber, SF, the following letter and SF asked us to respond because after several encounters he has become convinced the source is a "hopeless, lost cause case"--Ed.)

Dear SF.... Christianity is, indeed, the most intellectually satisfying world-view there is and although it is not something one can prove the truth of, as you take so much delight in pointing out, this is of absolutely no importance when comparing it to competing world-views inasmuch as no such philosophy of life, whether theistic or atheistic, can be proven.

Editor's Response to Letter #554 (Part a)

Dear SF. Your opponent's intellectual myopia is rather pronounced to say the least. For one to say that Christianity is the most satisfying world-view available borders on the ridiculous. Jews would say that of Judaism; Muslims would say that of Islam; Buddhists would say that of Buddhism; fascists would say that of fascism, libertarians would say that of libertarianism, and communists would say that of Marxism. That statement is almost too ridiculous to merit a reply. And for him or her to say that the inability of Christians to prove the truth of Christianity "is of absolutely no importance" belongs in the realm of the bizarre. If that is true, then every satisfying belief is as credible as all the others. Whether a philosophy is true or demonstrable is no longer of any significance; all that counts is whether or not it is intellectually satisfying, a wholly arbitrary and unreliable criterion.

Unlike our friend, many adherents to other philosophies heatedly contend their beliefs are provable and for him to say that nothing can be proven is merely an opinion that will remain as such until he can show that adherents of competing philosophies are also unable to substantiate their allegations.

Letter #554 Continues (Part b)

The satisfactions of Christianity derive from the fact that it offers answers to all the major questions of life, including the one you ask in your last letter about the meaning of life (a response to which will have to await another time). But even more it offers hope. It holds out the promise that there is, in fact, meaning to life....

Editor's Response to Letter #554 (Part b)

What kind of response is this? Virtually every philosophy offers answers to all of life's major questions. They are more than glad to comply. That's no problem. The problem is that the answers are either wrong or indemonstrable in far too many instances. And virtually every philosophy offers hope of some kind; that's no problem either. If they didn't, they wouldn't be in demand. Again, the problem is whether or not the hope is well founded and justified. Narcotics, religions, cults, the occult, New Age, and a wide variety of other superstitions and mental escapes offer hope for a better life as well. If they didn't, they wouldn't be around very long.

Yes, it holds out the promise that there is meaning in life, but it doesn't prove real meaning is to be found through acts and beliefs outlined and pursued by Christians. There could very well be real meaning that is not found through Christianity. In all probability it is not a choice between Christianity and no hope whatever, as your opponent alleges, but a choice between another philosophy and all other philosophies, including Christianity.

Letter #554 Continues (Part c)

Atheism, on the other hand, offers nothing but emptiness, hopelessness, meaninglessness, death, and despair....

Editor's Response to Letter #554 (Part c)

What an inaccurate comment! Atheists and others who don't base their life on belief in a nebulous, unsubstantiated afterlife of sweet bliss have always been in the forefront of those most concerned with the improvement of this world and everything in it. After all it only stands to reason that those most convinced that this world is all there is are going to be among those most concerned with improving the world as we see it. They have been and always will be in leadership of the fight against emptiness, meaninglessness, hopelessness, and despair and have always felt that if man is ever going to abolish these qualities of life, then that will have to materialize here and now, because nothing is going to be bestowed later. This world is all we have and we had better make the most of it. A logical concomitant to this view of life is that conditions will only improve when man rolls up his shirt sleeves and digs in. It isn't going to fall into his lap like a ripe apple from a tree. Who would be more inclined to fight against the deplorable conditions we all see and experience in everyday life than those most convinced that there is no nirvana to follow and no beneficent deity presiding over the welfare of mankind who has taken humanity to raise like a benevolent babysitter in the sky.

Religionists, on the other hand, are victims of precisely the opposite mentality. Firmly believing a better world is coming and conditions are mainly improved by prayer and reliance upon a benign deity, they are far more inclined to write this world off as a loss, abstain from opposition to social injustice, avoid social activism or improvements, and flee rebellion against unfairness. After all they reason, if you only live 80 or 90 years in this world, why be so involved. Don't worry about events; God will provide and heaven is on its way. The degree of involvement in social problems and distribution of financial assistance by religious agencies throughout the planet is in direct proportion to the extent to which the particular group, church, organization or religious instrumentality involved has left fundamentalism in general and the Holy Book (the Bible, Koran, etc.) in particular; while those closest to the religious/superstitious mentality distribute less aid and provide assistance more out of a need to ingratiate people to religious ideas and make the latter more amenable to the message than any real concern for their worldly condition. Most Salvation Army centers, for example, will not provide support until those in need have willingly submitted to an indoctrination session or propaganda barrage. Of course there are exceptions. But one would be ill-advised to latch on to an exception in an attempt to use it to destroy the rule. That is one of the most common tricks in the arsenal of all propagandists. They seize and magnify an exception in order to portray it as the rule. Make no mistake about it, religious aid is a means to an end; it's not an end in itself.

Incidentally, in light of the fact that religious organizations are subject to very little financial accountability, how can we be sure that money donated to organizations associated with "Save the Children," for example, actually reaches the children? What assurances are in place that nearly all of the funds donated reach the destination intended as opposed to enhancing the affluent life style of the "philanthropic" conveyor. After all, if vast sums are siphoned off who would know the difference?

The bottom line is that people work to improve conditions in this world in direct proportion to the extent to which they jettison their interest or concern for the "next" and vice versa. So who offers emptiness, hopelessness, meaninglessness and despair? -One who tells you that the world reeks with injustice and deplorable conditions that can be improved or eliminated through work, involvement, sensitivity, and realistic thinking or one who tells you the world reeks with injustice, deplorable conditions, and corrupt people that can not be improved to any meaningful degree but only escaped, and promises you a better world is coming based upon nothing more than admittedly unprovable faith, hope, and dreams found in a man-created book saturated with contradictions, errors, and fallacies. Personally, my conscience is clear, my deeds are pure, my cause is just, my advice is sound and that is far more than can be said for the biblical God and his proponents who are urging mankind to not only follow in his footsteps but adopt the tenets of "his" book. (To Be Continued)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #555 from VS of Lake Worth, Florida

Dear Dennis. Congratulations on your completing publication of the mass of material you have collected. Although I found out about your publication long after you started, it has helped me immensely in my search for knowledge about the Bible to counteract the seemingly endless stream of "soul-winners" out there.

I took the liberty of putting your name, address, and something about your publication on America OnLine. I wrote a short piece on how to debate Christians and quoted you (with attribution of course). I also mentioned Farrell Till of the Skeptical Review. Till does a bang-up job, in my opinion. You do, too. The piece has been downloaded about 40 times so far and one person sent me e-mail saying he would write to you for more information....

As you note, if nothing else we have to get some sort of message across about the Bible. I know from personal experience, however, that preachers simply tell their flocks that Bible critics (and even scholars) are miserable, disturbed people who want to share their misery with "joyful" Christians by destroying the Bible: claiming it is not the work of God to point out its contradictions, and so on. But, there are rational people out there who seek the information you have provided; I am on the lookout for them and have plenty of your nontracts to hand to them. Just by showing them that life without literal Bible belief can be just as good (and more so) than life in Christianity's intellectual cage, we may accomplish our goal.

Like you, I would like to see an intelligent debate on not only the Bible but also extra-Biblical topics presented on electronic media. I'm glad you're beginning to "broaden [the] focus" in bringing other material to the Bible. Fundamentalists like Robertson and Randall Terry want to drop the Bible, like a bomb, on our society and remake it in its image. We have to do the same. In any case, simple logic can disprove most of the Bible handily. We have to be sure to emphasize that the fact that the book has parts that are true does not make the whole book true. As you have noted in the past, every book has some truth in it. The Christian's insistence that it's either all true or all false are, in my view, indefensible and easily dealt with.

Keep up the good work.... Take care, keep plugging away, and don't lose hope. I look forward to future issues of Biblical Errancy and wish you luck in your future endeavors.

Letter #556 from JG of Altadena, California (Part a)

Dear Dennis. I was reading Issue #97 (Jan. 1991) and came across this misquote you were citing. It was at the top part of page two. (4) Matt. 11:10 ("For this is he of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. Mal. 3:1 ("Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me").

(a) the OT says "thy way before thee." WRONG! The OT says "The way before me."

(b) Jesus created the phrase "before thy face." As an atheist I don't believe the Jesus character ever existed. Jesus never created anything.

....On Issue #125 (May 1993) page 3. THE WARS OF GOD AND MAGOG.
WRONG! THE WARS OF GOG AND MAGOG.

Please be careful in printing up this material. I give these periodicals out to read.

Editor's Response to Letter #556 (Part a)

Dear JG. You are correct on both textual points. It is so easy to make typing errors and accidentally transpose words when you work with as much material as I do. I wish you had caught the first error when it appeared nearly three years ago. (4)(a) should say, "The OT says "the way before me" not "thy way before thee." This mistake should be corrected on all copies in everyone's binders. And THE WARS OF GOD AND MAGOG should be changed to THE WARS OF GOG AND MAGOG in all copies. Try as we may we can't catch them all.

Letter #556 Concludes (Part b)

Nevertheless I really enjoy how you point out these erroneous references made by the NT writers that this and that verse or verses in the OT are a prophetic fulfillment of what they write about. I think the Jesus character is their crowning achievement. There are other references about Moses and other items also. Moses is another fictional character. Why would these NT charlatans refer to Moses without fear of being punished by an all powerful God for falsely using his name; I think it's because they know the OT story about Moses is fiction.

Letter #557 from MC of Boston, Mass.

Dear Sir. A casual acquaintance showed me a copy of your newsletter. I would like to subscribe, and also obtain any back issues that might be available. I have been doing a lot of research in preparation for writing a book.... I started out thinking that the errancy issue had probably been covered exhaustively in the last few centuries, but I began to find some "corkers" on my own that had not been mentioned in any of the other literature I looked at, including various compendiums of errors such as the old Foote's Bible Handbook. My personal preference in error-hunting is to look for specific internal contradictions that require no referencing outside the Bible itself. I also like to compare certain passages in the different English translations; what is hidden or distorted in one is often revealed in another. My pet peeve is skeptics whose

only stock in trade is to debunk the Bible's miracle tales. With perhaps a couple of exceptions (like the sundial movements), to point out that an event is highly improbable does not prove absolutely that it (or something similar, or subsequently exaggerated) did not occur. There are plenty of airtight logic boxes (and some serviceable ones, too) with which to confound the fundamentalists' claims; and they have not all been found, I daresay....

Letter #558 from HB of Alexandria, Virginia

Dear Dennis.... Letter #549 in (Issue 128 of August, 1993) states that Abraham has a servant place his hand under Abraham's thigh to take an oath, but this does not refer to his penis. The thigh actually refers to Abraham's testicles or testes, which are the most important part of a man taking a vow because he swears on his progeny. Testes are so important that they are parts of words like testimony, testify, testament, Old Testament, and New Testament. None of my several reference books on the Bible mention this, probably from embarrassment because Christians have always had difficulty dealing with sex.

Your most recent Issue 128 of August, 1993 suggests only general directions for future issues. I would like to suggest several topics. (1) Put the 27 books of the NT in chronological order and then examine them to determine what has been added and removed over time.... (2) Describe how the canon of the Bible developed over time and the conflicts involved. (3) Show the difficulties of determining authors and dates of the 66 books of the Bible, with continuing disagreements. (4) Examine the 613 laws in the OT to determine which are obeyed, disobeyed, or ignored. (5) Examine the treatment of women in the Bible and anti-Semitism in the NT. (6) Compare science in the Bible with what the Greeks knew at the time.... (7) Examine the justifications for slavery and conflicts related to this. (8) Analyze the two dozen errors in procedure and Jewish law in the trial of Jesus. (9) Analyze the Christian claim that democracy is based on the Bible. (10) Examine the relationship of the Dead Sea Scrolls to the Bible. (11) Examine the changes which have been made over time to make the Bible more appealing. For example, Jesus was a Mediterranean Jew with dark skin, hair, and eyes, yet he appears much lighter in our art. (12) Comment on such thinking as Hyam Maccoby's *The Mythmaker--Paul and the Invention of Christianity* and John Spong's *Born of a Woman--a Bishop Rethinks the Birth of Jesus*. They turn the Bible upside down and raise numerous questions. (13) Describe the contents of the Apocrypha, how it developed, and why it is important. This is my way of encouraging you to continue your fine work.

Editor's Response to Letter #558

Dear HB. Don't worry; instead of winding down our efforts we have every intention of increasing them. As far as your list of suggested topics is concerned, I would say

we have covered to one degree or another virtually everything you suggested except points 1 and 9-13.

Letter #559 from RH of Dayton, Ohio

Dear Mr. McKinsey. Heartiest congratulations on the completion of your catalogue of Biblical errors. This is a superb achievement! I wish you well on your TV efforts; perhaps it will attract the attention of those who get their religion from TV. For those of us who usually avoid TV, and have no cable, it will be inaccessible. That is one reason I'd like to join the "scores of people" who have asked you to write a book. I value my 127 editions of BE highly. I often take down my binders and look at the older issues. But I would guess that there are relatively few like me who have every issue. And ring-bound notebooks of duplications of a computer-printout are not the easiest volumes to read. A one volume, thorough inclusion of your commentaries, organized by subject and indexed would be terrific ammunition for anyone wanting to debate biblicists, and as I am certain that there is no more comprehensive point-by-point refutation of the book, it would become a standard reference book as useful in one hundred years as it is now, and as a book, much more accessible than TV tapes.

I urge you, therefore, to do more than consider writing a book sometime in the future. It cannot be published too soon. Dennis, you have my admiration for the superb service you have done. I'll look forward to hearing about whatever new projects you undertake.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Over the years many people have asked us to write a book about the Bible's inadequacies and because the essentials of a very comprehensive work can be found in the transcripts of 24 recently completed audio tapes, we have decided to comply with their request. An abbreviated version of the book encompassing 3 of 24 chapters, a preface, and a table of contents is now available for review by any interested publishers readers may suggest. The final stimulus for this undertaking came from Paul Kurtz of Prometheus Books who sent us a letter in July stating that he would be delighted to consider any proposal we may have. Although we declined his initial suggestion because of so many other irons-in-the-fire, we decided to reconsider the matter and phoned him a month later to accept his kind offer. Because he stated he would like to review an abridged version of any manuscript we might seek to publish, in mid-October our abbreviated version of 75 pages was sent to him for analysis.

Issue No. 132

December 1993

With this month's issue we will continue our critique of *The Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* by Gleason Archer.

REVIEWS

(*ARCHER'S ENCYCLOPEDIA*--Part 3)

On page 126 Archer is asked how the Bible can be correct when it contends rabbits chew the cud. After discussing the hyrax of Lev. 11:5 and the rabbit of Lev. 11:6, he responds by saying, "True ruminants normally have four stomachs, and that which has been worked over in these stomachs is regurgitated into the mouth when it is ready to be chewed again. In this technical sense neither the hyrax nor the hare can be called ruminants, but they do give the appearance of chewing the cud in the same way ruminants do. So convincing is this appearance that even Linnaeus at first classed them as ruminants, even though the four-stomach apparatus is lacking." In effect, he's provided little more than an admission that the Bible erred. What does a "technical sense" have to do with the issue? They either are or they are not chewers of the cud. And that's that. What does he mean by "technical sense?" Does he mean there is another sense that makes sense? And what does appearance have to do with accuracy? You might as well say a car is alive because it moves or all birds fly because you have never seen one that didn't. You might just as well allege loud noises cause bullets to be expelled from guns, because every time one is expelled it is accompanied by a loud noise; or someone is a king because you saw him wearing a crown and a gorgeous robe. What difference does the appearance make? The fact is that they do not

chew the cud. If Linnaeus classified them as ruminants, then he was no more accurate than the Bible.

On page 152 Archer is asked: Deut. 24:16 says that children will not be killed for the sins of the fathers. Yet 2 Samuel 12:15-18 shows that the baby born to David and Bathsheba died because of their sin. Later, in 2 Samuel 21:5-9 Saul's seven grandchildren were put to death because of his sin, in order to bring the 3 year famine to an end. How do you reconcile these? And he responds by saying, "...It is clearly recognized in Scripture that each person stands on his own record before God.... In the case of the child conceived by Bathsheba and David when she was married to Uriah, the loss of that baby (in the OT setting) was a judgment visited on the guilty parents for their gross sin (which actually merited the death penalty under Lev. 20:10). It is by no means suggested that the child was suffering punishment for his parent's sin but that they were being punished by his death." This exhibits the kind of perverted logic that is so indicative of Christian apologetics. Certainly the child was bearing the brunt of the punishment, regardless of how it affected the parents. He paid the price, not them. One might just as well say that if I murdered someone and my father was executed in response, I was adequately punished because I lost my father. How ridiculous! My father was punished for my deeds, not I. He paid the price not I. All I endured was mental agony, at best. Later, Archer adds to his perverse sense of justice by saying, "Under special circumstances, then, the general rule of safeguarding children against punishment for the sins of their parents was subject to exceptions, so far as God's administration of justice was concerned. In each of the above cases it is fair to conclude that if the children involved had been permitted to live out a normal lifespan, they would have chosen to follow the evil example of their forebears and thus occasioned much suffering and woe to others." How absurd! Working on this principle we should kill the children of all criminals because they will probably choose to follow in their parents' footsteps. It is unfair to conclude anything, much less prejudice.

Even more important, how could it be just to punish people for doing something they have never done but could possibly do in the future? The kind of reasoning Christian apologists display to reconcile biblical contradictions is often downright unnerving.

On page 155 Archer is asked: Did God approve of Rahab's lie as related in Joshua 2:4-5? In essence, he seeks to justify her behavior by noting that she had faith in the Hebrew god, risked her life, joined the Israelites and became an ancestor of David and Jesus. But these considerations are irrelevant. The fact is that she lied and his answer rambled on for a page and a half without answering the question: Did God approve of the lie or didn't he? Even good people lie, but that doesn't make the lie any less false.

On page 175 Archer is asked: In 1 Sam. 16:19-21 Saul recognizes David as the son of Jesse, but in 17:58 Saul is said to have asked David, "Whose son art thou?" How can the two be reconciled? Archer responds by saying, "It is true that Saul had already been introduced to David (1 Sam. 16:18) as 'a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite who is a skillful musician, a mighty man of valor, a warrior, one prudent in speech, and a handsome man.' But it should be noted also that up until the contest with Goliath, David had shown to King Saul only his artistic side; and then David had been permitted to return home to Bethlehem. It is altogether true to life for Saul to see David in an entirely new light and to show a keen interest in his background."

What drivel. In other words, we are supposed to believe that David was known by Saul as an artist, went home, returned, and was no longer recognized by Saul. To say Archer is reaching on this one is an understatement. Saul knows David is Jesse's son in 1 Sam 16:19, saw him face to face in 1 Sam. 16:21, and told David he was a valiant man of war in 1 Sam. 16:18. Yet we are to believe he later saw him in a "new light." Archer's explanation is little more than an act of desperation. Saul isn't seeing David in

a new light when the text clearly shows he's seeing him for the first time. After all the prior events, he doesn't even know David, according to 1 Sam. 17:58.

On page 184 Archer is asked: What is the correct number of horsemen that David took in his battle over Hadadezer, 1,700 (2 Sam. 8:4) or 7,000 (1 Chron. 18:4)? In this instance we are at least given an answer that is not smothered in irrelevant and inaccurate verbiage. Archer states, "There is no question but that these two accounts refer to the same episode, and therefore the prisoner count should be the same in both instances. There has been a scribal error or two either in Samuel or in Chronicles." Of course, he is guessing and we have already addressed the inadequacies of this whole copyist-error defense in prior issues. It just won't save the day.

The same approach is employed on page 206 when Archer is asked: How old was Ahaziah when he began to reign (compare 2 Kings 8:26 with 2 Chron. 22:2) and Jehoiachin when he began to reign (compare 2 Kings 24:8 with 2 Chron. 36:9-10)? It's interesting to note that Archer doesn't even attempt to justify this contradiction. Even the most conservative of fundamentalists can no longer evade the obvious on occasion. He opts for the more expedient ploy of invoking the following rationalization: "Copyists were prone to making two types of scribal errors. One concerned the spelling of proper names...and the other had to do with numbers.... It is beyond the capability of anyone to avoid any and every slip of the pen in copying page after page from any book--sacred or secular. Yet we may be sure that the original manuscript of each book of the Bible, being directly inspired by God, was free from all error. It is also true that no well-attested variation in the manuscript copies that have come down to us alter any doctrine of the Bible...." To this one can only reply: How does he know there were any original manuscripts? Secondly, how can he be sure that any document is errorless when he admits no one living, including himself, has ever

seen that document? How can he attest to the validity of a document he has never seen? Thirdly, how does he know they were errorless, in light of the fact that the copies reek with errors and contradictions? Fourthly, how does he know they weren't copied correctly and still contradict one another? This is certainly a reasonable assumption, in light of the fact that the copies often conflict. Having never seen the originals, how does he know they agree? How can he prove they are in concert, when they no longer exist?

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #554 from SF Who is Citing a Letter Received from an Apologetic Opponent Continues from Last Month (Part d)

If you are interested in a more detailed response to Utchen's booklet, let me know, but I didn't think it worth the effort in this letter, especially since I found Dennis McKinsey's claims in his column entitled COMMENTARY to be more interesting.... McKinsey expresses his further concern that believers will be disinterested in the environmental destruction of our planet, since this earth, they believe, is only temporary.... I myself am a contributing member of half dozen conservation groups, including The Nature Conservancy, Audubon Society, Sierra Club, Wilderness Society, World Wildlife Fund, and others. I speak on environmental issues to churches from time to time, and I find that many Christians are very concerned about the degradation of the biosphere. McKinsey here, as elsewhere, just doesn't know what he's talking about.

Editor's Response to Letter #554 (Part d)

As long as you don't mind, SF, I'll address your opponent's comments concerning me directly.

If there is anyone who doesn't know the subject

matter, it's you. In the first place, you are concealing your position with respect to the inerrancy of the Bible. To what extent you have drifted from a fundamentalist position is central to the issue. If you are a liberal Christian who has drifted away from many biblical teachings, then your inclination to join social activist groups is understandable. If, on the other hand, you are a conservative Christian of the fundamentalist or inerrantist variety, then you are nothing more than an exception to the rule. For every one in your camp, scores of fundamentalists are not. Again, the exception does not destroy the rule. You are participating in those organizations **despite** biblical teachings, not because of them. The central thrust of biblical doctrines is other-worldly, not this-worldly, and that remains an unalterable fact.

Letter #554 Continues (Part e)

McKinsey argues that believers will be motivated to good behavior by the hope of reward rather than by concern for simply doing what's right. ...in a world where so many aren't motivated to do good by anything at all, he should be pleased that believers strive to do good for whatever reason, even self-interested ones.

Editor's Response to Letter #554 (Part e)

I should be glad that they are doing good, even if it is for reasons of self-interest? You admit they are doing it for self interest, self aggrandizement, self-enhancement and say I should be pleased. That's morality? That kind of behavior is included in what you deem to be desirable behavior? Can acts be moral that are based upon nothing more than self-interest and personal gain? Are they moral acts even though they may appear magnanimous to others? All you are saying is that *if we can get people to behave correctly through the promise of personal reward, who cares if we are basing our morality upon self-interest.* That isn't morality; that's the systematic manipulation of others by the expectation of personal gain and profit. People would not be

inclined to behave unless they could see some personal benefit to themselves, and to say that that is better than nothing is to justify the world's sad condition, which Christianity and the Bible enhance. Doing a good act for a bad reason could never lead to a real concern of one person for another. Instead people would tend to base their acts on cold prior calculations of what benefits they could expect. We have too much of that occurring already, and Christianity is a prime cause. People should do the right because it is the right thing to do, not because they expect a kickback, a reward, or a payoff.

In addition, you are saying that the end justifies the means, because it doesn't really matter if Christian teachings are true as long as they obtain results.

Letter #554 Continues (Part f)

But beyond this, his assertion is just plain wrong. It requires a complete and utter misunderstanding of Christianity to aver that Christians strive to do good out of hope for reward. Our reward is already established when we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior. The Christian's motive for doing good is love for God, which manifests itself in love for God's creation, both human and non-human. McKinsey would do well to read, say, Book I of Thomas A Kempis' *THE IMITATION OF CHRIST* before he ventures again to make such uninformed statements in his journal.

Editor's Response to Letter #554 (Part f)

Wrong again! According to biblical theology, your reward is not received by accepting Jesus Christ as your savior, but when you enter heaven -- and not a moment before. If you did nothing more than accept Jesus as your savior, and absolutely nothing happened to you subsequently, where is the reward? Jesus Christ is not an end in himself; he is a means to the end, which is eternal salvation. Heaven and hell are inseparable parts of Christian theology;

indeed, they lie at the very foundation. Take them away and the superstructure begins to crumble. For you to say that Christians don't do good out of hope for a reward or that Christian morality is not ultimately based upon a system of rewards and punishments is ridiculous. If there is anyone who displays an utter misunderstanding of the true import of Christian teachings, you are that individual. Abolish heaven, hell, and purgatory from Christian theology and see what happens. When I say abolish, I mean completely eradicate them from the minds of all Christians. See what that does for your love of Jesus. See how much is left of your concern for salvation. See what that does to Christian charities. And see what is left of Christian churches and denominations. And then come and talk to me about Christian beneficence and humanity. Why do you accept Jesus? Because you think it's to your own personal benefit. That's why. Take the fear of hell-fire and damnation out of the Bible, as well as the expectation of self-centered rewards in heaven, and Christianity would collapse. For you to say that "the Christian's motive for doing good is love for God which manifests itself in love for God's creation, both human and non-human" is little more than a prevarication. How can Christians love this world when the Bible says this world's god is the devil? For biblical Christians, the external world, the Devil's domain, is to be used as a means to an end -- to get people into heaven-- and is not to be loved or viewed as an end in itself. And since we have already shown that good deeds toward others primarily arise out of self-interest and personal profit, it cannot be said that the Christian motive for doing good is love for a supreme being. It's love for self that is cloaked in love for another.

Letter #554 Continues (Part g)

The author alleges that believers will not oppose wars very strenuously because of their belief in an afterlife. This whiff of intellectual flatulence evinces once again a complete ignorance on the part of the writer. The criteria of Just War theory were first worked out by Christians who were loath to have their governments go to war capriciously, and

Christians have striven ever since to hold their governments to these standards. Additionally, many of the staunchest elements of the anti-war and nuclear disarmament movements have been Christian, as are many pacifists and conscientious objectors.

Editor's Response to Letter #554 (Part g)

If there is any ignorance, my friend, it lies in your failure to realize that I never said anything about a Just War theory. My comment was much broader. I said that religion, by its very nature, is supernatural and otherworldly, and those entangled in its web are far more likely to accept war and possible death than those who believe that this world is the sum and substance of existence. Those who believe that death is followed by another world, another existence, or another life are less inclined to fear that which places their life in danger.

Secondly, religious components of the anti-war and nuclear disarmament movements are composed almost completely of liberal Christian elements and organizations. The latter are comprised of Christians who have moved farthest from an inerrant Bible and are least inclined to accept the largest number of biblical teachings. Generally speaking, those least inclined to accept the Bible are most involved with saving this world and vice versa. Your arguments remind me of Christian apologists who love to trot out the names of Christian ministers who opposed Hitler and Mussolini when their forces were rampaging throughout Europe. What they neglect to mention, of course, is that the ministers and priests who opposed them were the exception, and nearly always of the liberal Christian persuasion. Biblical inerrantists, fundamentalists, conservatives, evangelicals, and reactionaries were noticeably absent from beginning to end. Yet, it is those few brave individuals who were willing to oppose fascist tyranny that are projected as indicative of biblical Christianity as a whole, when they were by no means representative of the latter. It's from the liberal wing of Christianity that conscientious

objectors and those who hold governments to a higher standard emerge. The support given to fascism by the pope and to the Vietnam War by Billy Graham, Oral Roberts, Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell and other conservative Christians is fully understandable.

Letter #554 Continues (Part h)

On the other hand, as I have written before, most of the wars of this century have been precipitated and prosecuted by atheistic tyrants. It wasn't Christians who invaded Czechoslovakia in the thirties, it wasn't Christians who bombed Pearl Harbor. Christians have traditionally been disinclined to go to war unless they feel there is no other recourse. McKinsey doesn't have to speculate on this. It's history. He can look it up if he's really interested in truth and not in merely flummoxing his readership in order to score debating points.

Editor's Response to Letter #554 (Part h)

This comment is almost too inane to warrant a response. Where on earth are you getting this preposterous nonsense! Tens of millions of people died in World War I, and prime leaders of that catastrophe, such as the Hapsburgs and Romanovs, were not Christians? Are you serious! Key initiators and participants in World War II such as Hitler, Mussolini, Churchill, and Roosevelt were not Christians? I can remember seeing a newsclip of Roosevelt and Churchill on a ship in the North Atlantic singing "Onward Christian Soldiers" with thousands of sailors following a crucial meeting in the darkest hours of late 1941. Every major war of this century and most of the smaller conflagrations have been led, caused, or fought by Christians. Are you saying Adolph Hitler was not a Christian when he invaded Czechoslovakia, or Mussolini was not a Christian when he invaded Albania, Greece and Ethiopia? Franco was not a Christian when he attacked a legally elected government and killed prisoners? And what about Northern Ireland and Yugoslavia? If Christians have been disinclined to

go to war, deliver me from those you feel are so inclined. I taught history for many years and rarely encountered information that would substantiate your version of historical events.

Actually, flummoxing appears to be your specialty, in light of the fact that you deftly slipped in the phrase "wars of this century." Apparently you prefer to avoid other centuries, and in light of what repeatedly occurred throughout the last 2,000 years, one can easily understand why. Entire books would be needed to adequately cover the history of the wars, massacres, atrocities, tortures, and executions perpetrated by Christians for religious reasons. Anyone who doesn't know that the history of Christianity is replete with warfare and aggression of one sort of another has no business denouncing the historical comments of others. Succinctly stated, what you say is wholly inaccurate, and if anyone needs to be more concerned with research and less concerned with scoring debating points, it's you.

Letter #554 Continues (Part i)

McKinsey alludes to passages in the Bible that suggest that it teaches the inequality of men and women, but what the Bible teaches is that men and women are different, not that they're unequal. Indeed, Christianity revolutionized how women are viewed by the larger culture. Contrary to Judaism...and contrary to Roman society...women were exalted by the early church to a status similar to what they enjoy in twentieth century America....

Editor's Response to Letter #554 (Part i)

What tripe! I'm tempted to say trash. All the apostles were men; all the patriarchs were obviously men; all the founders of Christianity were males; Christianity's savior was a male, and God is depicted throughout the Bible as a male. From priests, through bishops, cardinals, and popes, women were purposely excluded from any meaningful role in church activities, and except for lesser parts for Eve

and Mary, no women play significant roles in the formulation of biblical Christianity. Even more importantly, the Bible specifically relegates women to a role lying somewhere between that of a slave and a domestic household servant. And you want us to believe that men and women are biblically equal! Don't deceive people by contending the Bible teaches "that men and women are different, not that they're unequal." You definitely need to read the 8th issue of BE, my friend. The thrust of verses like 1 Cor. 11:3 ("...the head of the woman is the man"), Gen. 3:16 ("thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee"), 1 Cor. 11:7-9 ("the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man"), Eph. 5:22-24 ("Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church"), Col. 3:18 ("Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands"), and 1 Tim. 2:11-14 ("I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve..."), is clear to all but the most indoctrinated. In no sense does the Bible teach that men and women are equal in social standing. Women are clearly to be viewed as subservient. Christianity never "revolutionized how women are viewed by the larger culture." In fact, the opposite is true. One would be hard pressed to find any religion that is not a bastion of male supremacy, and Christian teachings are directly in the mainstream of all religious pronouncements on women. At no time were women "exalted by the early church." Would you cite chapter and verse to substantiate this wholly unbiblical comment? In fact, I'd even be willing to consider any extrabiblical data you can provide to prove women were exalted by the early church or endured any other role than that of an appendage to a man. To be perfectly blunt, where on earth are you getting this palaver? You're merely writing your own script, my friend.

Letter #554 Continues (Part j)

McKinsey voices his dismay that believers enrich

certain televangelists in an attempt to "buy their way into heaven." While giving money to Jimmy and Tammy Faye Bakker and their ilk is doubtless foolish, people don't do it to buy a ticket to heaven. They do it because they believe in the people to whom they contribute and wish to help their ministries prosper. They may be deluded, but that is not the point at issue. The point is that Christians don't give in order to garner some reward....

Editor's Response to Letter #554 (Part j)

They don't! Take away the fires of hell and the eternal rewards of heaven's bliss and see what happens. If you don't think the underlying motivation behind nearly all contributions is self interest and personal gain, then you have failed to detect one of the pillars upon which Christianity rests. Its financial growth depends upon the concern and fear people have for a suspected or perceived future. Terror and fear of the unknown lie at the heart of all religions.

Letter #554 Continues (Part k)

I agree with McKinsey's assertion that Christians tend to view evil as a problem of human nature rather than a problem of our environment, and what's more, they are absolutely correct to do so. While environment is certainly a factor in how our nature expresses itself, our moral predicament today is nevertheless a function of the propensity of human beings, whether rich or poor, to be lustful, greedy, proud, and violent. These evils arise from within the hearts of men, they are not imposed from without.

Editor's Response to Letter #554 (Part k)

Here, probably more than anywhere else, our views differ drastically. You say the world will never improve until you get the garbage out of people, while I say the world will never improve until you get the people out of the garbage. It is not a matter of bad people making a bad environment; it's

a matter of a bad environment making bad people. You have the cart before the mule. Where do you find the most crime, the most violence, the most anti-social behavior, the most profanity, the most debilitating addictions, the most of that which is undesirable? It's in the poorer sections of society throughout the world. Where do police patrol the most? Where crime is greatest-- and that's in poverty-stricken areas. You can't bear a child in a rat's nest, raise him in a slum, restrict his every movement during maturation by removing everything material that allows him to enjoy life and respect others, and still expect him to display the manners of Emily Post and the etiquette of Amy Vanderbilt. It just isn't going to happen. In debating this very point with a fundamentalist minister, I repeatedly mentioned the fact that no amount of preaching and sermons would ever be able to overcome material conditions that were generating the opposite behavior. When words are saying one thing while every aspect of surrounding reality is dictating the opposite, people are going to obey the latter. That's a virtual foregone conclusion. Try stressing the evils of prostitution to a woman who has children to feed and can't find a decent job paying anything comparable to what she can make in one night on the streets. On the other hand, try teaching those who are materially well off to engage in criminal behavior and see what happens. They'll nearly always ignore your advice, because people with something at stake, people with more to lose than to gain, aren't about to jeopardize their status. (To Be Continued)

Issue No. 133

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On pages 15 and 16 of the publication entitled *Pros Apologian*, published by Rev. James White of Alpha and Omega Ministries, is an article entitled "Rebellious Lumps of Clay and the Praise of God's Glorious Grace." In this article White is essentially

trying to reconcile God's sovereignty with man's free will, and only succeeds in painting himself into a corner. He states, "...before the very creation of the world, God chose His people in Christ Jesus, not on the basis of what they did or would do, but solely on the basis of His mercy and grace. He makes them holy and blameless in his sight by His Spirit and power (Jude 24-25). They are predestined to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ, not according to their works, but according to His pleasure and will. Because this predestination finds its basis completely in God's will, not in man himself, it is all of grace, for it is freely given to us in the Beloved One, Jesus Christ." Later he states, "...we truly are God's creatures, at His disposal, to be used for His glory." In effect, White is saying that God and God alone determines who is saved and who is damned. Man has no influence on the decision whatever. As we have shown in several issues of BE, this position is biblically sound, although in conflict with God's alleged justice, and *morally detestable*.

But on the next page White says, "There is the objection that is heard over and over again. If God truly has mercy on whom He will have mercy, and hardens whom He hardens, then how can God still hold us responsible? Paul's answer provides us with the second part of our answer.... Paul's words are harsh, unloving, and repulsive. Why? Because Paul's answer is so clear: we are clay, God is the potter. We are the creation, He the Creator. We have no right to judge God. God has every right to judge us. We cannot put Him 'in the dock' and accuse Him." Apparently, White doesn't realize he has unsatisfactorily answered the question, and is on the horns of a dilemma. If people are free throughout their entire lives to act as they please, but their fate was determined by God long before they came onto the scene, then behavior is irrelevant to salvation. If behavior is irrelevant to salvation, then justice is irrelevant also, and many of those who will be saved will be among those who are least deserving. On the other hand, if the behavior of people is completely determined by God from beginning to end, then how can God be just, as is alleged in Deut. 32:4, when he condemns some people to hell for doing that which he forced them to perform? How can God judge or

condemn those who have no freedom? White evades the whole issue by relying on Paul, and alleging man has no right to pass judgment on God's behavior, no matter how unjust it may appear. That's analogous to saying: Are you going to believe me or your lying eyes? From White's perspective, any act of God is proper, regardless of the degree of injustice involved, and that's no justification whatever. In essence, he wants people to make a tremendous leap of faith and accept his unsubstantiated allegation that God would never do anything that was unjust, despite obvious evidence to the contrary. He offers no proof; just preachments. We are supposed to accept because of our unworthiness to criticize. Working on that theory, no act of God would be reprehensible no matter how heinous. Every despicable act of God listed in the commentaries of Issues 115 through 120 of BIBLICAL ERRANCY would be justified, and that would, indeed, be the ultimate in religious faith and indoctrination. Every contemptible deed of the Almighty could be defended on the supposition that God's ways are above man's understanding. Individuals entangled in that loop resemble those who believe that the failure of prayer lies in more prayer. They are so blinded to reality that they wouldn't believe god's behavior was reprehensible, even if Paul, himself, returned from the dead and said so.

On top of everything else, White later says, "We are, after all, rebellious lumps of clay, and what an incredibly foolish thing it is for lumps of clay to rise up in rebellion against the Potter!" If all acts by man are determined by God from the beginning, then how could man rebel to begin with? He would only be performing that which God determined. If, on the other hand, he is free throughout his entire life, but his ultimate fate is determined, then what difference does it make whether or not he rebels? He is going to Heaven or Hell, regardless of his behavior. His fate was sealed *ab initio*. Either way, the situation is fixed and ridiculous.

Anyone who takes White's theory seriously might as well devote his life to wine, women, and song, because the outcome is foreordained. If the outcome

is set in concrete, White should live it up and forget about preaching: the die has been cast.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #554 Continues from Last Month (Part 1)

McKinsey is wrong here yet again when he delivers himself of the opinion that Christians regard each other as so much rubbish or dung. I can't speak for other religions, but Christianity teaches that all people have dignity, worth, and beauty because they are made in God's image and because they are loved by God. Jesus commands us, in fact, to value each other to the point of giving our lives for each other. To say that we regard each other as pieces of dung is to confuse us with the secularists and humanists like B.F. Skinner, who regards man as nothing more than an animal with no intrinsic worth beyond what he can contribute to the common good....

The twentieth century has certainly paid in copious quantities of blood for this sort of thinking, as tyranny after tyranny has striven to expunge any theistic basis for human rights and human dignity from the societies they oppress....

Editor's Response to Letter #554 (Part 1)

You are only perpetuating the ridiculous mythology that has enraptured the Christian community for centuries, SF. In the first place, you have chosen to ignore the teachings of Christianity's real founder, Paul, who said in Romans 7, "We know that the law is spiritual; but I am carnal, sold under sin. I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing that I hate.... For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh, I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.... I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members. Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?" Clearly, Paul looks upon

himself as carnal and having nothing good dwelling within; he is wretched and captive to the law of sin. Are you saying you and the rest of humanity are somehow better? Are you saying your moral character exceeds that of a saint? Other verses could be quoted, but the point is that Martin Luther's reference to man being little more than a piece of dung is biblically sustainable. Second, the Bible refers to man being made in the image of God, but could you cite chapter and verse where the Bible specifically applies the words "dignity," "worth," and "beauty" to man, rather than having them eisegetically read into the text? In other words, do you have specific citations, or are you just drawing conjectures from words that are present, and one lone verse in particular? Third, could you also cite chapter and verse to substantiate your assertion that Jesus commanded us to give our lives for each other? One of the most common illnesses of nearly all Christian propagandists lies in their repeated tendency to embellish the biblical story. They just can't help but add to the text anything that makes it more astounding, more colorful, more indicative of the message they seek to convey. I have sat through many a sermon, wondering where on earth he was getting that from Scripture. A couple of Christmas movies I recently viewed entitled *Sodom and Gomorrah* and *Samson and Delilah* reek with addenda. Fourth, as far as the reference to pieces of dung is concerned, I think you will find that Martin Luther, the most influential of all protestant theologians, is far more in tune with biblical teachings than yourself, and more likely to refer to man as a piece of dung than B.F. Skinner. Fifth, your observations with respect to the twentieth century are little short of ludicrous. I challenge you to find any group on this planet that has been involved in bloodier and more costly conflicts than the world's Christians. All the European countries swim in a sea of Christian indoctrination, and yet they have been the source of the bloodiest internal and colonial conflicts in world history. In this century alone, tens of millions have paid the supreme sacrifice in wars in which major Christian leaders and organizations clearly supported both sides. The Christian record is nothing short of abysmal. And lastly, as far as

governments are concerned, those which have oppressed their citizenry the most are precisely those that have been most closely allied with religion, churches, and the propagation of Christianity. Franco in Spain, Pinochet in Chile, Somoza in Nicaragua, Duvalier in Haiti, Diem in Vietnam, Hitler in Germany, and Mussolini in Italy are prime examples.

Letter #554 Continues (Part m)

McKinsey says that believers will not be open to new ideas because they believe that there are some eternal truths. This is too ridiculous a charge to merit a response.

Editor's Response to Letter #554 (Part m)

Why don't you try, anyway? Probably because you know that eternal truths are, by definition, not open to alteration, modification, or revision; they aren't subject to adjustment. And insofar as they are not subject to renovation, believers are not open to new ideas. And to the extent they are not open to new ideas in such key areas as morality and Christian dogma, the tendency to be closedminded in other areas is heightened dramatically, because everything is interrelated. If there is any aspect to which the word ridiculous can be applied, it lies in your subtle attempt to provide an aura of complete mastery through abrupt evasion.

Letter #554 Continues (Part n)

He argues that believers tend to be intolerant of others because they believe they have the Truth. Unfortunately, there are indeed some Christians who are guilty of a kind of religious chauvinism. But what has this to do with the correctness of their beliefs about God? The fact that some people are intolerant does not mean that their beliefs are incorrect. The fact that some who believe God exists display little liberality in their dealings with others certainly does not mean that God doesn't exist.

Editor's Response to Letter #554 (Part n)

You ask, "What has this to do with the correctness of their beliefs?" I would ask you, What has your response to do with my question? We aren't talking about the correctness of their beliefs or their belief in the existence of God. Whether their beliefs are correct or incorrect or God does or does not exist is irrelevant to my original assertion. The fact is that believing they have the "Truth," whether they have it or not, tends to make them intolerant. If the extraneous verbiage in your answer is removed, your real defense includes the assertion that intolerance is only displayed by some Christians. You don't realize that Christians displaying religious tolerance as opposed to intolerance are doing so despite biblical teachings, not because of them. I strongly recommend for your enlightenment the commentaries on Pro- and Anti-intellectualism in Issues 80, 81 and 110.

(To Be Concluded Next Month)

Letter #560 from TG of Arlington, Texas

Dear Dennis.

You're doing excellent work. Even the hard core biblicists who won't be persuaded by the obvious must realize that their position is not so strong as they thought when they encounter your arguments. So I hope you take the following in the spirit in which it's offered.

Biblical criticism is useful and important. But, as you say, "You have to deal with people where they are, not where you would like them to be." And many MANY people, unfortunately, are not going to be separated from their Christian indoctrination by Biblical criticism, for the simple reason that an awful lot of them aren't the least bit interested in such matters. Most of these are "liberal" Christians who would readily agree with us that the Bible is not inerrant, and to most of them, Dennis, the intellectual arguments against their faith just aren't that important. Moreover, most people can readily see that choosing to abandon religious superstition will cut them off from friends and family and isolate them in a way that can be very uncomfortable. I'm convinced that this is why so few freethinkers are

women. Men can more easily afford to go their own way, whereas social attachments and acceptance are very important for most women.

This is why the frontal assault that you are so accomplished at is not the whole solution. This is also why "preaching to the choir" should not be at the very bottom of our priorities. You certainly don't see the Christian churches attracting their main following by holding picket and protest activities. Sure, they draw on a vast pool of people who've been indoctrinated since birth in religious superstition. But the pull of common sense is very strong, too. It's just too strong to overcome the desire to "go along to get along." Many people whose religious beliefs are tenuous at best join churches simply because they don't see any alternatives. This is especially true of couples with young children. And let's not kid ourselves. What we endure is not seen as an acceptable way of living by most people, and the greater part of this has nothing whatever to do with logic and reason.

I don't know what the whole solution is, Dennis. What you do is a part of it. But it doesn't stand much chance of getting us all to where we ought to be. Where we ought to be is in freethought communities that sponsor regular events, open to the public, concerning matters of wide appeal. We freethinkers, and not the fundagelical crazies and peddlers of irrationalism and mysticism, ought to be the ones sponsoring public lectures, workshops, and classes on things like being happier, improving our marriages, raising more self-reliant children, and so on and so on. We can build a better mousetrap, and people will beat a path to our door if we do.

P.S. How about a 4-5 page instead of a 3 page BE?

Editor's Response to Letter #560

Dear TG.

Please accept my response in the spirit intended, but your letter is plagued with beguilements. You wouldn't believe the number of suggestions I have received over the years on how to conduct, write, direct, and manage this publication, much of which

is calculated, either wittingly or unwittingly, to lead us down a side path that is little more than a cul-de-sac, if not a slippery slope to oblivion. In regard to your points: First, you are correct. Many people are not as interested in biblical criticism as are others, but as we have stated so often, our focus should be on those who are most in opposition to our position and most actively propounding biblical inerrancy and religious superstition. Insofar as the amount of work that needs to be done is concerned, this group has barely been touched. You want to move on to another group, when this one is yet to be dealt with in any meaningful way. Second, liberal Christians aren't nearly as immune from biblical contradictions and problems as they have been led to believe. As we have noted before, Adam and Eve, the Resurrection, the Virgin Birth, Original Sin and a host of other issues impact as much on liberal Christianity as the fundamentalist wing. The former are in the loop, whether they like it or not. Third, if I internalized your comment that people are not going to choose "to abandon religious superstition" because "it will cut them off from friends and family and isolate them in a way that can be very uncomfortable," then I might as well abandon all biblical criticism and close up shop, because that would apply to individuals on every side of the Christian spectrum. Although your statement no doubt applies to some, it is by no means applicable to all. Fourth, no doubt some women in the audience have something they would like to say in regard to your comment that "few freethinkers are women." Fifth, I have never said that the "frontal assault" is the whole solution, only that it is far ahead of whatever is second. Sixth, you don't think that "preaching to the choir" should be near the bottom of our priorities? I suggest you talk to some propagandists for the Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses, if you don't think much is to be gained by "spreading the word." All you are doing is submitting another version of the "you can't change those people" argument, TG, and I don't buy it. I'm sorry. I have attended many atheist and humanist meetings over the years, and virtually everyone present came out of some kind of religious background. If they can do it, so can others. And I

know from letters and phone calls we have received over the years that BE has significantly altered the religious beliefs of many people. Seventh, you support the "preaching to the choir" approach by saying that "where we ought to be is in freethought communities that sponsor events, open to the public, concerning matters of wide appeal." But what could be of wider appeal than the Bible! Have you looked at your television or turned on your radio lately? Good grief, my friend, where on earth have you been! The media is saturated with hallelujahs to the Bible in general and Jesus in particular. Eighth, you say that "we freethinkers, and not the fundagelical crazies and peddlers of irrationalism and mysticism ought to be the ones sponsoring public lectures, workshops, and classes on things like..." But TG, how many times have I said that biblicists are NOT, I repeat, they are NOT going to come to our events when they are convinced they already have the truth? It just isn't going to happen. You are living in a dream world if you think religionists are going to appear in droves to hear an atheist, humanist, or freethought speaker. You are going to have to go to them, if you want our numbers to increase dramatically. Don't expect them to come to you. And lastly, you say that "we can build a better mousetrap, and people will beat a path to our door if we do." Why do you say "we can," when we already have. We have had a better mousetrap, at least ideologically, for centuries. That's a done deed; yet, they're not beating a path to our door. No, my friend that's not how it works. Just because you have the truth does not mean your cause will prevail. By no means! If that were true, Falwell, Swaggart, Graham, Roberts, Robertson, and a host of other purveyors of perfidy would never see the light of day. Financial backing, political access, influential relationships, censorship, sympathetic media, educational control, escape from despair into phantasia, yet-to-be-demonstrated promises and threats, and general domination of the scene are far more important. And nobody's going to race to a door they don't even know exists. The situation resembles that noted by a political candidate discussing a controlled election who said, "It's not who has the votes; it's who counts them." Unfortunately, TG, it's difficult to avoid the

impression that you are trying to justify doing little and avoiding conflict by rationalizing everything.

As far as your comment regarding expanding BE to 4 or 5 pages is concerned, time and resources just aren't available. In fact, with so many irons in the fire, we are taxed to the max already. But thanks for the suggestion and encouragement.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #561 from MJ of Andover, Mass.

If God wrote a Book, it would be clear, concise, and intelligible, and not filled with muddled thinking masquerading as spiritual mysteries. It would not be filled with contradictions in claims, in accounts, in advice, and in logic. It would not constantly assert mutually exclusive ideas are both true, such as emphatically claiming the end is near and then extending this claim century after century (Mark 9:1).

It would not contradict known facts (Job 39:13-16). It would not present obviously mythological stories as literal truth (Gen. 7 & 8, Noah's Ark). It would not depend on miracles as a key to legitimacy (Matt. 11:3-5). It would not contain prophecies that failed, nor claim fulfillments of prophecies which were clearly talking about unrelated events (Ezek. 26:7-21 & Acts 21:3, Acts 1:16 & Psalm 41:9, 41:4).

It would have a real sense of justice. It would not favor one nation over another (Deut. 7:6). It would not discriminate against handicapped people (Lev. 21:16-23). It would not condone slavery (Ex. 21:20-21). It would not preach hatred toward gay people (Lev. 20:13, 1 Cor. 6:9-10). It would not be cruel. There can be no justification for the slaughtering of infants and animals, who cannot be guilty (Psalm 137:9, 1 Sam. 15:3). It would be appalled at the idea of eternal punishment for anyone, just because a person won't accept screwy theology (John 3:18, 3:36, Matt. 25:46, Mark 9:44). It would not hold people responsible for the sins of someone else (2

Kings 5:27, Romans 5:18-19). It would provide a better answer to the problem of evil than the Book of Job, which answer amounts to, "You have no right to ask, you puny human" (Job 40:2).

Its ethics would show some wisdom and maturity. It would not hold up an atrocious character such as David as a hero (Acts 13:22, 2 Sam. 6:20-22). It would not regard obedience as a greater virtue than understanding. Obedience is not an intrinsic virtue (Gen. 2 & 3, Adam and Eve; Ex. 24:7).

It would understand the nature of real faith--the will to find meaning in life--and not hold up simple-minded credulity as such a virtue (John 20:29). It would not claim that what a man believes is the critical factor, rather than how he treats people (Romans 4:5-6). It would have an understanding of forgiveness, and not demand a blood sacrifice, a barbaric concept at best (Heb. 9:22). Its teachings on marriage and divorce would be clear and humane, and not change from the OT to the NT or from gospel to gospel (2 Sam. 5:13, Mark 10:11, Matt. 19:9). It would teach that men and women, though different, are equal in value, with equal rights (Lev. 27:3-5, 12:1-4, 1 Cor. 11:3). It would celebrate life, not deny it (John 12:25).

Its chief spokesperson (the Son of God) would have realistic ethics, and not make utopian statements advising people to forgive endlessly, to take no thought for the morrow, and not to resist evil (Matt. 18:22, 6:34, 5:39). It would inspire us to work for the ideals of humanity, rather than to trust in wishful thinking and the adequacy of passivity (Matt. 17:20, 21:22, Psalm 37:3-11). It would reveal a God of compassion, understanding, and justice, not an egotistical, jealous, vengeful character (Job 40:2, Ex. 20:5, Nah 1:2). The essence of its God would be reason and compassion, rather than a desire to dominate and control.

In short, if God wrote a book, you can be sure the Bible ain't it....

Letter #562 from PD of Mesick, Michigan

Hi Dennis.

I answer all ads I see on TV and in printed media offering free religious materials. This material is invariably followed by a visit from the local clergy of the sponsoring denomination. So I get experienced biblical apologists on my home turf, with all of my notes and biblical materials readily at hand. What a wonderful opportunity to test out various BE arguments before chancing making a fool out of myself in public!

This practice gets me ready for various radio talk shows which do not screen their callers. (Those are getting more common every day.) As soon as I hear a Bible quoter call in, I call in to oppose his verse with one or more of my own. The host often asks me why the other caller's scripturally supportable position is any less valid than mine. I reply with a sigh, saying, "Well, I guess this is another example of biblical inconsistency and self-contradiction. Anyone can find verses to support whatever he wants to believe." The host is usually desperate to avoid straying off the day's topic with a never-ending biblical argument, so he quickly expresses agreement and terminates the call. Then, regardless of any subsequent Bible defense by angry callers, the damage has been done. Thousands of on-the-fence listeners have been exposed to information which seriously discredits any claim of biblical inerrancy! Many thanks for your help in all this. P.S. Can you please publish a source for an up-to-date BE index?

Editor's Response to Letter #562

Dear PD.

Keep up the good work, and stay on the offensive. Using our material to expose the Bible is sorely needed. However, I do have a problem with your strategy. A major weakness of your hit-and-run approach is that when you are no longer on-the-air any number of callers can attack, twist, distort, pervert and "correct" everything you have said with impunity. Who is going to show them the error of their ways? Who is going to tell them where they went awry? After hanging up, you become fair game and anything goes, as I have experienced on several occasions.

As far as inviting apologists into your home is concerned, that is an excellent strategy for those who are fully prepared. But remember, they are not going to send their dummies for idle chit-chat. Sending you propaganda and propagandists is costly, and they intend to get their money's worth. More than likely you will be visited by either skilled propagandists or ordained clergy. In any event, let me know what is most effective and I'll relay the message.

As far as a textual index for all biblical verses in BE is concerned, we have been distributing one for several years at \$10 a copy. A Tennessee subscriber with computer expertise sends us an updated version every year.

Issue No. 134

February 1994

Every year or so an entire issue is devoted to letters from our readers and this month's issue will continue that tradition.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #554 Continues from Last Month (Part o)

McKinsey accuses believers of nurturing feelings of superiority and nationalism. Some believers are guilty as charged, but again this is not a fault of their religion which, if it emphasizes anything, emphasizes personal humility and universal brotherhood. McKinsey would do well to judge religion by what religion teaches and by how its most exemplary votaries live and not by what some of its most unrepresentative members practice. In any event, nationalism and chauvinism are universal. They're no more likely to be found among believers than among non-believers....

The greatest commandment of the Bible, indeed, the quintessence of the entire Old Testament is the adjuration to do justice, to work for it, to fight for it for others. This is why churches were in the vanguard of the Civil Rights movement in this country, and why religious themes infused the movement with energy, songs, manpower, and blood.... It is why churches have historically resisted tyrants and oppressive laws.

Editor's Response to Letter #554 (Part o)

You seem to be incapable of realizing, SF, that the appropriate response to nearly all of your observations is that if Christians are being tolerant, considering new ideas, rejecting chauvinism and otherwise behaving properly, it's because they are leaving the Bible rather than incorporating it. People are acting intelligently **DESPITE** the Bible, not **BECAUSE** of it. You say "some believers are guilty as charged, but again this is not a fault of their religion" when precisely the opposite is true. It is precisely the ones most in tune with biblical teachings and most capable of substantiating their position biblically that are least tolerant, most nationalistic, most chauvinistic and most provincial. You say we should judge religion by what religion teaches and "not by what some of its most unrepresentative members practice." Yet you fail to realize that these members are, in fact, the most representative of, and closest to, what the Bible teaches. Far more biblical teachings propagate narrowmindedness and intolerance than openness and magnanimity. Those behaving as you favor are doing so in opposition to, rather than in compliance with, the essential biblical message. Because they still refer to themselves as Christians and are adhering to exceptional verses, outsiders mistakenly believe that they are behaving as the Bible prescribes.

You say nationalism and chauvinism "are no more likely to be found among believers than among non-believers." Talk about being too ridiculous to merit a response! The American populace alone disproves this comment quite easily. The most nationalistic, chauvinistic, racist, and sexist elements are found

among those believing the Bible is the inerrant word of a supreme being. The greater their attachment to the Bible, the less their attachment to other human beings. This can be attributed to the fact that in both quantity and quality the number of biblical verses pulling men apart is far greater than the number pulling men together and, consequently, the closer one adheres to biblical teachings, the more he is affected accordingly.

As far as your comment that "the quintessence of the entire Old Testament is the adjuration to do justice, to work for it, to fight for it for others" is concerned, a remarkable lack of sophistication is clearly evident. What parts of scripture prompted this wholly erroneous assessment? Virtually every book from Genesis to Job reeks with nationalism and contempt for other groups, and divine favoritism toward a special people is prominent throughout. Are we going to go by the overwhelming theme of the book or by a few isolated and contradictory verses that conflict with the general tenor?

Moreover, for you to assert that "churches were in the vanguard of the Civil Rights movement in this country" is both misleading and deceptive, and therefore inaccurate. Although a few churches and denominations in the liberal wing of Christianity conducted struggles for civil rights, they were by no means the majority or representative of Christianity as a whole, and were furthest from the fundamentalist approach to scripture. For every minister participating in the civil rights movement, scores either railed on the evils of integration or gave no encouragement to racial equalization.

And as far as your comment that churches have historically resisted tyrants and oppressive laws is concerned, that probably exhibits the most abysmal ignorance of all. Throughout the last 2,000 years, Christian leaders have worked relentlessly with the most tyrannical rulers imaginable and have received incredible amounts of ideological, political, and financial largess in the process. The record of the Catholic Church is especially reprehensible in this regard. Billy Graham and Jerry Falwell's "scriptural

assistance" to Nixon during the Vietnam War era come readily to mind as well.

Letter #554 Continues (Part p)

Anti-semitism, he worries, will be hard to avoid should Christianity become culturally ascendant. This concern is hard to comprehend in light of the fact that it is Christians who are the strongest gentile supporters of Israel in this country, when it is Christians who believe that the Jews are God's chosen people, and when it is Christians who believe that it is our sin, not the Jewish people, which crucified Christ....

Editor's Response to Letter #554 (Part p)

This publication is concerned with presenting what the Bible teaches, SF, not how you choose to interpret or misinterpret Scripture. Portions of the New Testament are clearly anti-semitic in essence. For you to allege that Christians "believe that it is our sin, not the Jewish people, which crucified Christ" is to erroneously allege that the scriptural comprehension of those opposed to your analysis is weak, and to ignore the fact that many biblically-based Christians not only clearly hold Jews responsible for the death of Jesus, but don't look upon the Jews as God's chosen people. In 1 Thess. 2:14-15 Paul says, "...the Jews: who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they please not God, and are contrary to all men; forbidding us to speak to the gentiles....," and while speaking to the Jews Peter says, "...that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified..." (Acts 4:10) and "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree" (Acts 5:30). Jews are persecutors of Jesus according to John 5:16, 5:18 and 7:1 and accuse him of having a Devil (John 8:52). Jews delivered Jesus to Pilate (John 18:35) and Jesus says Jews are satanic (John 8:44). And according to the commentary in John 19:1-23, Jews combined with Roman soldiers to slay Jesus. So, for you to say the Bible does not propagate anti-semitism is ridiculous.

The problem for people who choose to look upon the Jews as God's chosen people is to reconcile this with biblical comments that clearly attribute the death of God's son to God's chosen people. God's Chosen killing God's only begotten son generates a clash of great significance. Christians in support of Israel have decided to ignore the Crucifixion in favor of Chosenness, while others have decided to ignore Chosenness in favor of focusing upon those responsible for the Crucifixion. Some Christians believe that Jews are God's Chosen and our sin crucified Christ, while others do not. From a NT perspective, the latter position is more viable.

Letter #554 Concludes (Part q)

Having spent some time with this article an objective reader might find himself left with several thoughts. One is that the author of such a piece must be either intellectually unscrupulous or terribly unsophisticated....

I have no doubt that McKinsey knows the Bible, but I don't think he understands it at all....

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #554 (Part q)

For you to denigrate the character of others, SF, while exhibiting in your letter more shortcomings than one would care to recite is nothing short of absurd. Your biblical comprehension is poor and your understanding of Christianity's role throughout history is even poorer. You refer to me as "intellectually unscrupulous or terribly unsophisticated", when these terms could more accurately be applied to yourself with "or" being replaced by "and." Like so many Christians, you twist, distort, pervert and, when all else fails, ignore thousands of biblical verses that don't conform to your conception of what the Bible "should" say. You create your own script with numerous embellishments, and then foist it on the public. The parallel between your activities and those of snake-oil salesmen is unavoidable. While supposedly providing the cure for everything, you only drain your devotee's resources, while keeping him in a

detached euphoria at best. His problems are not cured, but only viewed in a different light.

Letter #563 from Dr. KM

Dear Mr. McKinsey. I've read a number of back issues of B.E., and I think I have a pretty good idea of what you're trying to do, but as far as I can see, in all this time, you've neglected one very important point that affects all your arguments, and that is this: God can do anything. Any Sunday-school child can tell you that.

And what does that mean? It means that God can, whenever He wants to, take a contradiction and turn it into a non-contradiction. He can take a fallacy and turn it into truth. That is only one way He can "confound the wise".

You can say "Well, 'white is black' is a contradiction." It is, unless and until God wants it not to be. Then "white is black" is no longer a contradiction, but is gospel truth. God is more powerful than all the laws of reason and logic, and can nullify or change the rules in any way at any time. Don't ask me how He can do it. His ways are omnipotent, and beyond my understanding or yours. If he wants to turn "up" into "down" or say that " $1 + 1 = 3$ " He can do it and it will make perfect sense in a microsecond. Every verse in the Bible is literally true. People like you are just too narrow-minded and have such tunnel vision that you can't accept the almighty power of an infinite and omnipotent God. Change your ways, Mr. McKinsey, and you can have a great reward at the end of your life.

Editor's Response to Letter #563

Dear Dr. KM. You have taken pseudo-intellectual anti-intellectualism to new heights by submitting the ultimate in religious inculcation and gibberish. I always thought Dr. Peter Ruckman's book *Science and Philosophy* was the most anti-intellectual composition in my repertoire, but your letter has surpassed even his absurd meanderings. This situation is made all the more tragic by the fact that your perverse thought processes and those of

Ruckman are loaned an aura of respectability by a doctorate in something or other. Critiquing your letter is in a category by itself. You are among those pathetic beings who have left the realm of reason, logic, rationality, evidence, proof, data, and common sense and entered a never-never land of make believe and self-indulgent bliss. You refer to a being whose existence you can in no way prove, and assert he is capable of performing deeds which you can in no way demonstrate. As sad as it is to say, KM, you are a disgrace to every scientist, every inventor, every person who has ever tried to improve the status of mankind by demonstrating that which they allege. All you have succeeded in doing is proving that when carried to its ultimate conclusion, religious propaganda is dangerous to sane minds and can only lead to a total divorce from reality, not unlike that found in neurotics and psychotics. You would have humanity believe that there can be a square circle, a four-sided triangle, and a non-existent existing being. You would have us believe that God can totally -- not partially -- totally destroy himself and then bring himself back into existence. You would have us believe that God can create a being more powerful than himself, or create something too heavy for him to lift. You would have us reject the law of non-contradiction itself, and have us believe that something can be itself and not itself simultaneously. You would literally have us believe that black can be white--the quintessence of inculcation, propaganda, indoctrination, and brainwashing. Is it any wonder that you would have us accept the Bible as the inerrant word of a supreme being? It's nothing more than the logical culmination of an up-is-down philosophy that can only lead to the rejection of all contradictions per se. Once people seriously adopt your philosophy, then anything they choose to believe can be justified on the grounds that God can do anything and God is on their side. They don't have to prove by reason or demonstrate by proof; all they need do is assert, and that alone is sufficient for verification. Talk about being divorced from the real world and dwelling in phantasia! Following that stream of thought I could claim to be god and defy you to prove otherwise. After all, you said god can do anything, anything. If

that's true, then I could very well be god. Even more important, my claim to be god is true until you can prove the contrary, which is impossible. How do you know for certain that I am not god?-- prove it. I defy you to prove that I am not God. If you were to ask me to perform some stupendous feats, I need only say that I do not choose to do so, and you were told by Scripture not to test the Lord thy God. If you say my behavior is imperfect, I would only ask you to observe the activities of God in the OT and note that they were justified as well. That settles the matter. Every one of your thrusts could be easily parried. In fact, everyone on the face of this planet could make equally incredible claims and your stance with them would be no stronger than with me. You religionists just don't realize that you have to PROVE things. You completely ignore your own book, which clearly says "Prove all things" (1 Thess. 5:21). Merely saying or believing something is wholly insufficient. You just don't understand that when you alter or remove a basic intellectual concept, such as the law of non-contradiction, a chain reaction is set in motion that affects everything down the line. Everything is interrelated, and what you think will work to your favor in one instance will operate to your detriment in others. If you can go on a wild spree, then so can I. If you can make ludicrous claims, then so can I. And mine are not only as valid as yours, but equally incapable of being disproven. The pandora's box you seek to open for yourself is also opened for all of mankind, and the only limits are the imaginations of all concerned. Someone could murder the person you love most and claim he is either god or acting on god's orders, and until you proved otherwise, you would have no right whatever to punish him. How do you know he isn't being truthful? I challenge you to prove otherwise! If you took his life, you could very well be killing a physical manifestation of god, and I don't need to tell you what the ultimate punishment for that would be.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #564 from SF of York, Penn.

Dear Dennis.

Over the last several years, you have done a great job, exposing Bible contradictions. Non-believers and atheists will all agree and approve of that. But how effective is it with the superstitious majority? I would like to suggest that you go after absurdities. The Bible has just as many ridiculous absurdities as contradictions (and an absurdity would only require one verse). As an example, the "flood"--would require more water than exists on earth. Where did it all come from, and where did it all go? (It didn't, it couldn't!) An obvious absurdity.

Editor's Response to Letter #564

Dear SF.

Over the years we have mentioned quite a few biblical absurdities. They are by no means as rare as you might think. For example, most of the 9th Issue, especially the commentary entitled Biblical "science," discusses a sizable number of absurdities. You asked where all the water involved in the Flood went, which is one of the questions we posed years ago that now resides in our sample issue. If you are really interested in these kinds of difficulties I would recommend *The Bible Handbook* by Foote and Ball which has over 50 pages of absurdities listed.

Letter #565 from DM of Pasadena, California

Dear Mr. McKinsey.

Regarding letter #537e, I think that the truth would not please GM. The real reason why Jesus' resurrection was given such play in the NT, as you have made clear, has nothing to do with its biblical uniqueness or miraculous content. Rather, Jesus was being cast increasingly into the popular "pagan" mold of a savior god, joining the ranks, as it were, of such worthies as Attis (Phrygia), Mithra (Persia), Adonis (Syria), Bel (Babylonia), Osiris (Egypt), Prometheus (Greece), Krishna (India) and others. A glorious resurrection, entailing hope for mankind, was the heart and cornerstone of every savior god, long before Jesus came onto the scene. Jesus evolved from a classical Jewish messiah to a "pagan" savior god. Early Christian communities scattered around the Mediterranean, populated by recent "pagan"

converts, naturally read their Hellenized ideals into Jesus, and their influence no doubt increased after the Roman conquest of the Holy Land.

Regarding letter #537g, I recommend that you refer to claims which have no evidential support as "non-facts" or some such term. Calling the existence of something "false" implies two things: (1) The object is meaningfully defined. (2) The object, in fact, does not exist. In the case of God, as envisioned by Christian theologians, it seems that the definition consists of a systematic negation of every quality or aspect of existence. That is, God is neither here nor there, without mass or dimension, invisible, etc. Thus, one wonders if the word "God" has, in the final analysis, any more meaning than "Jobblywick." We would not say that the existence of a Jobblywick is a false statement. The statement could also be called a "non-fact" which would cover in addition those cases where a Jobblywick is clearly defined (a two-foot green spider with red wings), but of which there is not the least bit of evidence.

After reading RS's letter (#551) a thought occurred to me. Why don't you try to round up 10 volunteers who will type the back issues of BE onto a computer disk? Surely, there must be eight others besides RS and myself who might willingly provide the labor if the workload isn't too heavy. I can see knocking off a dozen issues of BE over two or three weeks, without disrupting my routine too severely, and maybe others with computers would come to the same conclusion. If ten volunteers can be found, I'm willing to coordinate such a committee if no one else wants the job.

Think of it, BE roaring into the computer age! Every name or word being located by powerful search and find commands! Easy printouts (and custom handouts) of selected material! Easy duplication and a low price for a disk of all the back issues! Enthusiastic supporters loading portions of BE on electronic bulletin boards everywhere!

Editor's Response to Letter #565

Dear DM.

We appreciate your willingness to undertake the computerization of BE, but we already have a gentleman who has volunteered to type the first fifty issues onto a computer data disk. He is working on it now. Assigning a separate chapter to different people, working with different programs on different computers, is a prescription for disaster. I can imagine the dissimilarity that would arise. We do hope, however, to enter the computer realm much more extensively in the not-too-distant future.

Letter #566 from BY of Seminole, Florida

[While debating BE, GM made the following comment in Part (e) of Letter #537 on page 3 of Issue #129. He stated, "Your argument is not only invalid; it is misleading for a reader of Biblical Errancy not acquainted with the Bible, like BY of Seminole, Florida, who trusts your Periodical when he/she quotes the Bible." That statement prompted the following reply from BY, himself--ED.]

Since GM of letter #537 used ME as an example of how you are "misleading" people, I'd like to add a response of my own.

GM, you are making assumptions about me without any facts to back them up. I know this is not unusual for Christians, but unlike those referred to in the ancient texts, I'm still alive to rebut your errors. To begin with, without in any way detracting from this publication which I have found to be utterly reliable in those cases I've had occasion to check, I would certainly not be much of a scholar of anything if I relied only on one source without independent verification. In fact, this is the most grievous error that Bible-believers make, especially when the source they rely on has been translated, hand-copied, reinterpreted, and exists in so many variations--all claiming inspiration from an identical divine source--that none might be considered authoritative. However, BE constrains itself to the most popular version upon which most believers base their faith, and I will confine myself there as well. It so happens that I have the entire KJV on the hard drive of my computer, making it quick and easy to grab a

printout of both the verses mentioned and surrounding ones, avoiding the claims of "out of context." Additionally, I have a small library of concordances and guides other than BE, some written by apologists such as yourself, and some written by more rational thinkers.

In circumstances where I have used these independent sources, the rational thinkers have always concurred with BE, and the apologist arguments are always so rife with fallacies that they are usually absurd. Most end with appeals for acceptance on the basis of faith, which is equivalent to admitting that reason cannot refute BE's claims.

Reliance on faith as a basis for life is foolish. Faith is simply emotion, wrongly used (as Ayn Rand and others have often noted) as a cognitive tool. If you need evidence as to the foolishness of allowing feelings to direct your life, ask yourself how many people have bought lottery tickets (or something similar, in case there is no lottery in Finland) because they "had a lucky feeling." Of course, when they lose, they seldom recall the strength of this "lucky feeling" that caused them to act as fools.

It would seem that Jesus himself had similar "lucky feelings", which undoubtedly accounts for that famous phrase, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" when he recognized that he too had lost the lottery. As Dennis notes, these are not the words of a man who planned it this way.

Letter #567 from JS of Medford, Massachusetts

Dear Dennis.

I hope your battle against mythological deception continues apace. "Judge" Joseph F. Rutherford, second president of the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society (Jehovah's Witnesses) so aptly chirped at one time, "Religion is a snare and a racket"! I am hardpressed to disagree with him--on that count! As a former religionist I now take sides with you in your valiant battle!

Editor's Response to Letter #567

Dear JS.

Since Rutherford is one of the foremost leaders in the evangelistic movement, your quote could be of great assistance. Could you please cite book and page where it can be found?

Letter #568 from TF of Eau Claire, Wisconsin

Dear Dennis.

... I am attending the University of Wisconsin--Eau Claire with a double major of Philosophy and Religion. In my Bible classes the instructors typically do not emphasize the many errors, contradictions, failed prophecies, and atrocities contained in the Bible, but I take advantage of the opportunity and always raise my hand and point these things out for the benefit of the class. Most of these students were brought up as Christians, yet this is the first time they have actually read the Bible for themselves instead of listening to their clergy tell them what it allegedly says. Many of them are embarrassed, shocked, and outraged by what they are reading within the pages of this book, and it is obvious from their responses that they are beginning to question their religious upbringing. Truly the Bible is its own worst enemy....

Editor's Response to Letter #568

Dear TF.

Like many others, you are using BE in the manner intended. You researched the issue, found an audience, didn't expect people to come calling, and engaged biblicists on their own turf. You deserve a bouquet!

Letter #569 from RS of Sherman Oaks, California

Dear Dennis.

I am thoroughly impressed by your new tape series. As far as I know, your new commentary tape series is the most comprehensive rebuttal to Christianity's pseudo-scholars available. You take the Christian "experts" on their own turf, and dispose of their arguments one by one. Christians turn to McDowell, Sproul, and others, little realizing they are headed on a one-way trip into never-never land. Your tapes

prove decisively that the apologists can't solve the problems they claim to solve, and that the problems are incapable of being solved, except in dreamland. Keep up the good work!

Issue No. 135

March 1994

This month's issue will conclude our analysis of Archer's volume entitled the *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*.

REVIEWS

(ARCHER'S *ENCYCLOPEDIA*--Part 4) On page 294 Archer is asked: How could a holy God command Hosea to marry a harlot? Specifically, Hosea 1:3-4 says, "And the Lord said to Hosea, Go, take unto thee a wife of whoredoms and children of whoredoms: for the land hath committed a great whoredom, departing from the Lord. So he went and took Gomer the daughter of Diblaim; which conceived, and bare him a son." Archer rationalizes the situation by saying, "From the standpoint of Hosea himself, looking back on his domestic tragedy, it was quite clear that when God had encouraged him to marry Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim, who He foreknew would be unfaithful to Hosea after he had married her, this amounted to a divine directive to marry a harlot. This does not necessarily mean that she had already shown a tendency to sexual promiscuity when he was courting her or that she was already a woman of ill fame when he married her...." To begin with God did not encourage Hosea to marry Gomer; he commanded it. "Go and take" is not mere encouragement. But even more importantly, Archer has all but ignored the text. The Living Bible states, "Go and marry a girl who is a prostitute." The NAB says, "Go take a harlot wife." The NEB says, "Go,

take a wanton for your wife." The NIV says, "Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children." And the JB says, "Go, marry a whore, and get children with a whore, for the country itself has become nothing but a whore by abandoning Yahweh." Every citation clearly shows that the woman was a whore before Hosea married her. The text says nothing about foreknowing that Gomer would later become a whore, while it most certainly does show "that she was a woman of ill fame when he married her." Seeing no way out of the situation, Archer chose to simply rewrite the script to his own specifications.

Moving to another problem, Archer is asked on page 329: Is the mustard seed really the smallest of all seeds? Obviously Archer toned down the question, which should have been: Didn't Jesus lie when he said the mustard seed was the smallest of all seeds? In any event, Archer replies, "In Matthew 13:31-32 Jesus describes the mustard seed as being 'smaller than all the seeds.' The question arises as to whether this statement could be supported by a knowledgeable botanist, or did Christ make a mistake in His rating of the comparative size of the mustard seed? In all probability, He was referring to the black mustard seed.... J.C. Trever in the *Interpreter's Dictionary* suggests that the orchid seed is even smaller than the seed of the black mustard. But it is highly questionable whether Jesus was discussing all plant life on planet Earth when He made this statement. No one yet has proved that ancient Palestinians planted anything that bore a smaller seed than that of the black mustard, and that was the framework within which Jesus was speaking." First, how does Archer know that "in all probability" he was talking about the black mustard seed? He's guessing, and what difference does it make what kind of mustard seed is under consideration? As Trever strongly implies, in a Christian publication no less, the orchid seed is smaller than every kind of mustard seed; so Jesus erred. Second, for Archer to say that it "is highly questionable whether Jesus was discussing all plant life on earth" is equally conjectural. He is pulling speculations out of a hat, because nothing in the text justifies that conclusion. Jesus said the mustard seed

is the smallest of all seeds, period. He did not qualify the comment by saying it only applied to seeds in Palestine. Third, as is so often true of religionists, Archer tried to shift the burden of proof by alleging that no one has proved that ancient Palestinians planted anything that bore a smaller seed than that of the black mustard seed, when they are under no obligation to do so. Instead, Archer is obligated to prove that only seeds within Palestine are being discussed. Jesus said the mustard seed was the smallest of all seeds; he did not say it was the smallest of all seeds in Palestine. It is incumbent upon Archer to prove that Palestine, rather than the world at large, was intended. Jesus attached no qualifications or modifications to his statement, and for that reason the burden of proof lies on Archer's shoulders.

On page 373 Archer is asked how Jesus can call some men gods, as is done in John 10:34 ("Jesus answered them, Is it not written in your law, I said, Ye are gods?"). His vapid defense is as follows. "In citing Psalm 82:6, Jesus was appealing to a verse from the infallible Scriptures...that attaches the name or title 'god' to certain men, not to all men, of course, but only 'those to whom the word of God came' (John 10:35). A divine dimension was added to those people who had been especially chosen by God to be bearers of His saving truth and administrators of His holy law. In Psalm 82 God is addressing judges and administrators who have been chosen to serve as His representatives in teaching and enforcing His holy law...." In the first place, what difference does it make how many men are involved? No man at any time can rightly be called a god. From a biblical perspective, the word is inapplicable to all men and can't be applied to anyone, even a select few. Secondly, if the word can be applied to men "who have been chosen to serve as His representatives in teaching and enforcing His holy law," then Peter, Paul, Moses, some prophets and several other people can be called gods as well. But isn't Christianity a monotheistic religion? Apparently Archer just couldn't concoct a better defense.

Moving further, on page 378 Archer is asked if Abraham was 75 years old when he left Haran. His

reply is, "In Acts 7:4 Stephen asserts that Abraham did not leave Haran for Canaan until after his father, Terah, was dead. But Terah did not die, according to Gen. 11:32, until the age of 205. That would mean Abraham must have been 135 when he left Haran, since Terah fathered him at the age of 70, according to Gen. 11:26. But Gen. 12:4 states that Abraham was only 75 when he migrated to Canaan. Therefore Stephen was 60 years off in his statement.... But things are not really as bad for Stephen as the previous paragraph declares, for there is one serious fallacy. Gen. 11:26 records: 'And Terah lived 70 years, and became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran.' Normally the first named in a list of sons is the oldest, but that rule has its exceptions. Abraham was not Terah's oldest son, even though he was named first. It is far more likely that Haran was Terah's oldest, since he was the first of them to die (Gen. 11:28). Concerning Nahor's death we have no information, except that he outlived Haran, and that his descendants Laban and Rebekah were living up in the region of Haran by the time of Isaac's marriage. But in all probability the reason Abraham was mentioned first was that he was by far the most important of the three brothers. Even though he must have been born when his father was 130--and may therefore have been the youngest of the three--he was the most prominent of them all as far as historical achievement was concerned."

Archer's resolution of this difficulty is unconvincing, to say the least. To begin with, Gen. 11:26 clearly states that Terah fathered Abram, Nahor, and Haran at age 70. It doesn't say that he fathered Nahor and Haran and 60 years later fathered Abraham. What in the text would lead one to believe there was a 60 year gap between the birth of the sons, and why would Abraham even be mentioned with respect to the children Terah fathered at age 70, if there were a 60 year gap between Abraham and his brothers? And if Terah fathered only Nahor at age 70, then why were Abraham and his brother Haran mentioned? Secondly, since Abraham was mentioned first, it seems reasonable to assume he was the oldest, despite the prior death of Nahor. If anyone was born when Terah was 130, it was one of Abraham's brothers. And finally, most versions of Gen. 11:26

blow Archer's rationalization out of the water. The Living Bible says, "By the time Terah was 70 years old, he had three sons, Abram, Nahor, and Haran." The NAB says, "When Terah was 70 years old, he became the father of Abram, Nahor and Haran." The BBE says, "And Terah was 70 years old when he became the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran." The NEB says, "Terah was 70 years old when he begot Abram, Nahor, and Haran." And the JB says, "When Terah was 70 years old he became the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran." In every instance, the text clearly shows that all three sons were born before Terah reached the age of 71, and none even remotely implies that Abraham was born 60 years later.

And lastly, on page 383 Archer is asked with respect to another topic: Was Paul obedient or disobedient to the Spirit when he went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem? He responds by saying, "Acts 20:22 ('And now, behold, bound in spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit solemnly testifies to me in every city, saying, that bonds and afflictions await me') expresses Paul's confidence that he is in the will of God as he journeys back to Jerusalem to fulfill his vow as a pilgrim. But in Acts 21:4 ('And finding disciples...who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem') the disciples at Tyre kept telling Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem...." Paul later went to Jerusalem and Archer explains his defiance by saying, "It is clear that the Holy Spirit did everything to warn Paul of the danger and suffering that awaited him if he went back to Jerusalem. The statement in 21:4 that the disciples told Paul through the Spirit not to set foot in Jerusalem makes it sound as if Paul was acting in disobedience...." Of course, that's understandable in light of the fact that he was, as is noted by a scholar named Pettingill, whom Archer quotes as saying, "Paul was forbidden to go to Jerusalem at all. It is therefore evident that he was out of the Lord's will." Archer claims Pettingill's "position is difficult to maintain in view of God's continued faithfulness to him through all his trials." And Archer later concludes by saying, "All things considered, then, it seems best to understand Acts

21:4 as conveying, not an absolute prohibition of Paul's journey to Jerusalem, but only a clear, unmistakable warning that he is not to set foot in Jerusalem--if he wants to avoid danger and stay out of serious trouble."

The obvious defect in Archer's protracted explanation lies in the fact that Acts 21:4 says, "who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem." It's not a warning; it's a direct command. Don't do it, period! Paul chose to ignore a direct order from the Holy Spirit, relayed to him through his disciples, and went. Nothing was said about suffering, trouble, or dangers allegedly awaiting him. Archer's Christian compatriot, Pettingill, correctly concluded that Paul "was out of the Lord's will" and that's about all that needs to be said on that topic. Paul was disobedient, not obedient. He defied God.

DEWITT'S *BEYOND THE BASICS*--One of the most common problems to plague the Gospels is the numerical clash between different accounts. On pages 59 and 60 in the book entitled *Beyond the Basics*, apologist David DeWitt addresses this issue by saying, "Mark 5 and Luke 8 describe one Gerasene demoniac who confronted Jesus, whereas Matthew 8 says there were two. Matthew 28:2 mentions only one angel at Christ's tomb, and John 20:12 says there were two.... In the case of two demoniacs versus one, and two angels at the tomb or one, that is certainly no contradiction. If there were two, there certainly was one. There were, no doubt, many angels, and a hillside full of demoniacs. One author simply mentions two, whereas the other zeros in on one. The Bible never says there was only one demoniac or only one angel." This is the most common rationalization given for difficulties of this nature, and several problems accompany each excuse. First, the text refers to one demon-possessed man in Mark and Luke, and two in Matthew. DeWitt is assuming an additional man exists in the former accounts, even though he is not referred to in any way. Second, DeWitt is assuming the larger number is always correct and the lesser is not. Why couldn't

the reverse be true? If four different witnesses to a hit-and-run accident say there were one, two, three, and four people in the car, respectively, are police to automatically assume four is the correct number? Are they to automatically accept the higher figure? Are they to ignore the possibility of shadows, faulty vision, distorted angles, distractions, human-like contents of the automobile, etc.? Or should they just immediately assume the greatest number is valid. That's the procedure apologists want critics of the Bible to follow. Why couldn't the lower number be correct and the higher number be erroneous? And third, if we are going to make assumptions, why can't we assume 6, 8, 10 or even 50 men possessed with demons are involved and both accounts are invalid? Why can't we let our imaginations run wild and concoct any figure that strikes our fancy? If proof is not required, we could say the hit-and-run car was crammed with people, although only four were seen. After all, two can play that game. Apologists operate on the assumption that anything possible is actual, until disproven, which is only another ruse by which to shift the burden of proof and ignore our time-honored maxim that The Burden of Proof Lies on He Who Alleges.

In another defense DeWitt says on page 59, "Mark 6:8 speaks of the disciples taking staffs along on their journey, but Matthew 10:9-10 seems to speak against it.... Concerning taking a staff (Mark 6:8) versus not having one (Matthew 10:9-10), a closer reading will solve the supposed problem. In Mark 6 Christ instructs them to only take along 'a mere staff,' whereas in Matthew 10 He tells them not to 'acquire' an additional one. In Mark the instruction is on what to take along, but in Matthew the instruction is concerning what they are not to acquire after they got going." One need only read the appropriate texts to see that this explanation is without substance. Mark 6:8 says, "He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts." In other words, they were to take a staff. But Matthew 10:9-10 says, "Take no gold, nor silver, nor copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor a staff, for the laborer deserves his food." In other words, they were not to take a staff. How much clearer

could the text be? Where does Matthew say anything about what they were to acquire after being underway? Matt 10:5 clearly shows that Jesus is giving them marching orders prior to the commencement of their journey. When Jesus says, "Take...no staves" for your journey, he is saying they should not be acquired at the start, and subsequent behavior is irrelevant.

On pages 68-69 DeWitt provided additional proof that his biblical defenses warrant little credibility. He stated, "It may be, for instance, that the apostle Paul thought that Jesus Christ was coming back during his own lifetime. If he did, he was wrong. But if he did, he never said that in the Bible." One can only say in response to this observation that DeWitt needs to read scripture with a more discerning eye. In 1 Thess. 4:17 Paul says, "Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." Two verses earlier he stated, "...we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep" and in 1 Cor. 7:29 he said, "...the time is short..." In Heb. 1:2 Paul said, "In these last days" and in Heb. 10:37 he said, "For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come and will not tarry." So, clearly Paul felt the end of the world was coming in the lifetime of his contemporaries, and he expected to be snatched up bodily into heaven with the other disciples then living who would, thus, never taste death. Paul taught his converts that Christ's coming was close at hand, and after 2,000 years it is safe to conclude that his prophecy is as erroneous as DeWitt's observation that he made no such prognostication.

On pages 90-92 DeWitt recites the fundamentalist belief--Once saved, always saved--and then says, "Of all the major world religions, biblical Christianity is the only one that teaches that we cannot lose our salvation.... Salvation is a cleansing of all sins of all time totally accomplished by Christ on the cross and applied to the believer at the time he or she receives Christ. Can a Christian stop believing? Of course he can! But he cannot stop being saved...." Then DeWitt is asked about the

unpardonable sin and says, "The expression 'the unpardonable sin' is in one sense like the expressions 'Cleanliness is next to godliness' and 'God helps those who help themselves.' The one thing all such expressions have in common is that not one of them is in the Bible.... The Bible mentions a sin committed by the Pharisees that Jesus called 'blasphemy against the Spirit,' adding that, for whoever did what they did, 'it shall not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come (Matt. 12:31-32, Mark 3:28-30, Luke 12:10). A couple of observations are significant to understanding the 'blaspheming against the Spirit' as seen in Matt. 12. For one thing, the 'blasphemy against the Spirit' is nowhere repeated in the Bible. The apostles never warned anybody about it.... They were very specific in their warnings and exhortations to the early church, careful not to overlook anything that the Body of Christ was to be or not be."

What difference does the apostolic influence make? A direct instruction from Jesus should be more than sufficient. Since when do his admonitions have to be reiterated by the apostles to have validity? If that were true, a wide variety of his teachings would lack substance.

DeWitt continues, "A second observation to consider here is that there are two different kinds of events described in the Bible. There are the ones that might be repeated anytime (like someone praying) and the ones that will probably never be repeated (like the Israelites crossing the Red Sea on dry land). Some sins are unique to a certain time.... The sin of Matthew 12 appears to be just such a sin.... To blaspheme the Spirit was actually to see Jesus in a human body doing miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit and to reject that as evidence that He was the Messiah, the God of Israel. This sin was committable while Jesus was physically on earth doing those things. After that, the conditions for this particular unpardonable 'blasphemy against the Spirit' were (and are) not present. Therefore it could not be committed today."

There is nothing in Matthew 12:31-32 that would lead one to believe that it "appears" to be a unique

sin, and where does the text say that in order to blaspheme the Holy Spirit you must "see Jesus in a human body doing miracles by the power of the Holy Spirit and reject that as evidence that He was the Messiah"? DeWitt is rewriting the script according to his predilections, and has increased the amount of material contained therein. He is asserting the sin could only be committed while Jesus was alive, which is nowhere to be found in the text, and is alleging the sin consists of rejecting miracles performed by Jesus, which isn't scriptural either.

Interestingly enough, DeWitt's explanations still won't allow him to escape. If this unpardonable sin could only have been committed by contemporaries of Jesus who saw him doing miracles in a human body, we would still have people who would not have had all of their sins forgiven by him. He could not have paid for the unpardonable sins of contemporary detractors who witnessed his miracles but denied his messiahship. So DeWitt's comment on page 91 that "Salvation is a cleansing of all sins of all time totally accomplished by Christ on the cross" is fallacious.

DeWitt is resorting to a strategy often invoked by apologists. If a biblical maxim is liked by the Bible's defenders, they say it is applicable to all men everywhere. If, on the other hand, it is anathema or offensive, they claim it only applies to those being admonished at that particular time. Biblicists leap in and out of biblical teachings like porpoises following in a ship's wake.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #570 from of Sonoma, California

Dear Dennis.

I recently wrote a letter to the Editor of our local paper where I stated the contradiction between Num. 23:19, which says that God doesn't repent, and Ex. 32:14 which says, "And the Lord repented...."

A Rev. John R. Wayne responded with this; "Secondly the supposed contradiction regarding God's 'repenting' is clearly a matter of context. Num. 23:19 is simply a statement that God is not like a sinful man in need of repentance; while Exodus 32:14 tells of God's mercy toward a band of disobedient Hebrews, in response to an intercessory prayer offered by Moses."

I wrote a second letter where I quoted verses. Unfortunately the second letter wasn't printed, leaving the impression that Rev. Wayne's "clarification" was valid. I am beginning to see how sneaky and dishonest Christians are. I am still writing letters to the editor and every one is being challenged. But I have BE! And I fight back....

In another letter I quoted the OT teachings on slavery and the status of women. Mr. Bjerkhoel wrote in saying that "the position of woman has been greatly changed for the better through Christianity" and we are no longer under the old law. Well, thanks to your BE I replied that someone forgot to tell Peter and Paul, and quoted the NT verses supporting slavery and the subservience of women. Dennis, when you have the truth (i.e. BE) it is wonderful! Thank you so much.

And I found another JW to show my short list of 8 verses. Four say no one has ever seen God, and four say they saw God. I wish that you could have seen the sinking look on her face. She said, "Gee, if someone read this they might think that the Bible contradicted itself." I wish you the best.

Letter #571 from JL of Seattle, Washington

Dear Dennis.

I just got your sample issue of Biblical Errancy today. All I can say is, wow! Where have you been all this time? I wish I had known about you sooner. For the last six months, I have been researching the question of New Testament reliability. I am an Agnostic going to Seattle Pacific University, a Free Methodist university in Seattle, WA. I have been challenged by several fundamentalist Christians who are Josh McDowell fans to investigate NT reliability.

Well, I've done about 160 hours of research on the subject so far, and I wish I had found your newsletter sooner. I looked through the list of materials you have available, and I think I eventually want a copy of all of it.... Keep up the good work!

Letter #572 from KB of Santa Barbara, California

Dear Mr. McKinsey.

As a late subscriber to Biblical Errancy I am in the process of catching up on all the back issues. In my view one of the most interesting of all the issues is number 15 and its in-depth comments concerning the doctrine of the Trinity. Countless books have been written about it...pro and con. People have been put to death for not believing in it. Everyone on both sides of the issue agrees that it is incomprehensible. It must be accepted on faith since it could never be accepted as a result of the reasoning process.

In all of my considerable readings on the trinity doctrine I have never read of anyone mentioning the following. If all three persons of the trinity are co-equal, as well as co-eternal, with no one any greater than the other two, then why was the son the one fated to be the "fall guy" in this great celestial drama? Why should it not have been the father who had to come to earth and offer himself as a living sacrifice to the son? To my way of thinking the fact that it was the son who had to placate the father is implicit recognition that the three so-called persons of the trinity are anything but equal.

Keep up the good, liberating work. You are a treasure to the freethought movement.

Letter # 573 from JB of Cincinnati, Ohio

Dear Dennis.

...You completed phase one a few months ago. Now comes the marketing project. I doubt that there is a more thorough or comprehensive work in the world than what you have compiled. It deserves a lot more than frustrating a Jehovah's Witness or diehard fundamentalist.... A study of your works in a college religion course would be excellent exposure. Actually it should be a required course. Bible

Critique 101 could get the message out to anyone with an open mind.... Please give your superb work the exposure it deserves.

Letter #574 from RL of Marysville, Washington

Dear Dennis.

A thousand thanks for your great publication; it is eagerly awaited each month.

EDITOR'S NOTE: At long last our fledgling TV program is underway and airing every Wednesday and Friday at 7:00 P.M. in the northern half of Dayton, Ohio and some surrounding communities. We tape a 1/2 hour show every other Saturday morning at 10:00 A.M. and need volunteers to assist. The station kind enough to lend us its studio is located very close to the intersection of Interstates 70 and 75. Please contact us if you can arrive on a regular basis and are willing to be trained in one or more aspects of TV program production. Later we intend to activate and expand that list of volunteers compiled several years ago of people willing to play copies of them on their local public cable access channel.

Issue No. 136

April 1994

DEHAAN'S 508 ANSWERS TO BIBLE
QUESTIONS:

On page 25 in the book entitled *508 Answers to Bible Questions* apologist M.R. DeHaan is asked: How could the Devil sin in Heaven? He responds by saying, "...we must remember that the Devil was not a redeemed creature, and, therefore, could sin, but we who are redeemed by the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, when we have received our resurrected bodies will be beyond all possibility of sinning. Remember that heaven, too, is going to be purified." DeHaan's conception of heaven is not only unbiblical, but illogical for several reasons. First, where does scripture say the Devil was unredeemed before his fall from heaven? If that were true, then he would have been a corrupt being in heaven before his fall, which is impossible, since corrupt beings can't be in heaven. Second, how could the Devil have behaved improperly in heaven? Heaven is a perfect place by definition, and nothing of an imperfect nature can occur there. It's the place that matters, not the deed or doer. The place only permits perfect behavior. And thirdly, whoever heard of heaven being "purified"? Heaven is going to be purified? How do you purify the perfect? If DeHaan's conception of heaven is valid, then Christians are attempting to enter a place that is similar to that which they are leaving. Hardly a pleasing prospect!

We have all seen babies being sprinkled or dunked in water by someone dressed in religious garb. Not only is the act of purifying someone who has never committed a morally reprehensible act incongruous, but the ritual itself is biblically

unsupportable. Occasionally an apologist provides a correct response to biblical questions, and just such an answer is tendered by DeHaan to the query of whether or not infant baptism is taught in the Bible. He states, "...Carefully studying my Bible, I found that infant baptism is nowhere taught or even suggested in the Scriptures. It is a doctrine of the church which is certainly not founded upon the Word of God, but is a remnant of Roman Catholicism. There is not a clear instance of it in the Bible, and no trace of it until three hundred years after Pentecost. It is a wholly unscriptural doctrine of man...." DeHaan's analysis is correct.

Moving further, apologists claim that the angel of the Lord that reappeared several times in the OT was actually Jesus Christ. On page 57 DeHaan is asked where the Bible states that "the Angel of the Lord always refers to the Lord Jesus Christ in the Old Testament?" DeHaan responds by saying, "There is no direct statement which says in so many exact words that the 'angel of the Lord' is always the Lord Jesus, but it is rather on the accumulation of evidence where the term occurs in Scripture. From the various passages where the expression, 'the angel of the Lord,' occurs, it is quite evident that it is the second Person of the Trinity who is there, and who is the spokesman for the Trinity itself. We call this a 'theophany,' or an appearing of Jesus Christ in human form before His incarnation in Bethlehem. As is true of other doctrines of Scripture, we cannot put our finger on any one particular passage which states in so many words that this is true, but we have to assume it from the revelation." To say DeHaan is flying by the seat of his pants is an understatement. First, there is not only no "direct" statement saying so, but no "indirect" statement saying so, either. Second, there is not only a lack of "exact words" saying the angel of the Lord is Jesus Christ but a notable lack of "inexact words". Third, what "accumulation of evidence" is he referring to? He doesn't provide a shred of proof, let alone an accumulation. Fourth, in no way is it "quite evident" that the second Person of a Trinity is present. Fifth, DeHaan can call it a "theophany" or any other term

he and his compatriots may wish to concoct, but it's not biblically sustainable. The evidence is weak at best and wholly unprovable in a court of law. And lastly, why do "we have to assume" Jesus appeared in the OT other than to satisfy the unsupportable Christian yearning for OT signs of the Trinity? Just because they are desperate for biblical assistance to their theological imaginings does not mean the rest of us have to follow suit. Much has been asserted but nothing proven. Interestingly enough, DeHaan ignored his own warning found on page 95, "Many Bible teachers and evangelists find things in the Bible which even the Lord did not place there." He would do well to heed his own advice.

Just to show readers the extent to which biblicists let their imaginations run wild through Scripture, we might note DeHaan's answer to the following question on page 96: Is the atomic bomb mentioned in Scripture, specifically Psalm 137:9, which says, "Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones?" He responds by saying, "In regard to your question concerning Psalm 137:9, we would refer you to Isaiah 13:16 ('Their children also shall be dashed to pieces before their eyes; their houses shall be spoiled, and their wives ravished'). The latter verse contains the same expression, and this is evidently referring to the atomic bomb in the judgment of the Lord during the tribulation, as seen in verses 13 and 14 of Isaiah 13 ('Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth shall remove out of her place, in the wrath of the Lord of Hosts, and in the day of his fierce anger...')." Children being dashed against stones and smashed into pieces is equivalent to atomic war? How DeHaan made this leap in logic is anyone's guess, and we are hearing this from a man with a doctorate degree. Shaking the heavens and moving the earth are far too vague to draw reliable conclusions. Assertions of this nature demonstrate why children should be kept as far from biblical indoctrination and "reasoning" as possible. Information within the verses themselves shows that they have nothing to do with the atomic bomb. Would people be concerned with ravishing wives

and stealing from homes during atomic attack? More than likely concerns of this kind would be near the bottom of their list of priorities. Self-preservation, on the other hand, would undoubtedly be near the top. And would God employ the atomic bomb during the time of tribulation when his powers are far more potent?

On page 96 DeHaan confronts one of those problems that all biblicists would do well to flee. He is asked: How do you reconcile the Book of Ecclesiastes with the rest of Scripture? Specifically, DeHaan addresses the problem presented by Eccle. 1:9 ("The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun") by saying, "...Solomon speaks here not of the spiritual man, but of the physical man, and tells us that there is nothing new which man has ever discovered. All the inventions and discoveries of science are based upon the things which God has already placed in nature, so that he is only applying the laws and the materials which God has already created in making the things which we call new inventions. In this respect, there is 'nothing new under the sun'."

DeHaan is attempting to restrict the comment in Ecclesiastes to unformed matter and the natural laws by which it operates. But we are talking about more than just the ingredients out of which things are made. The arrangement of the materials is as important as the materials themselves. Airplanes, automobiles, computers, refrigerators, and millions of other items did not exist before 1800. Certainly their material components and the natural laws by which they operated were present, but all of the configurations in which they can lie vis a vis one another were by no means exhausted. So there are new things under the sun afterall.

On page 122 DeHaan is asked if Luke 14:26 ("If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be

my disciple") teaches us to hate our parents. He responds by saying, "The word, 'hate,' in Luke 14:26 is a comparative word in the Greek and not an absolute word. It means that the tender love we have for our fathers and mothers and loved ones is like hatred in comparison with the love that we have for the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord certainly does not tell us to hate our loved ones." Several problems accompany his explanation. First, if what DeHaan says is true, then the translators of the NASB, the NIV, the NWT, the NEB, the ASV, the JB, the KJ, the RSV, and the BBE are incompetent, because every one of these versions uses the word "hate," when they could just as easily have said "love less." According to DeHaan, who is no more of a Greek scholar than those who translated these versions, the verse should have been translated as, "If any man come to me, and does not love his (relatives-- Ed.)...less than me, he cannot be my disciple." The difference between "love less" and "hate" is not only quantitative but qualitative. "Hate" is absolute in nature, while "love less" is not. Choosing between the two represents a major distinction in translation, which the translators of the previously-mentioned versions were no doubt aware of. Yet, they chose "hate" over "love less." Second, according to *Strong's Concordance* the word comes from the Greek word "miseo" which means "to detest (especially to persecute); by extension to love less:-- hate (ful)." Detest clearly means more than just to "love less" and no doubt explains why the translators opted for the word "hate." Third, in 38 other instances in which the Greek word "miseo" is used in the NT it is translated as "hate" not "love less." Like so many apologists, DeHaan is grasping for the highest straw in the bunch because he can't think of another excuse. And lastly, DeHaan says, "The Lord certainly does not tell us to hate our loved ones" when he just did. How much clearer could the text be. What would Jesus have to say to convince him that that is exactly what he intended? Jesus is saying you must reject everything in this world, even your closest companions, if you want to be his disciple. How would Jesus have to phrase his admonition to convince DeHaan that that's precisely what he means? To resort to the common defense--that's

what it says but that's not what it means--is to grasp for a thin string indeed.

On page 133 DeHaan, like so many other apologists, became entangled in the perennial problem of whether or not one can be saved without the Gospel. After being asked if the heathen can be saved without the Gospel, he responds by saying, "In regard to your question concerning Romans 1:19-20, the Bible is plain that there can be no salvation apart from faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith in the God of creation is not enough. However, we must remember that God is a just and righteous God, and the heathen who have never heard the Gospel will be judged by the light which they had. The judgment of the heathen will be infinitely lighter than that of those who have heard the Word and then rejected it." Apparently DeHaan doesn't realize that he has fallen into a theological quicksand bog. He began by saying everyone had to believe in Jesus in order to be saved, and then reversed himself by saying that the heathen who have never heard the Gospel are exempted. They will be judged by whatever light they have. Regardless of the light they have, it is not the light of Jesus Christ. So how could they be saved under the criterion he himself established? Either they have Jesus or they don't. There is no in between. They are either saved or they aren't. If they are saved by whatever light they had, then, in effect, belief in Jesus is not mandatory. Secondly, if "the judgment of the heathen will be infinitely lighter than that of those who have heard the Word and rejected it," then justice becomes a mockery, because a dual standard rules the roost. People will be judged more leniently or stringently because of where or when they were born, and that's injustice in action. Yet, Deut. 32:4 says God is just. Moreover, missionaries are disserving the heathen immensely, because the latter's salvation is virtually assured until the former appear on the scene.

On page 136 DeHaan is asked what Romans 14:5-6 ("One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth

the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it") teaches in regard to observing a sabbath. He responds by saying, "The Christian has no sabbath. The Lord's day is not a command, but a privilege, and Romans 14:5-6 has to do with our liberty in Christ. The spirit, not the day, is of the greatest importance." DeHaan doesn't seem to realize that he has, in effect, abolished the fourth commandment found in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. What does he mean by saying the Christian has no sabbath? If that's true, then how can he adhere to the fourth commandment? How can he observe a day he denies exists? What is he doing to heed the fourth commandment? How can DeHaan say "the Lord's day is not a command, but a privilege," when Exodus 20:8 says, "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work...." According to DeHaan you can obey or ignore the fourth commandment at will; you don't have to honor any day, be it the sabbath or the Lord's Day. If the spirit is all that matters, then any day could arbitrarily be deemed the sabbath and THE sabbath is fiction. You can call any day the sabbath or ignore it entirely, which hardly represents an adherence to the fourth commandment.

In regard to the same issue, DeHaan is asked on page 173 to explain the difference between the sabbath and the Lord's Day. He replies by saying, "Saturday is still the Jewish sabbath, but certainly not the Christian's. Sunday is not a sabbath, but the Lord's Day and the day of the resurrection. Saturday Christ spent in death; on the first day He rose from death.... The sabbath was a command to Israel. The Lord's day is a privilege for Christians. The sabbath has never been changed." Talk about perverting scripture and poor thought processes! In the first place, what does he mean by saying "Saturday is still the Jewish sabbath, but certainly not the Christian's." There are two sabbaths? How absurd! A "Christian sabbath" is unbiblical. Secondly, the 4th commandment says we are to observe the sabbath, not the Lord's Day. What difference does it make

when the Lord's Day occurs when we are told to observe the sabbath? That's what matters! Whether or not the Lord's Day is a privilege or an obligation is irrelevant, since nothing is said about paying it homage. Third, since when did the fourth commandment become applicable only to Israel? It applies to everyone. Fourth, by DeHaan's own admission the sabbath has never been changed; therefore, the seventh day, Saturday, is the only day mankind is obligated to observe. And lastly, DeHaan admits Sunday is not the sabbath, and if that is true, then mankind is not obligated to observe Sunday in any event.

And finally, on page 209 DeHaan is asked: If Christ kept the law before Calvary, was he not breaking the law by plucking ears of corn on the sabbath day as recorded in Matthew 12:1? He answers by saying, "You are making the same mistake the Adventists and a great many others make in not distinguishing between the Law, and the traditions of the Law. When Christ 'violated the sabbath,' as you say, by picking corn, He was violating the 'tradition' of the Pharisees and the Scribes. Jesus Himself laid down the principle that it is good to do good on the Sabbath Day. If you will remember that it was 'tradition,' that Jesus violated, and not the 'Law of God,' I think you will have the solution to your problem." The only one making a mistake is DeHaan. People don't distinguish between the Law and "traditions of the Law" because no clearly defined biblical distinction is made, and that's a pretty good reason. If DeHaan tries to find textual support for his wholly arbitrary differentiation, he'll find the only one with a problem is himself. If plucking ears of corn on the sabbath can be relegated to the "traditions of men" category, then so can just about every other OT mandate. As was noted by his biblical critics, Jesus plucked ears of corn on the sabbath in clear violation of the law, and that's about all that needs to be said on that subject without becoming involved in maze of rationalization and obfuscation.

STEWART'S 99 QUESTIONS PEOPLE ASK MOST ABOUT THE BIBLE:

On page 17 in a book entitled *99 Questions People Ask Most About the Bible* apologist Don Stewart says, "Jesus claimed to be the unique Son of God, God in human flesh. And he backed up his claim with the most remarkable event in history. He came back from the dead...." Actually, in light of other biblical feats, the resurrection was by no means remarkable. As has been noted in prior issues, many people rose from the dead both before and after Jesus. Christians never tire of extolling the Resurrection, even though it was surpassed by other accomplishments. It was not an exceptional event and the record clearly proves as much.

On page 27 Stewart says, "The Bible is a unity, one unfolding account from beginning to end in complete harmony and continuity." To that one can't help but reply: Read the book with a more discerning eye, my friend. If there is anything the Bible is not, it is harmonious.

Two pages later Stewart says, "Unfortunately, many who practice biblical criticism assume nothing in the Bible is true unless it is proved correct by some outside source. Scripture is assumed to be in error until some evidence can be brought up to substantiate its trustworthiness." Stewart's prejudice against biblical critics is all too obvious. The latter don't assume the Bible is erroneous throughout; in fact, they don't assume much of anything. But they do ask for proof. And when the only "proof" that is forthcoming in far too many instances is testimony from a book that is saturated with errors, contradictions, and supernatural events, they understandably discount its reliability. When I am told to believe in something by a book that is not only inconsistent but says people rose from the dead, sticks turned into snakes, donkey's talked, people walked on water and iron ax heads floated, you can understand my skepticism. Stewart does not hesitate to reject Greek, Roman, and Egyptian mythological literature when they speak of fantastic events. Yet he

races to embrace Christian mythology, which is no less incredible.

Then Stewart says, "The benefit of the doubt should be given to the Bible, not to the critic, and the work should be assumed to be correct until some evidence is brought forth contradicting what has been said." Again we are confronted with the time-honored tactic so often exhibited by those of a superstitious/religious mentality--shift the burden of proof. Instead of proving their assertions are true, they claim the latter are valid until opponents can prove they aren't. As has been noted previously, if this position were credible, every crackpot theory imaginable would be valid until proven false. No, the burden of proof lies on him who alleges. Those who make an assertion are obligated to prove it is true; opponents are not obligated to prove it is false. And until proven valid; it's not to be accepted as true.

On page 80 Stewart states, "Today, no serious scholar doubts the existence of Jesus. The fact that Jesus lived is an established historical fact." Don't be ridiculous! It is by no means an established historical fact. A significant number of scholars doubt Jesus lived, not so much because they can prove he didn't, as that his adherents can't prove he did. After all, the burden of proof lies on the latter.

On the next page Stewart states, "... disciples were eventually transformed from cowards to martyrs. Because of the influence of Jesus, men's lives were radically altered." Stewart contends we shouldn't rely so heavily on extra-biblical information, when that is the only source of data he could possibly use to substantiate his martyrdom proposition. Nowhere does the Bible state that the disciples of Jesus were transformed from cowards to martyrs. That isn't biblically sustainable.

And finally, on page 91 Stewart says, "...every time Satan spoke, he lied." How does he square that comment with Luke 4:41, which says, "And devils

came out of many, crying out, and saying, Thou art Christ the Son of God. And Jesus rebuking them suffered them not to speak: for they knew that he was Christ'." Or are we supposed to believe devils can tell the truth but The Devil cannot? And what about Gen. 3:4, in which The Devil told Eve she would not die on the day she ate the forbidden fruit? Since Eve relayed the message to Adam and he lived to be 930 years old after eating the fruit, it is safe to conclude the Devil told the truth.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #575 from JL of Seattle, Washington (Part a)
Dear Dennis.

I read your commentary on audio tape #5 and had some questions/responses for you. Specifically, I tried three of your four objections to the resurrection on a fundamentalist Christian, and I would like to share with you the responses I got.

First, you ask, "Why should the resurrection be of any significance to begin with, when other people rose from the dead before Jesus." Here is the response I got:

"This question shows a lack of knowledge of the Bible's message about the resurrection of Jesus.... Unlike any others, Jesus was without sin and was the perfect sacrifice to satisfy God's justice regarding payment for the sins of the world. When Jesus died he died for the sins of others, not for his own sin, since he was sinless, and thus the only person not worthy of death. His resurrection was the crowning statement that the power of death (which is sin) had been broken, and that forgiveness of sins and eternal life could be granted based on faith in the work of Christ. Finally, all others who came back to life in the Bible eventually died again, whereas Jesus rose never to die again."

Editor's Response to Letter #575 (Part a)
Dear JL.

Your fundamentalist acquaintance is attempting to employ a subtle shift in focus to escape what is

otherwise a cul-de-sac. The first part of his answer, which includes everything but the last sentence, focuses on information that isn't even relevant. What difference does it make if Jesus was sinless or died for the sins of others? We aren't discussing his death; we are discussing his resurrection. That's the issue. And if his resurrection "was the crowning statement that the power of death had been broken," then some of his predecessors broke the power of death as well.

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As far as the last sentence is concerned, he is attempting to link the resurrection to immaterial considerations. We are talking about the resurrection, per se, not factors relative to the character of the one being resurrected. Paul said it is the resurrection that matters, not the fact that Jesus never died again or was superior to those who rose before.

Incidentally, how does he know these people died again? That's not stated in scripture. Perhaps they went straight to heaven like Elijah in the chariot.

(TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT MONTH)

Letter #576 from DP of Ann Arbor, Michigan
Dear Dennis.

Congratulations on your fine work in BE. I look forward to examining the outcome of your association with Prometheus Books. I have one small criticism. You frequently say, as in Issue 135, page 4, "The burden of proof is on he who alleges."

I certainly agree with your meaning, but the pronoun should be "him", not "he". It's the object of the preposition "on" (the clause "who alleges" is an adjective clause modifying the objective pronoun him.) If the adjective clause modifying the pronoun is omitted, one can clearly see that the objective form of the pronoun is required. Your assertion could read: The burden of proof is on him who alleges. OR, if you prefer, The burden of proof is on the one who alleges (or the person who alleges). It's just a small point, but it makes English teachers and editors grind their teeth (I've been both of those). You are doing a brilliant job, a superlative job. Don't stop.

Editor's Response to Letter #576

Dear DP.

I thought "who" was merely a repeat of "he" and both were subjects of the verb "alleges". Apparently I'm mistaken, in view of the fact that other knowledgeable subscribers recently sent us correspondence corroborating your observation. Corrections of this nature are always welcome and accepted in a spirit of respect.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #577 from JP of Portland, Oregon

Dear Dennis.

One of the members of the Atheist Community Center introduced me to your newsletter, and I think it's fabulous. Therefore, I'd like to subscribe for one year. Frankly, I am glad that somebody is telling the truth about a 2,000 year old storybook that should be burned, banned, recycled, or just plain thrown away.

Would you, by any chance, be a professional editor/writer? Your skills really shine in your newsletter. So by all means, keep up the work! I'm looking forward to my first issue.

P.S. I also wanted to say that people like yourself are living proof that the home entrepreneur is alive and well. Why didn't I think of this concept? Oh well!

Editor's Response to Letter #577

Your kind comments are most appreciated and although I am not a professional writer or editor, I'd enjoy either role.

Letter #578 from DW of Marietta, Georgia

Dear Dennis.

I received and read my free sample issue of "Biblical Errancy" and have a few comments. I like the content, I like the format, I like the length, I like the price and I admire your style, your courage and your intransigent approach -- SIGN ME UP!....

Issue No. 137

May 1994

SPROUL'S REASON TO BELIEVE:

On page 28 in a book entitled *Reason to Believe*, apologist R.C. Sproul is asked why the Bible is so offensive. An inquirer who wants to know why the law code laid down by God in the OT is so merciless asks on the next page, "When we examine the law code of Israel do we not see a legal ethic that is in fact bloodthirsty? Does not the list of over 35 crimes which require capital punishment reflect a barbarian ethic? Are not the punitive measures of the OT manifestations of what we would regard as cruel and unusual punishment?" Sproul responds by saying, "The law code of the OT seems harsh to us in light of our present societal standards. But we live in an age where serious sin is not taken seriously. We live in an age where the holiness of God and the sanctity of human life have been sadly eclipsed. If we compare the law of the OT with the law of creation, we see not the cruelty of God but the mercy of God. In creation all sin against God is regarded as a capital offense. In the slightest act of rebellion we commit cosmic treason. Any sin against a perfectly holy and righteous God may justly culminate in death. Thus the OT law represents a massive reduction of capital crimes which reveals not the bloodthirsty vengeance of an angry God, but the long-suffering mercy of a holy and loving God.... If we are offended by the Bible, perhaps the fault is not in God but in our own corrupt and distorted sense of values."

In light of his answer, Sproul would have done well to have avoided this question entirely, for several reasons. First, the law code of the OT would be considered harsh in any age. It doesn't "seem" to be harsh according to present societal standards. It is harsh, and would be considered harsh in any era. Secondly, we don't live in an age "where serious sin is not taken seriously." Hundreds of thousands of people are incarcerated in the United States for every felony imaginable. Perhaps the number isn't as high

as Sproul desires? But he can't honestly say it isn't taken seriously. Thirdly, he is obligated to cite chapter and verse for this alleged "law of creation" that is even more stringent than the law of the Old Testament. Sproul is trying to make God look less oppressive by comparing his Old Testament laws to an even harsher code that is neither spelled out nor corroborated. Where does the Bible say that "in creation all sin against God is regarded as a capital offense"? Judged by an imaginary criterion that is neither delineated nor substantiated, anyone could be made to look good, no matter how reprehensible his behavior. Fourthly, he states that "in creation all sin against God is regarded as a capital offense and in the slightest act of rebellion we commit cosmic treason." What kind of justice is that? Stealing an apple or lying about one's age warrant execution! If Sproul's assertion has validity, then at one time there were thousands of acts deserving of capital punishment rather than a mere 35. Fifthly, even with all his fire and brimstone, the god of the OT never went so far as to allege that "all sin against God is regarded as a capital offense and the slightest act of rebellion" is "cosmic treason." In his exuberance to defend the faith at all cost, Sproul went beyond the pale. Sixthly, the allegation that God reduced the number of capital offenses to 35 hardly warrants serious consideration, in light of the fact that so many of the remaining 35 are ridiculous. According to Ex. 19:12 you can be executed for touching a mountain; Lev. 24:14 demands capital punishment for cursing; Num. 15:32-35 requires death for gathering sticks on the sabbath, and Deut. 21:15-21 requires the extreme penalty for striking your father or mother or disobeying your parents. In each instance the severity of the punishment is far out of line with the violation. Even with Sproul's alleged massive reduction of unspecified capital offenses, those which remain still reveal "the bloodthirsty vengeance of an angry God." And lastly, the only "corrupt and distorted sense of values" in evidence is that exhibited by Sproul's defense of a moral and legal code that is plagued by tremendous iniquities and disparities between transgressions and punishments.

On pages 122 and 123, Sproul digs himself into

another hole when he says the following with respect to God's omnipotence, "In fact there are many things God cannot do. Reason tells us He cannot be God and not be God at the same time and in the same relationship. God cannot make a square circle or a two-sided triangle. Triangles by definition have three sides." So far so good. But Sproul continues by saying, "The point that is crucial, however, is that all of this does not deny the omnipotence of God but affirms it. The point of confusion rests with the meaning of the term 'omnipotence.' As a theological term the word does not mean God can do anything. What it does mean is that God does have all power over His creatures. The whole created order is always under the control and authority of God."

Sproul is exhibiting theological doubletalk. There is no confusion with respect to the meaning of the term "omnipotence." The only confusion lies with his feeble attempt to redefine the word by restricting its coverage. According to *Webster's New World Dictionary* "omnipotence" means "having unlimited power or authority." Yet, Sproul would have us believe God's power is restricted; it isn't unlimited. But if it's limited, then it's not all-powerful. Sproul wants an all-powerful, omnipotent being with abbreviated powers. Either God can create a square circle and a two-sided triangle or he can't. There's no in between. And if he can't, then he's not omnipotent, and the "whole created order" is not "under the control and authority of God." Squares, circles, and triangles are as much a part of the created order as anything else. And what difference does it make whether the term "omnipotence" is used theologically or otherwise? It's an absolutist word that allows no exceptions. That's about all that needs to be said on Sproul's efforts to have a foot in both camps.

SCRIPTURE MIXTURE

(Part 1)

This new section consists of a potpourri of invalid or dubious biblical observations found in a variety of apologetic sources. Many writings don't

have enough material to warrant a separate REVIEW section, but they do contain comments that deserve consideration.

COLQUHOUN'S HARD QUESTIONS:

On pages 112 and 113 of apologist Frank Colquhoun's dull book entitled *Hard Questions* the author addresses the topic of prayer and says, "It's not so much getting what you want as asking God to give you what he wants. Even Jesus prayed 'Your will be done' when he spoke to his Father." If that's true, then why bother praying? Why ask for what you are going to receive, regardless, since that's what God wants? Later Colquhoun says, "What then is the point of praying? Surely the only answer to that must be that God tells us to because he wants us to learn to depend on him and to align our needs and wishes with his will." What kind of an explanation is that? How can you align your needs and wishes with an uncertain will? Biblicists either know God's will or they don't. If they know it, then they can do it. So why pray? If biblicists don't know his will, then praying is nothing more than guesswork. So why pray?

MCDOWELL'S MORE THAN A CARPENTER:

On page 19 in his little book entitled *More Than a Carpenter* apologist Josh McDowell says, "Since none but God can forgive sins, it is conclusively demonstrated that Christ, since he forgave sins, is God." This argument no more proves Christ is God than a comparable claim by any street charlatan. Jesus may say an individual's sins are forgiven, but that doesn't mean they are. Just because someone makes an assertion doesn't mean it's true. If I met someone on the street and told him I forgave his sins, would that prove I am god or his sins were actually forgiven? Hardly! What evidence can biblicists provide to show that sins were forgiven by Jesus other than assertions of the latter and his accomplices? Saying something doesn't make it true, especially comments that are self-serving.

STEWART'S 101 QUESTIONS PEOPLE ASK MOST ABOUT JESUS:

On page 17 in this paperback edition apologist Don Stewart says, "Therefore, the question of the existence of Jesus is not an issue. Twenty-seven separate documents (the books of the NT--Ed.) written by people who had personal contact with Jesus testify to the fact that he did, indeed, exist. We add to their testimony that of the Jews and the Romans. Neither of these groups believed in Jesus.... Yet they never denied that he existed. Thus we can confidently say that the issue of Jesus' existence is not an issue at all. Every source, friendly and unfriendly, testified that he existed."

This is the kind of deceptive apologetic reasoning critics of the Bible should always be on the alert for. Stewart starts from a wrong assumption, proceeds wrong, and concludes wrong. First, the existence of Jesus is very much an issue, and is by no means settled. Second, he relies primarily upon a book, the NT, which is in total agreement with his basic premise. He is using a book to prove the validity of the book itself, the essence of circular reasoning. Third, scholars certainly do not agree that the authors of the various NT books had personal contact with Jesus. They not only clash over who wrote what books, but, even more importantly, when they were written. Fourth, Stewart began by saying the Jews and Romans never said Jesus did not exist, but concluded by saying every friendly and unfriendly source testified that he existed. There is a vast difference between these two assertions. The first is essentially one of neutrality with respect to the existence of Jesus; while the second denotes a strong belief in his prior existence. Stewart might be able to substantiate the first position, which has always been the stance of this publication, but he'll never be able to prove the latter is valid. Even today, plenty of "unfriendly" sources would never testify that Jesus existed, especially when his supporters have provided so little evidence that he did. For Stewart to allege that "every friendly and unfriendly source testified that Jesus existed" is ridiculous. That's never been the case.

Stewart says on page 34 with respect to another topic, "Jesus was unique in His victory over death--

the Resurrection." We have already shown in prior issues that this event is by no means unique, since many biblical figures rose from the dead before Jesus. No matter how many times they extol its distinctiveness, the Resurrection remains a bland occurrence from a biblical perspective.

On page 110 in the same book Stewart says the ministry of Jesus "was attested by miracles. He offered the proper credentials as the Messiah, yet they did not believe". He completely ignored biblical testimony to the effect that the ability to do miracles is not to be used to establish one's credentials as the messiah. According to Matt. 24:23-24/Mark 13:21-22 ("For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect") and Rev. 19:20 ("the beast was taken, and with him, the false prophet that wrought miracles before him....") false christs and false prophets can not only perform miracles, but fool the elect as well. Second Thess. 2:9 ("...Even him whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders...") proves Satan himself can perform miracles. Even the pharaoh's magicians can execute miracles, according to Ex. 7:10-11, 21-22, and 8:6-7. So the ability to perform miracles is not to be used as a criterion by which to identify the messiah, because it also lies within the purview of false prophets, false christs, Satan, and magicians.

SISSON'S ANSWERING CHRISTIANITY'S MOST PUZZLING QUESTIONS, VOL. 1:

On page 80 in this verbose apologetic work, the author, Sisson, says, "Paul was an apostle. He had seen the risen Savior! Jesus Christ had called him by name. He was the divine instrument for bringing the authoritative message of the gospel to the Gentiles...." He erred in a couple of respects. To begin with Paul was not one of the 12 apostles, and for him to be repeatedly called the Apostle Paul is decidedly misleading. Secondly, he incorrectly related the sequence of events relative to Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus, which can be

found in the ninth, twenty-second, and twenty-sixth chapters of the Book of Acts. Nowhere does it say Paul saw Jesus. In fact, Acts 9:3-9 says, "As Paul journeyed he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed about him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him,.... The men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but seeing no one. Saul arose from the ground; and when his eyes were opened, he could see nothing; so they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. And for three days he was without sight...." The text not only says that when Paul arose he saw nothing, but he remained blinded for three days thereafter. Even the men with him saw nothing.

Sisson contends on page 157, in regard to another subject, that God "has decreed that sin can be atoned only through blood sacrifices" and he cites Lev. 17:11 ("For the life of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it for you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that makes atonement, by reason of life") as proof. He further states, "God rejects all human devices and schemes that attempt to pay for sin." Like most apologists trying to prove the validity of Heb. 9:22 ("...without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins") he completely ignores the fact that the Leviticus passage does not exclude other methods. It does not say "only" through the shedding of blood can sins be forgiven, but merely portrays this as one path. As Shmuel Golding notes on page 33 of his work entitled *The Light of Reason Vol. 1*, "The scriptures clearly state that blood was one way of obtaining an atonement. There are indeed other forms of atonement, as seen in Lev. 5:11-13, where it states that flour can make atonement for the soul. Money (Ex. 30:15-16), jewelry (Num. 31:50), and prayer (Hos. 14:3) can atone for the soul." So from a biblical perspective it is by no means true to say that "God rejects all human devices...that attempt to pay for sin."

O'BRIEN'S *TODAY'S HANDBOOK FOR SOLVING BIBLE DIFFICULTIES*:

Most of this apologetic work is little more than

a mass of conjectures and generalities that systematically avoid the tough issues. We've discussed some of its comments before, although most aren't worthy of critical analysis. We can't help but note, however, that O'Brien says on page 217, "...did Scripture ever teach a flat earth? I think not." If he thinks not, then he thinks wrong. He continues by saying, "Bible readers today see poetic imagery in places where Christians of past centuries saw proof of a flat earth." No! Christians of today "seek", rather than "see", poetic imagery to escape the text's wording. He omitted the letter "K". Christians of past centuries were more candid in their interpretations of scripture, because they didn't have to face modern science or be so involved in molding the Bible to reality and greater rational criticism. The Bible has several verses that support belief in a flat earth. Rev. 7:1 says, "I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth..." and Isaiah 11:12 says, "...assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth." How could the earth be round, circular, or a globe if it had corners? Job 28:24 says, "For he looks to the ends of the earth and sees everything under the heavens" and Dan. 4:11 says, "The tree grew and became strong, and its top reached to heaven, and it was visible to the end of the whole earth." Globes or circular objects don't have ends. "Ends" are only applicable to something that is flat and whose surface abruptly changes direction. And no matter how tall the tree was, it could not have been seen by someone on the other side of the planet. Probably the most potent verse of all is Matt. 4:8 which says, "Again the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them." How could Jesus have seen all the kingdoms of the world at one time from one spot, if the world were round or a globe? How could he have seen around a curved object? How could he have seen kingdoms on the opposite side of the planet? The answer is that he couldn't. Those who believed in a flat earth centuries ago were following the implications of scripture rather than reinterpreting the Bible for purposes of expediency.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #575 Continues from Last Month (Part b)

We skipped your second objection for now. Your third objection was that many verses in the Bible rule out any possibility of a resurrection of anybody to begin with. Here is the response I got from my fundamentalist acquaintance:

...These isolated passages hold little weight when cross-checked with the whole of the Biblical message about man and the afterlife. First, one must check the context of the statement and understand the meaning in terms of the immediate passage at hand. Two of these (verses that you quoted) are from Ecclesiastes, which is known to be reflecting the negative conclusions and musings of Solomon after having pursued all manner of earthly amusements in a search for meaning; they do not necessarily reflect doctrinal statements.

Editor's Response to Letter #575 (Part b)

How did your fundamentalist friend manage to cram so much palaver into such a small paragraph, JL? First, the passages I used are neither isolated nor of little weight. Several were mentioned, including Eccle. 3:19-21 (RSV) which states, "For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has NO ADVANTAGE over the beasts; for all is vanity. All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again. Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down to the earth?" To say this passage is of little weight is absurd, although I can understand apologists wishing that were true. He's trying to ignore Ecclesiastes because it doesn't fit his preconceptions of what the Bible should say. The fact that other biblical verses say the opposite does not invalidate what is said in Ecclesiastes, but only proves the Bible is contradictory. Running to other verses and claiming they are more valid because they say what he wants to hear, and picking and choosing according to conditions is anything but objective scholarship. Second, insofar as Ecclesiastes is concerned, one need only read the

entire chapter to see that the contextual argument isn't going to save the day. There is nothing either before or after the text that invalidates the clear intent of the words. The format of Ecclesiastes is similar to that of Proverbs, in which a series of statements are made on a variety of topics. Consequently, the contextual argument has little or no applicability. Third, what difference does it make if Ecclesiastes is reflecting the negative conclusions and musings of the author as long as its contents reflect biblical doctrine? Since when do biblical teachings have to be positive and uplifting? Fourth, how does your fundamentalist acquaintance know Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes? Every version I have says the book was written by the Preacher, the son of David, who was king in Jerusalem. David had many sons and only one was king in Jerusalem? Fifth, how does your fundamentalist friend know that comments in Ecclesiastes "do not necessarily reflect doctrinal statements?" Is that stated somewhere? If he can use that defense, then nearly every statement in the Bible is up for grabs and can be discarded on the pretext that it "does not necessarily reflect biblical doctrine." What are his criteria for valid doctrinal statements? How does he know what is bona fide and what isn't? When he says "they do not necessarily reflect doctrinal statements," he is obligated to prove otherwise, since they are, in fact, scriptural. If a comment is scriptural, do we assume it is doctrinal until proven otherwise, or do we assume it is non-doctrinal until proven doctrinal? Not surprisingly, when distasteful comments, such as those found in Ecclesiastes, are under consideration, our fundamentalist acquaintance opts for the latter.

Letter #575 Concludes (Part c)

Finally, you assert that the resurrection is not nearly as important as other events in the Bible by saying, "Our FIFTH AUDIO COMMENTARY states the resurrection is of no real consequence when compared to other events. How many people came into the world as full-grown adults as did Adam and Eve in Gen. 1:27 and Gen. 2:7? Elijah never died at all; he just went straight to heaven in 2 Kings 2:11. According to Gen.5:22-24 Enoch never

died either. He, too, went straight to heaven. In Gen. 18:11 and Gen. 21:1-3 Isaac was born to a woman who had passed through menopause, and according to Heb. 7:1-3 Melchisedec had no father, no mother, no beginning, and no end...Jesus never topped that. At least he had a father and a mother."

My resident Christian has the following feedback,

"...It is true that there are other supernatural events recounted in the Bible, which fill out the picture of the revelation; however, the resurrection of Jesus, as noted above, has unique qualities as those associated with the promised Redeemer (messiah) which is pivotal for the Christian message. Read 1 Cor. 15 and you will see that the resurrection is crucial for the gospel that Paul preached. He himself stated that if Christ be not raised then the Christian faith is futile and that Christians, above all people of the world, should be pitied (presumably for their naivete and gullibility). Read Revelation 5:9-10. Here the statement is made that the Lamb (Christ) overcame by his death and resurrection. This accomplishment makes him worthy to open the seals of God's book of judgment on the earth, as recounted in the fifth chapter of Revelation. It should be read in context. Rev. 1:18 has Jesus saying that he was dead and is now alive forevermore."

I consider myself a novice at this; that is why I am feeding this Christian's responses directly to you. Hopefully, you can either send me a reply directly or publish this letter and your reply in your next issue of Biblical Errancy. Whatever you decide, I will look forward to your response.

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #575 (Part c)

I fail to see the relevance of your resident Christian's response, JL. All he is doing is reemphasizing the alleged importance of the resurrection to humanity. But that's not what I asked; that's not the issue. I want to know what makes the event, itself, so unusual, in light of the fact that others rose from the dead before Jesus, and participated in acts that were far more spectacular. For obvious reasons, he wants to concentrate on its ramifications, rather than the event per se.

Letter #579 from CK of Bloomfield, New Jersey
Dear Mr. McKinsey.

In regard to your discussion on whether the words "dung" and "piss" are pornographic, I would have to disagree with that categorization. The dictionary labels "piss" as vulgar, but "dung" is in no way so annotated. I wouldn't even venture to guess, however, how either word was considered at the time of translation of the King James Bible, and the words can only be judged in that context. The NRSV uses "urine." Ultimately it rests upon some Hebrew word, to whose connotations we have even less a clue. As for "pornographic", that usually implies some sexual context, and that is absent in the cited verses. I never understood myself why some synonyms are considered vulgar and others are not.... Intrinsically, no set of phonemes or letters is offensive--it's only in the trained ear of the listener, and eye of the reader....

Editor's Response to Letter #579

Dear CK.

According to my *Webster's New World Thesaurus* pornography is comparable to obscene literature, vulgarity, smut, salaciousness, prurience, and grossness. And since the word "piss" is rather vulgar, to say the least, I think it can be reasonably classified as pornographic. Technically speaking, the word "pornography" probably does pertain to lewd sexual activity, but that is not the manner in which it is generally employed today. Secondly, how the words were originally used when the KJV was translated is not as important as how the words are currently viewed, especially by children. Whether words are intrinsically offensive is of less importance than the fact that they are viewed as salacious by today's reader. Incidentally, if you traced the Hebrew origins of the word "dung" you would find that the latter is translated from a word that would have been more offensive if it had been translated literally rather than euphemistically. It's reminiscent of the comment by Abraham to his servant in Gen. 24:2 that the latter should swear an oath by putting "thy hand under my thigh." That's a sanitized version of where the hand was really placed when an oath was sworn. In Gen. 47:29 Jacob

told Joseph to put his hand on the former's male organ when he swore an oath as well.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #580 from PC of Donalsonville, Georgia
Greetings....

My son is a fundamentalist Baptist minister. I have now shaken his position, due to your publication, mostly. His deceased mother misguided his education and endeavors. I was traveling abroad at the time. He is now 51 years old. It isn't easy to endure a change in his life's pursuits since there is his livelihood. ...You are indeed an unusual person who ventures forth with the sword of truth against odds approaching the incredible.

Letter #581 from SC of La Honda, California
Dear Dennis.

We ordered your publication kind of like a kid sending in a boxtop for a plastic slingshot; imagine our delight when we received instead a high-quality, fully loaded bazooka! Great information to fuel anti-biblical debating. So, we'd like to get some more ammunition, please.

Letter #582 from JT of Williamsport, Penn.
Dennis....

I continue to be amazed at the work you've put into the tapes! I've never run across their equal anywhere else....

Letter #583 from KB of Santa Barbara, California
Dear Mr. McKinsey. ...

You have been an inspiration to many freethinkers, including myself. You have the ability to put into words the thoughts and beliefs that I've had all my life....

Letter #584 from BW of Shreveport, Louisiana
Dear Dennis.

Don't let my subscription expire!... Your publication is a valuable resource for freethinkers. I mention it every chance I get. Keep up the good work.

Editor's Response to Letter #584

Dear BW.

Your kind words, like those of PC, SC, JT, and KB, are warmly received.

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JOHNSON'S *SO THE BIBLE IS FULL OF CONTRADICTIONS?* (Part 1):

One of the more prominent apologetic writings currently on the market is a 146 page paperback entitled *So the Bible is Full of Contradictions* by Carl Johnson. The author attempts to answer some of the most obvious biblical contradictions in as succinct and conclusive a manner as possible. Unfortunately, the following examples show that his efforts were often to no avail.

On page 13 Johnson seeks to reconcile the Noah-and-the-Ark conflict between Gen. 7:2-3 ("Of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee by sevens, the male and his female: and of beasts that are not clean by two, the male and his female. Of fowl also of the air by sevens, the male and the female....") and Gen. 7:8-9 ("Of clean beasts and of beasts that are not clean, and of fowls, and of every thing that creepeth upon the earth, There went in two and two unto Noah into the ark, the male and the female...."). He states, "Noah was commanded to bring two of every kind of animal into the ark, a male and a female, then to bring seven of some animals and fowls, and then we read that the animals went in two and two.... In the first reference, God instructed Noah to bring the animals in by twos, but later, in the second reference, he was given further instructions to bring in seven of every clean animal and fowl. Clean animals and fowls are the ones acceptable for sacrifice. Exodus gives ten such beasts. The unclean animals and fowls went in by twos, the clean by sevens."

I'm always amazed at the apparent willingness of

apologists to leap into a contradiction with which they are ill-prepared to cope. His "reconciliation" leads one to believe that he would have done well to have passed over this problem entirely. It's hard to believe we're reading the same verses. What does the text say? Gen. 7:2-3 says clean beasts and fowl shall go in by sevens while the unclean are to go in by twos, even though Gen. 7:8-9 says they are all to go in by twos, whether clean or not, whether fowl or not. Johnson's final statement that "the unclean animals and fowls went in by twos and the clean by sevens" ignores Gen. 7:8-9, which says clean beasts went in by twos, not sevens. His final statement also clashes with Gen. 7:2-3, which says "Of fowls also of the air by sevens." Fowls did not go in by twos; they went in by sevens.

On pages 16 and 17 of his book, Johnson confronted a different kind of problem relative to the Egyptian pursuit of the Israelites during the Exodus. He attempts to meld Exodus 9:3, 6 ("Behold the hand of the LORD is upon thy cattle which are in the field, upon the horses, upon the asses, upon the camels, upon the oxen, and upon the sheep: there shall be a very grievous murrain. And the LORD did that thing on the morrow, and all the cattle of Egypt died...") with Exodus 14:9 ("But the Egyptians pursued after them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, and his horsemen, and his army, and overtook them..."). Johnson reconciles the problem by saying, "The seeming contradiction here is: how could the Egyptians pursue the Israelites with their horses and chariots if all the horses were killed earlier? If we read the two accounts closely we find that the first reference speaks of a judgment upon the cattle, horses, asses, camels, oxen, and sheep. The judgment was to be 'a very grievous murrain,' which is a contagious disease among cattle. The record does not say that all the horses died, but that all the cattle died (verse 6)...and only the 'cattle which are in the field (verse 3)." When Johnson says "the record does not say that all the horses died," he is only using the version of verse 6 that satisfies his interpretation. True, the KJV, RSV, ASV, MT, BBE, and the LB say only the "cattle" died but the NASB, JB, NIV, NAB, and NEB, say "All the livestock of Egypt died." The word "cattle" comes from the

Hebrew word "miqneh" which actually means "livestock" or "live herds". If all of Egypt's livestock died, instead of cattle only, then all horses would be included as well. And if all the horses were dead, then how could the pharaoh have pursued the Israelites on horses?

As far as the defense alleging only cattle or livestock in the fields died is concerned (verse 3), that is refuted by verse 9 in the NASB and other versions, which says, "All the livestock of Egypt died." Johnson quotes Sir Gardner Wilkinson as saying that some animals were stall-fed in Egypt and survived because they weren't in the field. But whether or not livestock were fed in stalls or fields is irrelevant, since ALL the livestock of Egypt died according to verse 9.

On page 63 Johnson is asked to blend Matt. 11:13-14 ("For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John (John the Baptist--Ed.). And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come") with John 1:21 ("And they asked him (John the Baptist--Ed.), What then? Art thou Elias? And he saith, I am not. Art thou that prophet? And he answered, No"). In the former verse Jesus said John the Baptist was the Elijah who was prophesied to come, while in the latter verse John says he isn't. Johnson explains this dichotomy by saying, "John the Baptist denied that he was Elijah, while Jesus said he was. This has bothered a number of people. I have personally been asked about this.... Jesus said on at least two occasions that John (John the Baptist--Ed.) was Elijah (Matt. 11:14, 17:10-13). The answer lies in understanding 'the law of double fulfillment.' That means that a prophecy is often partially fulfilled as a type of the total fulfillment. John came in partial fulfillment of what Elijah was to do. Both John and Elijah preached against sin in Israel; both attacked the kings and religious leaders of the day; both spoke against religious corruption of the people; both were severely persecuted for offending the kings and immoral wives; and both were highly commended by God. John did come 'in the spirit and power of Elias' (Luke 1:17) but not in his reincarnated form."

The only double involved in Johnson's answer is double-talk. Contrived phrases such as "partial

fulfillment" or "double fulfillment" are nothing more than theological smokescreens. Either John the Baptist is Elijah or he isn't; there is no in between. And Jesus says he is. That should settle the matter. But when John the Baptist says he is not, and who is in a better position to know, then an irreconcilable contradiction between the words of Jesus and those of John the Baptist materializes. Johnson says John came in "partial fulfillment" of what Elijah was to do. But who cares what he came to do? That isn't even the issue. The question is: Was he or was he not Elijah? What deeds he performed or did not perform are irrelevant. Johnson is trying to redirect our focus toward extraneous considerations. When Johnson says "John did come in the spirit and power of Elias but not in reincarnated form" he is saying Jesus is a liar and John the Baptist told the truth. While later quoting the New Scofield Reference Bible Johnson says in reference to the ministry of John the Baptist "with a ministry so completely in the spirit and power of Elijah's future ministry in a typical sense, it could be said: 'Elijah is come already'." Spirit, however, has nothing to do with the issue. The question is: Is John the Baptist Elijah or isn't he? Whether he is or isn't in the spirit of Elijah is immaterial. The fact is he's not Elijah, and that's what counts.

Johnson closes out this issue by saying, "Elijah reappeared in the flesh on the Mount of Transfiguration in the days of Jesus, will come again 'before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord' (Mal. 4:5), and will probably be one of the two witnesses in the tribulation period." These comments are not only immaterial but irrelevant as well.

Johnson is one of the most prominent users of the "that's what it says but that's not what it means" approach. He repeatedly substitutes his own spin for what a verse really says. What follows are some of the more glaring examples of this ruse.

On pages 20 and 21 he addresses the clash between Ex. 31:17 ("...for in 6 days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the 7th day he rested, and was refreshed") and Isa. 40:28 ("...the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary..."). Johnson states that,

"Several times in the Bible we read that God rested (Gen. 2:2, 3; Ex. 20:11; 31:17; Heb. 4:4) yet the passage in Isaiah says He is not weary. We think of God as a being who is almighty, infinite, who never becomes tired. Why does He need to rest? The answer is that when we read that God rested from His work it simply means He ceased from His work. The word translated rested comes from the Hebrew word shavath, from which we get the word Sabbath, which means 'to stop' or 'cease.' He ceased because He was finished. When we read that God 'was refreshed' it means He was delighted.... Dr. J.B. Thompson said in his book, *Man in Genesis and in Geology*: 'To rest' here does not mean to seek repose from fatigue, but to suspend activity in a particular mode of operation, to cease from doing thus and so."

In effect, Johnson is saying that he has a more accurate rendition of Gen. 2:2 ("And God blessed the seventh day, and...rested from all his work...." than those who translated many of the most well known versions of the Bible. The KJV, RSV, ML, NASB, MT, NWT, NAB, BBE, ASV, NIV, and the JB versions use the word "rested". Their translators chose the word "rested" and, in effect, he claims they should have used the word "ceased." His resolution of this conflict is little more than an assertion that he knows Hebrew better than those who translated many of the most famous and scholarly versions on the market. He also claims that "was refreshed" means "delighted" when they are even further apart than "rested" and "ceased". And why have "re" in front of "refreshed," if he was not refreshed a second time? The prefix "re" means "again." If "refreshed" means he was "delighted," then what would the word "refreshed" mean? Lastly, the word "rested" is much more compatible with the word "refreshed" than the word "ceased." Johnson is trying to escape the problem by rewriting the script to his own specifications. Is he qualified to correct a whole battery of experts? I doubt it.

On pages 49 and 50 he confronts a direct contradiction between Proverb 3:13 ("Happy is the man who finds wisdom, and the man that getteth understanding") and Eccle. 1:18 ("For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increases sorrow"). He rationalizes the

conflict by stating, "One verse says wisdom brings happiness, the other verse says it brings grief. Which is correct? Both. The first verse speaks of wisdom from God, the wisdom from above.... (James 3:17).... This kind of wisdom brings happiness. The wisdom that causes grief speaks of worldly wisdom, the wisdom that "descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish" (James 3:15). In effect, Johnson has arbitrarily assumed that two "wisdoms" of totally opposite character are involved because different kinds of wisdoms are referred to in the NT. Yet, no distinction of this kind is made in our original conflicting OT verses, and the disagreement stands until Johnson can provide evidence that the NT differentiation applies to this problem as well.

On page 50 he is asked to reconcile Prov. 8:17 ("I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me") with Prov. 1:28 ("Then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me"). Again he resorts to the reinterpretation defense by saying, "Once again there seems to be a contradiction: If you seek God early you shall find Him, but if you seek Him early you shall not find Him. The first reference promises that those who seek God "early," that is, diligently, shall find Him.... The second reference speaks of persons who refuse to listen to God, who do not regard God, who will not heed God's counsel nor his reproof (Prov. 1:24-25). When distress and anguish come upon them, then they call upon God, but he will not answer.... There is no real contradiction here when we keep the two different classes of persons in mind."

In the first place, Johnson assumes that the word "those" in Prov 8:17 refers only to those who love God. Why couldn't it also refer to those who do not regard God or his counsel or his reproof? Prov. 8:17 does not say that only those who love me and seek me early shall find me. Just because the first part of the sentence is referring to those who love God does not mean the second half of the sentence is only referring to those who love God. It could include those who have not been heeding God's counsel or his reproof, but for some reason have decided to seek him. In simple terms, Johnson has assumed Prov. 8:17 is only referring to "good people," while

Prov. 1:28 is only referring to "bad actors". When considered in context, the latter can be substantiated textually but the former cannot.

Secondly, he quotes the first verse as saying, "those who seek God 'early'...shall find Him," and the other verse as saying those who seek God "'early'...shall not find" him. If "early" means "diligently" in the first verse as Johnson claims, then why wouldn't it mean the same in the second, absent evidence to the contrary? Thus, the contradiction would remain.

Another example of arbitrarily drawing class distinctions comes to the fore when we compare Prov. 22:15 ("Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him") and Prov. 27:22 ("Though thou shouldest bray a fool in a mortar among wheat with a pestle, yet his foolishness will not depart from him"). Johnson's defense is, "The first verse speaks of driving foolishness away and the second verse says foolishness will not depart. The two passages refer to entirely different people. In the first reference the Bible is speaking of foolishness in the heart of a child.... The second verse speaks of a grownup fool whose folly is past cure. After long years of wilfulness, folly has become part of his very being...."

Although Johnson correctly states the first verse is referring to children only, he has no proof that the second verse is referring to adults only. It refers to "a fool" and that could apply to someone of any age. Why must the verse apply only to adults? The contradiction remains until Johnson can prove it specifically excludes children.

Another arbitrary distinction is concocted by Johnson in response to those who would like for him to reconcile Eccle. 1:4 ("One generation passes away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth forever") with Rev. 21:1 ("And I say a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea"). He responds by saying, "The first verse says the earth will abide forever, the second says it will pass away. When the Bible speaks of the earth passing away, or being burned up (2 Peter 3:10-12), we believe it means that God will renovate the earth

by fire. In the past God renovated the earth by water: 'Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished' (2 Peter 3:6). When Peter said the earth 'perished,' he did not mean it was annihilated. When God renovates the heaven and the earth in the future, the earth will not be annihilated, but the fire will purge away all sin and everything that has been contaminated by sin.... when John says in Rev. 21:1 that the earth will pass away, he means it will pass from one condition to another...."

This is one of Johnson's trickiest defenses, so be wary. The sleight of hand, reminiscent of the huckster maneuvering peanuts under shells, is performed around the middle of his monologue. He deceptively equated the "passing away" in Eccle. 1:4 with the word "perished" in 2 Peter 3:6. But the words are not synonymous, because more than mere renovation is involved in Eccle 1:4. It says generation after generation "passes away" and that refers to total annihilation or extermination. They were not merely renovated. One vanished and another appeared, and there is no reason to believe that the "passing away" in Rev. 21:1 does not have the same meaning as the "passing away" in Eccle. 1:4, especially in view of the fact that the former says "there was no more sea" when the earth passed away. If the sea was gone, then it was annihilated, and not merely renovated.

To make a long story short, Johnson chose to equate the "passing away" in Rev. 21:1 with the word "perish" in 2 Peter 3:6, which does not mean total extermination, rather than with identical words in Eccle. 1:4, which do mean total eradication. He also ignored the fact that the sea was abolished when the earth passed away in Rev. 21:1. If "there was no more sea," then it was not merely renovated but annihilated. For him to say "we believe" is understandable, since that's about the only appropriate summation of his position. As this example readily demonstrates, apologetics can more accurately be called sophisticgetics, since sophistry is a key component.

Johnson's rationalization of the conflict between Isa. 45:7 ("I form the light and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things") and Psalm 5:4 ("For thou art not a God that

hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee") is the standard fare foisted on the public. He states, "God is said to create evil, yet evil shall not dwell with Him. The word 'evil' has more than one meaning. In the first reference 'evil' means affliction, adversity, calamity, and in the second reference 'evil' means sin and iniquity. God is not the author of sin. He did not create iniquity, but He did create evil as an inevitable result of sin. Sometimes, because of the sin of evildoers, He permits catastrophes, earthquakes, storms, wars, and other physical calamities to come upon them to punish them or to chasten His own children...."

During one of my radio debates years ago, a fundamentalist Bible college professor used this very defense. He contended that the word "evil" in Isa. 45:7 was referring to catastrophes and calamities, not evil in the sense of corrupt or degenerate. Both men fail to realize that Isa. 45:7 is only one of several verses with moral overtones, saying God is the author of evil. Lam. 3:38 in the RSV says, "Is it from the mouth of the Most High that good and evil come?" The words "good and evil" are set in contrast to one another which implies both are referring to morality and behavior. If the word "evil" refers to catastrophes, rather than wickedness and corruption, then why use the word evil at all, since it's misleading? The words "catastrophe" or "calamity," rather than the word "evil," would have been more applicable. And if evil means calamity, then why set it in contrast with the word "good", which also implies morality or ethics? It should have been set in opposition to either "tranquillity," or "harmony", rather than the word "good".

In Jer. 26:3 God says, "...that I may repent of the evil, which I purpose to do unto them because of the evil of their doings." The second "evil" refers to corrupt or wicked behavior. Why assume the former does not? If the word "evil" always refers to catastrophes and calamities when God is the perpetrator, then scores of scholars need to improve their translating skills, because the word "evil" implies morality and ethics, not calamities and catastrophes.

(To Be Continued Next Month)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #580 from MJ of Andover, Mass. (Part a)
Dear Dennis.

I listened to some tapes by the Christian apologist Walter Martin. He says that the most common intellectual error skeptics make is to accuse Christians of using the book's own words to substantiate its validity, in essence claiming it's the word of God because it says so. But, Martin responds, the Bible is not one book, but many! It was written by some 50 odd people from different cultures and times, so that establishes legitimate independent corroboration.

My response would be, yes, I agree it was written by some 50 odd people (pun optional) but 50 people, each from a different state, claiming an Elvis sighting doesn't constitute solid independent corroboration. Or, as Ingersoll said, "If 50,000 people believe a foolish thing, it is still a foolish thing."

I'd be interested in how you would respond to this issue, because I'm sure many Christians have jumped on this rationalization to support their use of the Bible's own assertions as evidence for its validity.

Editor's Response to Letter #580 (Part a)

Dear MJ.

Either the Bible is one book or a compilation of 66 books; it's either one or the other. It can't be both. And evidence leads to the conclusion that it's one book rather than many for several reasons. First, if it's merely a compilation of 66 books, then each book would have to make a separate and independent claim that it is the word of God, and many do not. Where do the Books of Esther or the Song of Solomon, for example, say they are the inspired word of God? In fact, the words "God" and "Lord" don't appear in either. Since the Bible does not claim to be God's word very often, it must be considered a unity for many of the books to be considered divinely inspired. Secondly, one need only read the Bible to see that the work is not only sequential, especially with reference to the Old Testament, but interdependent as well. If I walked

into any library and took 66 books off the library shelves at random, the chance of their being as interrelated, interdependent, sequential, similarly focused and concurrently scripted as the Bible, is almost non-existent. Thirdly, if the Epistles from Romans to Hebrews were all written by Paul, as fundamentalists claim, they could hardly vouch for the authenticity of one another. Would you believe a book merely because 13 other books written by the same author testified to its reliability? Fourthly, even if the Bible were viewed as merely a compilation of 66 books and not a book itself, critics are still well within their rights to ask what evidence exists outside of these 66 books to substantiate the validity of much of that which is contained therein. Fifthly, and most important of all, what difference does it make whether or not the Bible is one book or merely a compilation of 66 separate books? If one part of a book contradicts another part of the same book, you have as strong a contradiction as you would have if something in one book contradicted something in another entirely different book. A contradiction is a contradiction, regardless of the source. I don't know what "skeptics" Martin is referring to, but if he thinks the most common intellectual error they make is to accuse Christians of using the book's own words to substantiate its validity, then apparently I am exempted, because this tactic has never been a significant ingredient in my approach. My focus has never been upon determining what part of the book or books tends to substantiate another part of the same book or books. Instead, I have tried to expose those parts which disprove the Bible's perfection by revealing one part's contradiction of another. After all, in the final analysis what is a contradiction? Essentially it is nothing more than a statement by one passage that another passage is lying. Lawyers, scientists, politicians, and everyone else concerned with the compilation and utilization of data spend a lot of time trying to find, expose, or camouflage contradictions. From media interviews and economic analyses to scientific assertions and political philosophizing, the process of detecting contradictions is central to logical thought. Comedians, for instance, would be out of business

without them. They lie at the very core of their profession.

Letter # 580 from PC of Donalsonville, Georgia
Greetings...

My son is a fundamentalist Baptist minister. I have now shaken his position due to your publication, mostly. His deceased mother misguided his education and endeavors. I was traveling abroad at the time. He is now 51 years old. It isn't easy to endure a change in his life's pursuits, since there is his livelihood. ...You are indeed an unusual person who ventures forth with the sword of truth against odds approaching the incredible.

Letter #581 from SC of La Honda, California
Dear Dennis.

We ordered your publication kind of like a kid sending in a boxtop for a plastic slingshot; imagine our delight when we received instead a high-quality, fully loaded bazooka! Great information to fuel anti-biblical debating. So, we'd like to get some more ammunition, please.

Letter #582 from JT of Williamsport, Penn.
Dennis....

I continue to be amazed at the work you've put into your tapes! I've never run across their equal anywhere else....

Letter #583 from KB of Santa Barbara, California
Dear Mr. McKinsey ...

You have been an inspiration to many freethinkers, including myself. You have the ability to put into words the thoughts and beliefs that I've had all my life....

Letter #584 from BW of Shreveport, Louisiana
Dear Dennis.

Don't let my subscription expire!.... Your publication is a valuable resource for freethinkers. I mention it every chance I get. Keep up the good work.

Editor's Response to Letter #584
Dear BW.

We are only too happy to be of service. Your

accolades, like those of PC, SC, JT, and KB, are received with heartfelt thanks. Without the support of people like you, our efforts would be all but fruitless. After all we can't do it alone, and see little potential in trying.

Issue No. 139

July 1994

With this month's review we will continue our extensive analysis of the apologetic work entitled *So the Bible is Full of Contradictions?* by apologist Carl Johnson.

JOHNSON'S *SO THE BIBLE IS FULL OF CONTRADICTIONS?* (Part 2)

One of the most prominent nonquotes in Scripture is found in Matt. 27:9-10, which says, "Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued...And gave them for the potter's field..." The act of buying a potter's field for the 30 pieces of silver was supposedly a fulfillment of a prophecy in Jeremiah. Unfortunately for apologists The Book of Jeremiah contains no such prophecy. Johnson says on pages 68 and 69 in this regard, "Matthew is charged with making a mistake by saying that Jeremiah spoke about 30 pieces of silver, when in reality it was Zechariah who made the statement. John Calvin is reported to have said about this: 'How the name of Jeremiah crept in I confess I do not know, nor do I give myself much trouble to inquire. The passage itself plainly shows the name of Jeremiah has been put down by mistake instead of Zechariah, for in Jeremiah we find nothing of the sort, nor anything that even approaches it.' The Dean of Westminster quoted this passage to prove that Gospel narratives are not necessarily 'historical accounts of what actually occurred.'

Alford calls it a 'slip of the pen.' Augustine said

that Matthew was only quoting 'from memory.' John Haley commented: 'It is obviously a mistake, either made by Matthew or by subsequent transcribers. The prophecy was uttered by Zechariah, not Jeremiah'."

Johnson suggests that "a more probable solution comes when we realize that Matthew does not say it was written by Jeremiah, but 'spoken by Jeremiah.' It is not an uncommon thing for the men who were used by God to write the NT to give in writing for the first time verbal utterances of some of the OT saints.... It may well be that there were sayings of some of the prophets that were handed down orally."

Again we are faced with some typical apologetic distortions of Scripture. Johnson wants us to believe that "spoken by Jeremy the Prophet" does not mean it was written by him. Yet, this flies in the face of that which can be found elsewhere in the Book of Matthew. Matthew 1:22 says "all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet saying" and the text then goes on to repeat Isaiah 7:14. In other words, it was written. Matthew 2:15 says "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet saying" and the text then goes on to quote Hosea 11:1. Matthew 2:17 says "then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremy the prophet saying" and the text then goes on to quote Jeremiah 31:15. Matthew 3:3 says "For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Isaiah saying" and the text goes on to quote Isaiah 40:3. Matthew 4:14, 8:17, 12:17, 13:35, 21:4, 22:31, and 27:35 continue the same pattern. Every time Matthew said something was spoken by an OT source, he clearly meant it was actually written down. When Matthew used the word "spoken" he meant "written", not mere verbal communication. So when Matthew said something was spoken by Jeremy the prophet, the problem becomes one of finding it in the Book of Jeremiah, which is impossible.

Johnson resorts to an even weaker defense by citing J. Sidlow Baxter's explanation. The latter states in regard to the absence of anything of relevance in Jeremiah, "Perhaps we need say no more on this point. It is not one on which anyone can speak with absolute finality at the moment; but we have said enough to show that Matthew's reference

to Jeremiah might be no problem at all if we had fuller information. Matthew may have been writing with the knowledge and precision upon which we ourselves are quite incompetent to pass any critical judgment. We do not now possess all the data required for a final verdict...." Baxter's defense borders upon the pathetic, because it amounts to nothing more than saying: "There is an explanation; we just don't have a handle on it at present." His explanation is an amalgam of speculation and pure conjecture. While admitting he has no answer, he's claiming one exists. Apparently Baxter doesn't realize that if his premise were to rule the roost, an incredible number of preposterous claims would have to be given credence, on the grounds that substantial and convincing evidence currently unavailable will eventually materialize. Under this criterion I could claim I have the ability to raise people from the dead, and will eventually prove as much. I could claim to be god incarnate and will eventually substantiate my allegation. I could claim I am the reincarnation of Abraham Lincoln and will provide substantive proof in due time. After all, can my detractors conclusively prove I am not god incarnate or the reincarnation of Abraham Lincoln or that I am unable to resurrect others? We have again returned to the Achilles heal of superstitious thought: The burden of proof lies on him who alleges. Baxter is obligated to prove that sufficient data and convincing proof is available, and until he does, Matthew's comment is erroneous.

On page 72 Johnson confronted another problem which he would have done well to have ignored. I'm always amazed at the willingness of apologists to tackle quandries for which they are ill prepared. What's the old adage: Fools rush in where wise men fear to tread. Prudent individuals realize when they are in over their heads and back out. But not our apologetic respondents. They plow ahead like bulls in a mine field, utterly oblivious to the fact that their explanation does little more than corroborate the problem's implacability. That can't help but say something about their intellectual capabilities.

In any event, Johnson addresses the clash between Mark 6:5 ("And Jesus could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few

sick folk, and healed them") and Matt. 28:18 ("And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth") by saying, "The first verse speaks of the time when Jesus went to Nazareth. Because Nazareth was His hometown, the people there were offended at Him and did not believe in Him, thus he could do no mighty works there. The second verse says that He has all power. Once again we have a seeming contradiction.... It may surprise some to know that there are some things God and Christ cannot do, but as we read the Bible, we find this is so. Young says, 'God's inability is moral. In the material world He can do everything; in the moral and spiritual world God is confronted with glorious impossibilities.' There is nothing physically impossible for Christ. He said, 'All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.' Morally, He cannot do some things."

Johnson's rationalization is fatally flawed in several respects. First, he says God is limited in what he can do in the moral world but "in the material world God can do everything." If Johnson is going to talk about an omnipotent being, then commentators are well within their rights to discuss omnipotent feats. Again, we ask if God can create another being with powers exceeding his own. Can God create something too heavy for him to lift? Can God annihilate himself and then reappear? Can God create a square circle or a two-sided triangle? Can god count to infinity? These are not trivial, childish, or flippant questions, because they go to the heart of this omnipotent being in which Johnson places so much faith. They show he is, in fact, limited in his physical capabilities. Limitations in one area open up the possibility of limitations in other areas. Even more importantly, once limitations are admitted, the same crack appears in divine infallibility that appears in biblical inerrancy when contradictions are exposed. Secondly, Johnson directly contradicted himself when he quoted Jesus as saying, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth," and followed that up by saying, "Morally, He cannot do some things." Either he has all power or he doesn't. There is no in between. And if he has all power, then there are no moral feats he can't commit, regardless of their nature. If Johnson is trying to say Jesus has

all power but merely chooses not to do some things, then he is inaccurate when he says "Morally, He cannot do some things." He can do them, but he just doesn't choose to do so. There's a difference. But Johnson has taken us adrift. That's not what the original verses say. One says he has all power, and the other says he could do there no mighty work. It says he can't do it; it doesn't say he can do it but chooses not to do so. There's a big difference. Johnson is surreptitiously altering Mark 6:5. According to him it should say "he chose there to do no mighty work" and that's dramatically different from "he could there do no mighty work." His rationalization implies that either some people are incompetent translators, or he knows Greek better than a committee of experts. We are again confronted with the "That's what it says, but that's not what it means" strategem.

One of the most well-known NT conflicts concerns the question of who heard what during Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus. On page 86 Johnson addresses the conflict between Acts 9:7 ("And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man") and Acts 22:9 ("And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me"). While submitting the standard defense, he says, "In the first reference we read that they heard the voice, but in the second we are told they heard not the voice. At first glance this looks like a flat contradiction. (That's only because it is--Ed.). The difficulty is easily solved with a little knowledge of the Greek language in which the New Testament was originally written. In the Greek of Acts 9:7, the word voice is in the genitive case, and in Acts 22:9, it is in the accusative case. In the first instance the voice is only heard as a sound. The meaning of what is said is not understood. Those with Paul heard the sound but did not understand the words which Jesus spoke to Paul.... In Acts 22:9 the words translated "the voice" are in the accusative. They did not hear the message of the One who spoke. They heard the voice as a mere sound, but they did not hear the voice as the sound of uttered words."

To cut through all the verbiage and get to the

meat of the matter, all Johnson is saying is that the word "hearing" in Acts 9:7 means only hearing the voice but in Acts 22:9 "heard" means more than mere hearing; it means understanding, which they failed to do. This is another instance of: That's what it says but that's not what it means. If his defense had any merit, then the word "heard" in Acts 22:9 should have been translated as "understood" which is quite different, and the committee of experts who composed Acts 22:9 would have been exposed as incompetent translators. There is a qualitative difference between the word "heard" and the word "understood." Everything audible that is understood had to have been heard, but everything heard certainly does not have to have been understood. Finally, both of the key words come from the same Greek word (akouo). In every instance in the NT where the words "hearing" and "heard" come from this Greek word, they mean hearing as hearing is normally used. Nowhere does it mean to not only hear but understand.

Moving further, on page 87 Johnson seeks to resolve the conflict between Acts 26:23 ("Christ should suffer, and...be the first that should rise from the dead....") and Luke 7:15 ("And he (a young man--Ed.) that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he (Jesus--Ed.) delivered him to his mother"). In response to this dichotomy Johnson says, "Jesus is said to be the first to rise from the dead, yet we read of others who rose from the dead before Him (see 1 Kings 17:22, 2 Kings 4:32-35, 13:21, Matt. 9:18-25, Luke 7:11-15, John 11:43-44). The solution to this seeming contradiction is that Christ was the first to be raised into an endless life over which death has no power. 'Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him' (Rom. 6:9). All others who were raised passed through death again..." Johnson's constant reliance upon the "That's what it says but that's not what it means approach" leaves us no alternative but to suggest that he write his own version of the Bible and send us a copy. Time after time his defense is little more than an assertion that he has a more accurate rendition of what a particular verse should say. He repeatedly adds, deletes, or changes the meaning of words. In this instance

nothing is said about Christ being "the first to be raised into an endless life over which death has no power" or that he would never die again. Johnson has supplied some wholly gratuitous addenda. All Acts 26:23 says is that Christ "should be the first that should rise from the dead." Nothing is said about what occurs afterward, and for that reason it's irrelevant. Acts 26:23 does not say Christ was to be the first to rise from the dead and never rise again. For obvious reasons Johnson is more concerned with differences between what happens after the act of rising from the dead than with the act of rising itself. But that's not what the verses are discussing. He's attempting to shift the focus.

And finally, on page 87 Johnson addresses the problem of whether or not all Israel will be saved. It's generated by the clash between Rom. 11:26 ("And so all Israel will be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob") and Zech. 13:8-9 ("And it shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith the LORD, two parts therein shall be cut off and die; and the third shall be left therein. And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined...." In order to resolve this difficulty he says, "Paul says 'all Israel shall be saved.' Zechariah says only one-third of them shall be saved. The Bible teaches that when Christ comes back to earth He will gather the Jews, bring them into the wilderness, cause them to pass under the rod of judgment, and will purge out the rebels from among them (Ezek. 20:33-38). The passage in Zechariah teaches that two-thirds of them will be purged out, and one-third of them will come through the judgment. Those Jews who accept Jesus as their Messiah will make up the 'all Israel' who will be saved...."

Wait a minute! Proceed no further! Johnson's argument just collapsed. He quoted Rom. 11:26 as saying, "And so all (Not some, most, or many, but all--Ed.) Israel will be saved." But then he says that only those Jews who accept Jesus as their Messiah will make up the "all Israel" who will be saved. That means "All Israel" does not include all Jews but only those who accept Jesus. Obviously if that is true then all Israel is not included and all Israel will not be

saved. All Israel can not be saved when 2/3 are excluded.

(To Be Concluded Next Month)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #585 from RS of Sherman Oaks, California
Dear Dennis.

Just want to say hello and thanks again for your great publication. It is a great contribution to intellectual integrity, exposing, as it does, the fantasy world of Christian apologetics, where two plus two equals five and red is green. It's about time someone attacked the head of the snake and exposed the appalling befuddlement underlying Christian "scholarship". Anyone who takes the time to study Christian apologists and their writings will eventually see the convoluted web they weave. It's truly amazing how they can offload such drivel onto an unsuspecting public. Their apologies are really a cut below medieval science and scholarship, at best.

If we were forced to believe the arguments of apologists, we would eventually become rambling imbeciles, forever forcing facts to fit fallacies. I often hear Christians regurgitating apologetic denials like magical incantations to ward off Biblical errors. For example, when shown a contradiction in their scriptures, some of them will say the verse has been taken out of context, or the verse is better in the original Greek or Hebrew, or some other such obfuscating nonsense. But in every case when you call their bluff and read the actual verse in context and analyze the original Greek or Hebrew so that there can be no mistake about it, their argument collapses for sheer lack of support. Eventually, they are wrestled to the mat with their own spurious information and have to take the "faith" amendment. Really, they must re-examine the false information of their apologetic sources if there is to be any light on the matter. Then, maybe, just maybe, they will see how apologists work with shadows and smoke to effect their miscreant sophistry.

Christians rarely think independently and, more

often than not, rely on some "expert" with a new, "magic bullet" against the innumerable problems of the Bible. They'll read apologetic drivel till the cows come home, yet rarely will they review scholarly critiques found outside of Christian bookstores. The reason for this shameful farce is simple. They're not looking for truth; they're looking for a band-aid to cover their self-deception. They have no real faith to begin with. If they did, they would not fear getting a second opinion from independent scholars. In my mind, most Christians are intellectual cowards. They'll die at the stake for their beliefs, but run like hell when the silver bullet of reason flies at them.

I have encountered similar subterfuges, as you have in apprehending apologetic criminals like Carl Johnson. I recently talked to a Christian who had Zondervan books up the kazoo and still he couldn't answer the question: "Why does God create evil?" He gave the same response as Johnson, so I had him look up the Hebrew word used in the verses in which it is stated that God creates or causes evil. The meaning of the word includes "calamity", but it most certainly also includes "iniquity." I told him that if the verses were intended to mean "calamity" only, then they should have used the Hebrew word for "calamity" rather than using a word that means "iniquity", especially since the word clearly means "iniquity" wherever it's used in the Bible. Finally, I asked him how can anyone trust a God who creates evil. There was no response.

The more I talk to persons of the Christian persuasion, the more I realize what a foul mess of sloppy thinking they have gotten themselves into. If the propensity to believe Christian apologists reflects the intellectual development of the Christian millions who populate the earth, then we are definitely headed for a grave decline in moral and intellectual achievement. B.E. provides the only "review board" that examines apologetic authors and exposes their intellectual depravity at the root. By the way, your tape transcripts were excellent.

Letter #586 from KN of Sacramento, California
(In our 137th issue we answered a letter written by a fundamentalist to one of our supporters who forwarded the letter to us. The author accused us of taking verses out of context and he also stated, "Two

of these verses are from Ecclesiastes, which is known to be reflecting the negative conclusions and musings of Solomon after having pursued all manner of earthly amusements in a search for meaning; they do not necessarily reflect doctrinal statements." KN would have altered our response to the fundamentalist and sent us the following letter--Ed.).

Dear Dennis.

You missed a good bet in your response to JL's fundamentalist friend (letter #575, part b, Issue #137, page 5). Like many apologists, JL's friend argued that some of the more inconvenient teachings in Ecclesiastes are simply the sinful musings of Solomon in his twilight days.

Indeed, Eccle. 1:1 identifies the following verses as the words of the "Teacher" or "Preacher," the "son of David" and "king in Jerusalem." One might well identify this as King Solomon, son of David.

But now read Eccle. 12:9-10, at the end. Ecclesiastes has stopped quoting the Preacher and has returned to narrative form. These closing words, at least, are not the musings of Solomon. And they clearly say that what the Preacher wrote was "upright" and "true".

The entire Book of Ecclesiastes, therefore, has God's stamp of approval. JL's friend should have kept reading.

Letter #587 from FM of Novato, California

Dear Dennis.

I participated in an effort which resulted in the city of Santa Rosa dropping its requirement to have a prayer before council meetings, and also the city of Petaluma that changed the requirement to a moment of silence for those who wished to pray and for those who preferred not to do so.

Editor's Response to Letter #587

Dear FM.

Your efforts are to be commended and every bit helps, but I think Petaluma tarnished your achievements. Isn't a moment of silence, prayer by another name? A moment of silence to do what? What is its purpose, if not for the insidious introduction of silent prayer? Nobody has died and no tragedies have occurred, so it can't be in

commemoration of anything. Perhaps I'm mistaken, but as far as I'm concerned Petaluma has surreptitiously inserted prayer through a cleverly disguised subterfuge. Prayer by another name is still prayer. What about those who don't believe in prayer or a moment of silence? What about those who just want to get down to work and have no interest in wasting time looking at the floor for some outside force to alleviate their problems or provide assistance? In any event, keep up the good work and more power to you.

Letter #588 from MO of Chicago, Illinois

Dear Dennis.

I missed reading Biblical Errancy very much. I've read tens or hundreds of books and articles in critique of Christianity, but two among them are outstanding: Biblical Errancy and "The Case Against Christianity" by Michael Martin.

Letter #589 from SS of Kalamazoo, Michigan

Dear Dennis.

...I consider Psalms 137:9 as the SECOND most blasphemous verse in the Bible. First Samuel 1:3 is the most blasphemous verse. And yet as Ingersoll points out in his "Why I am an Agnostic" the doctrine of "eternal torment" should be considered the worst. He writes, "As a matter of fact, the New Testament is infinitely worse than the Old. In the Old there is no threat of eternal pain." Ingersoll is correct. This doctrine is the worst, the most horrible.... Thank you for making Biblical Errancy available to former SLAVES, like myself. Keep up the GOOD work, doc. We're all behind you!

Letter #590 from RS of Sherman Oaks, California

Dear Dennis.

Love your publication; you're still the tops. I'm still challenging every Christian who believes the Bible has all the answers. Thanks to your publication I have been able to totally educate myself about the Bible and I believe myself to be a competent spokesperson for our cause. It is interesting to see how many Christians are at first shocked and ultimately incapable of refuting the many counter-arguments which I have in store for them. I have a sense of total control over my interchanges with

Christians to the extent that they are finally unable to come back with a persuasive counter-argument. I owe a debt of gratitude to you.

Editor's Response to Letter #590

Dear RS.

It sounds as if you are using BE in precisely the manner intended. Keep up your excellent work, and if we can be of further assistance, please write. As I have said so often: Taking it to the other side goes to the crux of this publication. Gathering information merely for the sake of compiling data is all but worthless. We have no interest whatever in amassing a mountain of anti-biblical data merely in order to put a trophy on a shelf.

Editor's Note: Our TV game plan is as follows. So far we have created and played on cablevision eight one-half hour programs. When we have a much larger number of programs available, we intend to start distributing them to supporters who are willing to see that they are played on their local cable access television station. We will be asking people to do the following. First, contact your local cable access station and arrange for our programs to be played at a favorable time. All programs are one half hour in length. Second, buy a blank TWO HOUR-- BROADCAST QUALITY VIDEOTAPE at a company specializing in tapes of this kind. We get them for around \$3 to \$4 each from a company in Columbus, Ohio called Comtel Instruments. Send us the blank tape and we will record FOUR (4) programs onto each of your tapes and then mail them back to you. The first tape has programs 1-4 and the second has programs 5-8. Try to have each program played four times--Two times one week and two times the next week. We, for example, have a program played on a Wednesday evening at 7:00 PM and then two days later on a Friday evening at 7:00 PM. The next week the same program is again played at 7 P.M. on Wednesday and 7 P.M. on Friday. Then that program is completed and the same procedures are followed for the next program. Since each tape contains four programs, one tape should last 8 weeks or two months. If you can only get the tape played twice a week for one week, then one 2-hour tape should last one month. Once you

finish with a tape you can keep it, circulate it, give it to a local library or friend, save it for a later showing or do whatever you prefer. That's your choice to make. But we definitely need your help. This is one project that is not going anywhere without the assistance of BE's supporters. Of that there can be no doubt. WE'LL NEED YOUR HELP! Right now we are only asking you to be willing to respond YES when asked to assist. We already have 11 volunteers and hope to enlist more. If you want to combat religious superstition and the Bible in particular, then effort and dedication are a must. Mere complaining won't accomplish much of anything. The other side has thousands of dedicated volunteers, and we need to exhibit similar determination if inroads are to be forthcoming. We'll let you know when the circulation of videotapes is to begin.

Issue No. 140

August 1994

With this month's review we'll conclude our analysis of the book by Carl Johnson entitled *So the Bible is Full of Contradictions?*

JOHNSON'S *SO THE BIBLE IS FULL OF*

CONTRADICTIONS? (Part 3): Johnson resorts to the old word game when faced with the contrast between Gal. 6:2 ("Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ") and Gal. 6:5 ("For every man shall bear his own burden"). He says, "A seeming contradiction is found in the sixth chapter of Galatians. In the first verse above we are told to bear one another's burdens, while in the second verse we read that every man shall bear his own burden. In verse 2, the burdens we are to bear for one another refer to the responsibility each Christian should feel for the welfare of other Christians, especially when they have sinned. The Greek word for 'burdens' here is 'baros' and has the idea of weight, that which can

be lightened. God wants us to help bear others' burdens. There are many burdens people carry for which they need help: the burden of sin,...the burden of sickness, of sorrow....

The word 'burden' in verse 5 is 'phortion,' which has the idea of a task, a personal responsibility which a person must not shirk, which no one else can do for him. Each person is responsible for the kind of life he lives...."

Unfortunately for Johnson, his rendition of "phortion" won't stand the strain, because Strong's *Exhaustive Concordance* says the word means "a task or service, a burden, a diminutive of 'phortos' which means something carried, i.e., in the cargo of a ship: lading, or freight." Since this does not refer to a task that someone must do on his own and is the kind of burden that can be lightened, there is no meaningful distinction from the "burden" used in the first verse. So his explanation collapses.

On page 92 Johnson waded with reckless abandon into the clash between Gal. 6:10 ("As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith") and 2 John 10-12 ("If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds"). He says, "Paul and John seem to contradict each other in these two verses. Paul tells the Christians to do good unto all men; John forbids them to receive a man into their house or bid him Godspeed. There is really no contradiction here, since Paul is speaking of a Christian's duty of doing good to all men, while John is speaking of a Christian's attitude toward false teachers. A false teacher is not to be received into our house and we are not to bid him Godspeed.... We are to love everybody, even our enemies, but we are not to approve of, and support, their dangerous doctrine."

In the first place, Johnson says we are to do good to all men but not to "false teachers." Since when did false teachers resign from the human race? Despite their behavior, they are as much a part of mankind as anyone else. "All" means all, and if we are to do good to "all men," then that would include false teachers as well. Secondly, in typical apologetic

style Johnson attempts to shift the focus by saying we are to do good to all men while our attitude toward false teachers is to be one of disapproval. He surreptitiously changed the thrust of the second verse in order to make it appear as if it were addressing a different issue. Actually the first says we are to "do good" unto all men and the second says we are not to "receive" him into our house or "biddeth him God speed." Both refer to doing rather than attitudes or beliefs. Johnson is trying to say that we are to "do good" to all men but our "attitude" toward false teachers is to be negative. But the second verse, like the first, is referring to actions, not attitudes.

On page 94 Johnson finds himself entangled in one of those absolutist imbroglios with which the Bible is so bountifully endowed. He addresses the contradiction between Heb. 9:27 ("And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment") and two other verses: John 11:26 ("And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die") and 1 Cor. 15:51 ("Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed"). In order to reconcile this conflict he states, "According to the first verse above all men will have to die, but according to the second and third verses those Christians who are living when Christ comes for His own at the rapture will not have to die ('shall not sleep' means shall not die). The first verse refers to physical death, while the second verse speaks of spiritual death.... The general rule made by God is that it is appointed unto men once to die a physical death, but there will be an exception to this rule when Christ returns for his own, and those who belong to Him 'shall not all sleep,' but they shall be...'caught up to meet the Lord in the air' (1 Thess. 4:17)."

Apparently Johnson is unable to realize that he actually proved Heb. 9:27 and 1 Cor. 15:51, in particular, are contradictory. He stated, "The general rule made by God that it is appointed unto men once to die a physical death" and then admitted there will be an exception to the rule when Christ returns. He can't have it both ways. Either all men will die once in accordance to Heb. 9:27 or they won't. There's no in between. If some men will not die when Christ returns, then all men are not going to die.

Later, he all but buried himself by saying, "Enoch and Elijah in the OT did not have to die-- they went to heaven without dying. So will all Christians who are living when Christ comes again. They will be translated, changed...in the twinkling of an eye.... The God who made the rule that all must die will also make an exception to that rule when Christ comes again." Need more be said? He began by allegedly reconciling a contradiction and concluded by conceding the contradiction's existence. One can't help but be amazed at the willingness of apologists to tackle problems with which they are wholly ill-prepared to cope. With a defense like this, Johnson would have done well to have avoided this conflict entirely. One could hardly imagine a more inept explanation. In effect, he is not only saying Heb. 9:27 is false, but providing evidence to prove as much.

On top of everything else, he didn't even interpret the second verse correctly. He said, "according to the second and third verses those Christians who are living when Christ comes for His own at the rapture will not have to die." That may be true with respect to the third verse, but the second verse, John 11:26 is referring to those in general who believe "the resurrection at the last day" (John 11:24) will occur, not just those who will be living when the rapture is supposed to occur.

On page 95 Johnson sought to reconcile Heb. 11:17 ("By faith Abraham...offered up Isaac...offered up his only begotten son") with Gen. 25:6 ("But unto the sons of the concubines, which Abraham had, Abraham gave gifts, and sent them away from Isaac his son...."). He states, "The first verse says that Isaac was Abraham's 'only begotten son,' while the second verse says he had other sons. This looks like a contradiction. (Of course, that's only because it is--Ed.). The solution is that though Abraham had sons by concubines and by Keturah, and a son by Hagar, Isaac was the 'only begotten son' by Sarah, the only one in the direct line of ancestry to the Messiah, and the only heir of all the possessions of Abraham. Josephus says the 'only begotten son' means the 'beloved son'."

To begin with, Johnson needs to straighten out in his own mind his definition of "begotten". Does it

mean a son who is a direct ancestry of the Messiah, or a son who is merely "beloved"? Either way, his explanation carries no weight. Where does the Bible say that "begotten" refers to someone who is in the messianic lineage? Judges 8:30 says, "Gideon had seventy sons of his body begotten: for he had many wives." Does that mean every one of these seventy sons was in the messianic line? After all, they were "begotten". In Hosea 5:7 God condemns Israel and Ephraim for having "dealt treacherously against the Lord" by having "begotten strange children...." Although these children were "begotten", surely Johnson is not going to allege they were ancestors of the messiah? And finally, Johnson must be aware of the incredible number of times the word "begat" is used in the OT. If all of those people were "begat", then they must have been "begotten". Yet, no one with even a modicum of biblical knowledge would dare claim they were all ancestors of Jesus. So, the word "begotten" isn't used only in reference to those in the messianic lineage.

As far as "begotten" meaning "beloved" is concerned, Johnson is not only obligated to show where Josephus made this correlation but prove they are synonymous. He provided evidence of neither. And where does the text show or even imply that Isaac was the only "beloved" son of Abraham?

On page 96 Johnson leaps into another prominent biblical dilemma by trying to meld 1 John 1:8 ("If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us") with 1 John 3:9 ("Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God"). Oddly enough, he begins by refuting two of the most common rationalizations provided by his own compatriots. He states, "These two verses, which seem to contradict each other, have been a source of perplexity to many of God's children. Many attempts have been made by Bible scholars to reconcile these verses. One interpretation says that 1 John 3:9 is referring to the new nature of a Christian which does not and cannot sin. It is true that the new nature cannot and does not sin, but that is not the true interpretation of the verse. Another interpretation, which is perhaps the most common one, says that the sin referred to is a

continuous act or habit of life, and that a Christian does not practice sin. Dr. William Pettingill, in his book *Bible Questions Answered* tells about speaking to Dr. Scofield about this verse and says, 'I see you have adopted the word practice in the margin of your reference Bible relating to the third chapter of John. But, doctor, how does that help matters any? When you consider that any coming short of the glory of God in thought or word or deed is sin, is it not true therefore that we all do practice sin?' 'Alas! Alas! so we do,' replied the doctor."

In effect, Johnson has saved us the trouble of refuting two of the most common excuses used in an attempt to make these two verses compatible. As he correctly showed by his little story, to sin at all is to practice sin. It doesn't have to be repetitive. First John 3:9 says that whoever is born of God does not sin; it does not say it has to be done on a regular basis.

Unfortunately, Johnson closes by submitting a harmonization of his own that is no more sea-worthy than those already disproven. He states, "The key to the problem is found in the literal rendering of 1 John 3:9: 'Whosoever is begotten of God is never lawless, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot be lawless because he is begotten of God.' No born-again child of God will be guilty of sin in the sense of lawlessness. There is a great difference between disobedience and lawlessness. A person may disobey the Word of God at the same time he acknowledges God's Word to be right that he should obey it.... So, although a Christian can sin, as we see in 1 John 1:8-9 and 2:1, he cannot be lawless...."

Apparently Johnson is trying to prove that the adage "Words were invented to hide reality" has some validity. Not only does the Bible make no such distinction between the words "lawlessness" and "disobedience" but they aren't even mentioned. Where on earth Scripture justifies a wholly arbitrary distinction of this nature is anyone's guess. Secondly, not only does Scripture make no such differentiation but *Webster's New World Thesaurus New Revised Edition* equates the two words on page 429. If you are disobedient then you are lawless, and if you are lawless then you are disobedient. Johnson has concocted a distinction without a difference.

So, in summary and based upon what we have seen over the last couple of issues, the evidence clearly demonstrates that Carl Johnson is a firm believer in one of the most common of all apologetic defenses: "That's what it says, but that's not what it means"

Before ending our extensive analysis of Johnson's book, we can't resist citing his quotation on page 124 of an absurd remark made by Dwight L. Moody, founder of the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, Illinois. The latter states, "I know the Bible is inspired because it inspires me." If that is to be the criterion, then hundreds of religious books are inspired because millions are inspired by them. No doubt Muslims feel inspired by the Koran and Mormons are inspired by the Book of Mormon. Being a source of inspiration hardly proves a book was written or produced by God. Even more important, in no way does it prove the book is valid.

That completes an analysis of Johnson's work entitled *So the Bible is Full of Contradictions?* and if our readers have been provided with additional tools with which to examine apologetic literature more critically, then our efforts will not have been in vain.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #591 from TD of Morgantown, West Virginia (On page 2 in the 137th issue we asked a biblicist if god could create a two-sided triangle or a square circle and TD feels our comments should have been altered--Ed.)

Dear Dennis.

I think you erred in your answer to Sproul on BE page 137-2. To have unlimited power means to be able to perform any action. But there are some sequences of words that do not describe actions. For example, the sequence "to make green ideas sleep furiously" is a nonsense string. It does not describe any action. So if someone were to ask "Can an omnipotent being make green ideas sleep furiously?" then the correct reply would not be "Yes, of course," but rather "Your very question is unintelligible."

Similarly with the sequences "to create a square circle" and "to create a two-sided triangle." They are nonsense strings and do not describe actions. If

someone were to ask "Can an omnipotent being create a square circle (or a two sided-triangle)?" then the correct reply is not "Yes, of course," but rather "Your very question is unintelligible."

In order to describe an action, a sequence of words must be intelligible, which means that it must express something thinkable or imaginable, something capable of being represented by pictures or on film (if only in a cartoon). Thus, Biblical miracles would be actions in this sense because they can indeed be represented on film (e.g., the movie "The Ten Commandments"). It follows that an omnipotent being must be able to perform all the Biblical miracles. But sequences of words like "create a square circle," "create a two-sided triangle," "make green ideas sleep furiously," "make is were he if," etc. are mere nonsense strings. They do not express anything thinkable or imaginable or capable of being represented on film (even a cartoon). Some would say they are ill-formed sequences that violate rules of language. Thus they do not describe actions or anything that an omnipotent being might intelligibly be said to do.

Most of your answers are well done, but that one was objectionable. Keep up the good work.

Editor's Response to Letter #591

Dear TD.

I appreciate your suggested modification to my critique of Sproul in the 137th issue, but beg to differ with your analysis in several respects. Firstly, I think you are confusing an unintelligible sentence with an unintelligible concept. I asked if God could create a square circle, which is an intelligible sentence with an unintelligible concept. Your statement "make is were he if" is no sentence and has no concept. The mere presence of verbs like "make, is, and were" and the pronoun "he" is not sufficient for the creation of a sentence. So nothing is doing anything. If I had made that kind of comment, it would have been as if I had never spoken at all. Your question: "Can an omnipotent being make green ideas sleep furiously?," on the other hand, is a sentence and, like my query, contains an incomprehensible concept. But you have taken the absurdity in my question one step further by relating concepts that are not associated with one another. Ideas are not associated

with color and speed is not associated with sleep. With reference to my questions, however, shapes are associated with triangles and squares. Perhaps you are merely making a subtle attempt to discredit my observations, I'm not sure. But I don't think your analogy will stand the strain. If you insist the situations are analogous, then I'm willing to go one step further by asking your questions as well. Can God create green ideas? Can he make ideas sleep furiously? Of course not.

Secondly, you say that "to have unlimited power means to be able to perform any action. But some sequences of words do not describe actions." If a sequence does not describe any action, how would it even be applicable to what we are discussing, since I was asking god to do something in every sentence I uttered?

Thirdly, you say, "a sequence of words must be intelligible, which means that it must express something thinkable or imaginable, something capable of being represented by pictures or on film (if only in a cartoon). Thus, Biblical miracles would be actions in this sense because they can indeed be represented on film (e.g., the movie "The Ten Commandments")." In effect, you are saying that man has no right to ask god to perform any kind of deed that man cannot imagine or put into films or cartoons. In other words, unless man can conceive of it, man has no right to ask god to do it. God's powers are limited to what man can imagine! Or stated somewhat differently, god can only be justifiably asked to do what man can conceive. Since when is god acting only within the constraints of man's capabilities? Since man can't conceive of someone counting to infinity; therefore, man has no right to ask god to do so?

And lastly, you say, "If someone were to ask 'Can an omnipotent being create a square circle (or a two sided-triangle)?' then the correct reply is not 'Yes, of course,' but rather 'Your very question is unintelligible'." The question is not unintelligible, but conceiving of a response is.

In summary, I can't help but feel that your "God can only be asked to do what man can conceive" approach betrays an insidious religious background coming to the fore. In any event, I appreciate your

suggested modifications to my analysis and hope my observations will be taken in the spirit of camaraderie intended.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #592 from JS of Detroit, Michigan
Dear Dennis.

On page 139-5 I don't understand why SS says in his letter that 1 Samuel 1:3 is the most blasphemous verse in the Bible. Can you get clarification?

Editor's Response to Letter #592
Dear JS.

We received several letters expressing the same concern. We should have been more vigilant. Perhaps SS will write and enlighten us.

Letter #593 from EEB of Corpus Christi, Texas
Dear Dennis.

I have been aching to find a steady supply of freethought programs to put on the local public access channel, but the search has been frustrating. My first hope was a series of readings from Ingersoll's works done by a man in Wisconsin. Unfortunately, his tape did not meet the requirements of the local TV company. Your program will not either unless you are willing to change your format.

I am sure that you know the federal laws concerning public access use. The only local requirement is that "No program shall be transmitted which contains copyrighted material for which proper clearance has not been obtained." When the manager of the public access channel saw the Ingersoll tape, he told me I had to have authorization from the copyright owner of the music that was used in the introduction.

The cable company has the following technical standards:

- The videotape is previewed for minimum technical requirements.
- Access programs must have technical standards high enough to deliver clear

pictures throughout the entire length of the program.

- A label must accompany each tape cassette. It should contain the producer's name and phone number, the length of the program, the title of the program, and the cablecasting date. Only one program per tape is allowed.

These specifications are strongly encouraged:

- 60 seconds of color bars and tone at the head of the tape.
- Slate with title of program, producer and production date.
- A countdown or at least 10 seconds of black before the program begins, and 60 seconds of black after the 30 or 60 minute mark.
- The public access tape format is 1/2" VHS (SP speed) and 3/4" u-matic. All other formats must be transferred to 3/4" for cablecasting.

My concern is that you intend to put four programs on one tape, which would mean that I cannot get them on the local channel. It seems you probably use the SP speed, since you intend to put four 30 minute programs on one 2-hour tape.

I hope it will be possible for you to be a source for me. Surely you know about Freethought Television Network which will publish a catalogue of programs.

Editor's Response to Letter #593

Dear EEB.

Your willingness to assist is greatly appreciated. In regard to specifics, let me say this. Our music was chosen from a list of songs on a generic list that presents no copyright problem. Our station provides a list of songs that are free for anyone to use. Having one program on each tape isn't possible, however. I tried that initially and quickly realized that I was going to have a room full of tapes very rapidly. Even more importantly, mailing costs would soar. I can mail four programs on one tape for almost as much as it would cost to mail one program per tape. Of course, once you receive the 2 hour tape you are free to record it onto four separate tapes or divide it in any manner you deem preferable. As far as color

bars, labeling, countdowns, clarity, and so forth are concerned, I recommend showing it to your local cable access personnel to see what they think. I hope you can make whatever modifications may be required, if any. Our program's quality exceeds that of many of the programs that are shown on our local access channel, so I don't think that should be much of a problem. I'm unacquainted with the Freethought Television Network. Is it connected with the Freedom From Religion Foundation in Madison, Wisconsin? I've always found Dan Barker to be a fine gentleman, doing good work.

Letter #594 from PS of Charlotte, North Carolina
Dear Mr. McKinsey:

I would like to volunteer to contact my local cable station to arrange "airing" the television program you mentioned in the last issue of BE. The comments you made regarding the purchase of "broadcast quality videotape" on which to record the shows is not specific enough, since there are several "broadcast quality" video formats. Our local cable station uses 3/4" U-matic video cassettes, which will only hold a total of 1 hour of programming. I assume you are referring to SVHS, which some cable companies are now using, and will hold up to 2 hours of total programming in the SP speed.... Please specify what format tape you require, and I will send them to you. Also please advise the title of the show so that I can give this information to the cable station when I contact them. In order to reserve a time slot for a program they usually want to be sure the show will continue pretty much uninterrupted every week. They have had problems with people starting a project and then its fizzling out after a few shows.

Editor's Response to Letter #594

Dear PS.

I'm certainly glad you also are willing to volunteer to help in our most worthy cause. We just finished recording our 11th program, but we still aren't ready to begin circulation yet. We'll let you know through BE when we are ready to proceed.

In regard to specifics, we can say the following. The name of the show is BIBLICAL ERRANCY COMMENTARY. Every program is 1/2 hour in length. (The shows are supposed to begin with a

disclaimer by the station according to the station's manual, but they have never bothered to insert the disclaimer at the beginning of any of our shows. I asked why it wasn't inserted and wasn't given much of a reason.) Except for the first one or two programs, the format is as follows. The show begins with a 30 second color bar which is required by the local station. Then we see a Bible splitting in half with the name of the program appearing in the middle. A short introduction with respect to the program's purpose and content is followed by my appearance on a short stage speaking from notes on a clip-board. Every program ends with a rolling of the credits and a final statement as to where additional information can be obtained. ALL programs are on 1/2 inch tape only. We never use 3/4" tape for any reason. Programs are recorded on tapes that are 2 hours long, so we put 4 programs on each tape. Once I have four programs on a tape, I will take it home and record the tape from one of my VCR's to another one of my VCR's, which will have your blank tape inside. Your tape will then be mailed to you. I have no way to modify the tapes as recorded; so if your local station has some local requirements with respect to a tape's format, all I can do is ask that you make whatever changes are needed.

There has been some concern about what is meant by a "broadcast quality tape." Basically, it is a quantum improvement over the 2 hour tapes that can be purchased in most local discount stores. We use VHS Broadcast quality tapes. We do not use the next grade up which is SVHS (Super VHS) because it cannot be used on my home VCR's without damaging my equipment. The picture is better, but it can only be used by our studio equipment. So, in order to get a good picture without great expense, we record the show on an SVHS tape and then use studio equipment to transfer the recording onto a VHS tape, which I then take home and use in my VCR's. Stay tuned. We'll keep you informed as to the latest developments. More is yet to come.

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DID JESUS OF NAZARETH EXIST? (The Talmud) The thirty-second and thirty-third issues of BE discussed a group of non-Christian writers whom biblicists allege referred to Jesus in their writings. Both issues clearly showed that ancient writers such as Josephus, Tacitus, Suetonius, and Pliny the Younger are not referring to Jesus of Nazareth in their most commonly quoted passages, and only by twisting and quoting out of context can their extrabiblical writings be employed in this manner. Another extrabiblical source occasionally cited as well is the Talmud. It is the collection of writings constituting the Jewish civil and religious law, and consists of two parts--the Mishnah (text) and the Gemara (commentary). In Judaism, the Torah, i.e., the law, is the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Old Testament, and the Mishnah is the oral Torah supplementing it. For several centuries after the codification of the Mishnah, rabbis and scholars wrote commentaries on it, known as the Gemara, i.e. completion. The Talmudic comments most often relied upon by biblicists were not cited earlier because their strength ranges from poor to pathetic. But to forestall any possibility of their being used to deceive the unwary, an exposure of the most prominent references and their deficiencies is well advised.

The first comment worthy of note is found in Sanhedrin 43a of the Talmud, which states,

On the eve of the Passover Yeshu (The Munich manuscript adds the Nasarean) was hanged. For forty days before the execution took place, a herald went forth and cried, 'He is going forth to be stoned because he has practised sorcery and enticed Israel to apostasy. Anyone who can say anything in his favour, let him come forward and plead on his behalf.' But since nothing was brought forward in his favour he was hanged on the eve of the Passover.... Do you suppose that he was one for whom a defence could be made? Was he not a Mesith (enticer), concerning whom Scripture says, Neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him (Deut. 13:9)? With Yeshu however it was different, for he was connected with the government (or royalty, i.e., influential). Our Rabbis taught: Yeshu had five disciples, Matthai, Nakai, Nezer, Buni, and Todah.

Although difficult to imagine, this anemic passage is a reference to Jesus, according to some commentators. Reliance

upon passages as weak as this can't help but dissipate respect for apologetic scholarship. Obvious inadequacies are:

- (1) It says Yeshu, not Jesus.
- (2) Even if Yeshu and Jesus were identical words, it was not an unusual name. On the contrary, it appears rather frequently in ancient Jewish literature. Josephus records the following out of 28 high priests in the 107 years from Herod to the destruction of Jerusalem: Jesus, son of Phabet; Jesus, son of Damneus; Jesus, son of Gamaliel; Jesus, son of Sapphias; Jesus son of Thebuthus.
- (3) Jesus was crucified, not hanged.
- (4) Jesus was not stoned, at least not according to the biblical record.
- (5) The New Testament says nothing about a herald going forth for forty days before the execution occurred.
- (6) Jesus had no connection with the government. At least nothing within the Gospels would lead one to believe that he lived among royalty or the influential class.
- (7) Nowhere in the New Testament was Jesus charged with sorcery or leading Israel astray. The New Testament record tells of three accusations against Jesus: (a) blasphemy, (b) claiming to be the Son of God, and (c) assuming the role of King of the Jews. But he was never charged with practicing sorcery nor of leading Israel astray. Any attempt to apply this part of the Talmud to Jesus is doomed to failure.

Another passage relied upon is found in section 55b of the Sanhedrin in the Talmud and states, "The blasphemer is punished only if he utters [the Divine] name.... The whole day [of the trial] the witnesses are examined by means of a substitute for the divine name, Thus, 'May Jose smite Jose.'" This is vagueness at its worse. The suggestion is made that the first "Jose" represents God. But it is unlikely that even for illustrative purposes the rabbis would allude to Jesus as a divinity. And did God ever smite Jesus?

A footnote to Sanhedrin 67a says, "In the uncensored editions of the Talmud there follows this passage.... 'And thus they did to Ben Strada in Lydda, and they hung him on the eve of Passover.'" Although cited by apologetic sources, this clearly isn't much to go on either. As we all know, according to the biblical account Jesus was crucified, not hanged, and he was killed in Jerusalem, not in Lydda, near the coast. The names aren't even the same.

Another passage that is sometimes cited is found in Sanhedrin 106b and is interpreted by some apologists in such a manner as to equate Balaam with Jesus of Nazareth. It says,

Balaam also the son of Beor, the soothsayer, [did the children of Israel slay with the sword]. A soothsayer? But he was a prophet! R. Johanan said: At first he was a prophet, but subsequently a soothsayer. R. Papa observed: This is what men say, 'She who was the descendant of princes and governors, played the harlot with carpenters....! Rab said: They subjected him to four deaths, stoning, burning, decapitation and strangulation. A certain man said to R. Hanina: Hast thou heard how old Balaam was? He replied: It is not actually stated, but since it is written, Bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their day, [it follows that] he was thirty-three or thirty-four years old. He rejoined: Thou has said correctly; I personally have seen Balaam's chronicle, in which it is stated, 'Balaam the lame was thirty years old when Phinehas the Robber killed him.

Believe it or not, that nebulous maze of disjointed monologue is used as a reference to Jesus of Nazareth. Apparently some Christian apologists just couldn't resist the temptation when they read such emotionally charged words as "prophet," "she/carpenters," "subjected/deaths," "slain by Israel," and "thirty-three." The discrepancies between the life of Balaam and Jesus are numerous.

- (a) Balaam was slain with a sword, while Jesus died by crucifixion.
- (b) The father of Jesus was not named Beor, nor was he a soothsayer.
- (c) One would be hard pressed to find biblical support for allegations that Jesus died by stoning, burning, decapitation and strangulation. Incidentally, how could he have died by all four methods? In order to make sense, "and" should have been translated as "or".
- (d) If "she" is referring to the mother of Jesus, this passage is saying she was a harlot with many carpenters (plural).
- (e) If Jesus is Balaam, then the passage is implying Jesus is bloody and deceitful.
- (f) When did Jesus keep a chronicle, especially one relating his age or death?
- (g) Jesus was never lame, and certainly not for thirty years.
- (h) The names Jesus and Balaam are quite different.
- (i) And finally, Jesus was not killed by someone named Phinehas the Robber.

It doesn't take a great deal of wisdom to see that apologists are stretching interpretation to the limits on these.

A short little comment found in the footnotes of Sanhedrin 107b says, "In the uncensored editions there follows here, 'and not like R. Joshua b. Perahjah, who repulsed Jesus (the Nazarene) with both hands.'" The problem with this sentence is that only the Munich manuscript adds (the Nazarene).

Another footnote in Sanhedrin 107b says, .

..When King Jannai slew our Rabbis, R. Joshua b. Perahjah (and Jesus) fled to Alexandria of Egypt. On the resumption of peace, Simeon b. Shetach sent to him.... He arose, went, and found himself in a certain inn, where great honour was shewn him.... He (Jesus) thinking that it was to repel him, went, put up a brick, and worshipped it. 'Repent,' said R. Joshua to him. Jesus replied, 'I have thus learned from thee: He who sins and causes others to sin is not afforded the means of repentance.' And a Master has said, 'Jesus the Nazarene practised magic and led Israel astray.'

Although hard to realize, this is the more intelligible part of the entire passage. Again, one can see how desperate some apologists are to find something in the Talmud that can substantiate the alleged existence of Jesus of Nazareth. The attraction of "fled to Egypt," an "inn," "Jesus the Nazarene," "led Israel," and "sin/repentance" were more than they could resist. The problems with this are readily apparent.

- (a) Jesus was not a rabbi when he fled to Egypt.
- (b) The New Testament says nothing about Jesus fleeing to Alexandria, Egypt.
- (c) When did Jesus ever worship a brick? The worship of bricks is known in the Hermes cult, and is not Christian.
- (d) According to apologetic theology, Jesus neither sinned nor caused others to sin.
- (e) Jesus was not a contemporary of King Jannai.
- And (f) while the Munich, Florence, and Karlsruhe manuscripts and the early printed editions of the Talmud mention Yeshu, only the Munich text adds "the Nazarene."

That's about as coherent as these passages can be rendered.

Another passage of equal clarity is found in Abodah Zarah 17a which says,

I was once walking in the upper-market of Sepphoris when I came across one [of the disciples of Jesus the Nazarene] Jacob of Kefar-Sekaniah by name who said to me.... To which I made no reply. Said he to me: Thus was I taught [by Jesus the Nazarene], 'For the hire of a harlot hath she gathered them and unto the hire of a harlot shall they return.' They came from a place of filth, let them go to a place of filth.

Again, the power of imagination appears to have been overwhelming.

- (a) How does the mere mention of a disciple of Jesus prove that Jesus lived?
- (b) The reference to Jesus only occurs in the Munich manuscript.
- (c) And nowhere in the Gospels can one find the quote that was attributed to Jesus.

A final passage from the Mishnah itself, as opposed to the Gemara, is found in Yebamoth 49a, which says, "I found a roll of genealogical records in Jerusalem, and therein was written, 'so-and-so is a bastard [having been born] from [a forbidden union with] a married woman,' which confirms the view of R. Joshua."

Some people actually see Jesus in this. The problems are:

- (a) Jesus was born in Bethlehem, not Jerusalem.
- (b) Although technically speaking, Jesus was a bastard since his parents were not married, one is hardpressed to understand how apologists would want to use a passage that is so derogatory toward him.

To skirt this difficulty some writings say, "A certain person was illegitimately born of a married woman." The word "illegitimate" is a euphemism. In addition, "a certain person" could apply to thousands of Middle Eastern people, and Mary was not married.

In summary, the Talmud has no independent tradition about Jesus; all that it says of him is merely an echo of Christian and Pagan legends, which it reproduces according to the impressions of the second and later centuries. The Talmud has "borrowed" its knowledge of Jesus from the Gospels. When Josephus is excluded from the Jewish witnesses to the historicity of Jesus, there remains only the question of whether or not there may be some other evidence in the other Jewish literature of the time, in the Talmud, for instance. The answer is no.

Most readers should now be able to understand why this whole topic of Jesus and the Talmud was given such low priority and is only now being discussed.

REVIEWS

On page 86 in *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* apologist Josh McDowell refers to some Talmudic passages, including some discussed earlier, to prove the historicity of Jesus. Essentially all he did was scour the Talmud for any sentence, phrase, or passage that could possibly be twisted in such a manner as to refer to Jesus. Context was deemed irrelevant. For example, on page 86 McDowell quotes the Talmud as saying, "The Amoa 'Ulla' ('Ulla' was a disciple of R. Youchanan and lived in Palestine at the end of the third century.) adds: 'And do you suppose that for (Yeshu of Nazareth) there was any right of appeal? He was a beguiler, and the Merciful One hath said: 'Thou shalt not spare neither shalt thou conceal him,' It is otherwise with Yeshu, for he was near to the civil authority."

Besides the fact that this passage is so vague that hundreds of people could be under consideration, allegations are included that should exclude Jesus, according to apologetic propaganda and the Gospels. For McDowell to cite as a source a passage which refers to Jesus as a beguiler is rather interesting, to say the least. I'm surprised he would admit it. Secondly, if Jesus was near to the civil authority, then McDowell is obligated to cite chapter and verse for corroboration.

McDowell cites Yeb. IV 3, 49a ("R. Shimeon ben Azzai said [concerning Jesus]: 'I found a genealogical roll in Jerusalem wherein was recorded, Such-an-one is a bastard of an adulteress'") for his own purposes. He is uncomfortable with the word "bastard." So, he quotes Klausner who redefines bastard by saying,... "What is a bastard? Everyone whose parents are liable to death by the Beth Din." Now McDowell feels that he can comfortably quote Klausner's final conclusion, "That Jesus is here referred to seems to be beyond doubt." After disassociating Jesus from the word *bastard*, McDowell feels he can now claim that "beyond doubt" his passage is referring to Jesus. He neglects to mention the fact that the reason they are punishable by death at the hands of Beth Din is that they are participating in a forbidden union. To be specific, the passage says, "so-and-so is a bastard [having been born] from [a forbidden union with] a married woman..." A footnote to this passage says, "Such a union is

punishable by death at the hands of Beth Din." The essence of McDowell's deception lies in the fact that he made it look as if a bastard was anyone who was liable to death by Beth Din, as if Beth Din were some kind of uncontrollable murderer, when they are to be killed by Beth Din because they engaged in an illicit relationship that gave rise to a bastard. So, if it were referring to Jesus, then Jesus would be a bastard, and for McDowell to say it "seems to be beyond doubt" that Jesus is being referred to speaks for itself. McDowell is calling his saviour a derogatory name.

Other Talmudic passages are available for discussion, but there is a limit beyond which imprecision, speculation, and imagination should not be allowed to go. That point has been reached..

Over the years we have repeatedly critiqued apologetic books of one sort or another on a wide variety of topics. But there are also many books and pamphlets corroborating our contentions on various issues and they deserve at least one hearing. After all, there is no sense in just reviewing books with which we disagree. And also it might be well to lighten up a bit after enduring the agony of a Talmudic excursion. Since it would be wholly impractical to quote everything available on the market, we have decided to extract from our personal portfolio some comments that are poignant, appropriate, entertaining, or amusing as the case may be.

SLAVERY--In a pamphlet entitled "Christianity and Slavery" Chapman Cohen says on page 3,
The twenty-fifth chapter of Leviticus contains a full permit to own slaves, with some interesting rules as to their cost and treatment.... In the twenty-seventh chapter there is a scale of prices that are to be paid for slaves.... In the New Testament there is no condemnation of slavery. Jesus accepted it as a settled institution.... Jesus was never at any time appealed to for help in abolishing slavery. His teaching of non-resistance, and Paul's teaching that slaves were to be obedient to their masters, whether the masters were good or bad, held out no hope for the slave. It should be remembered that the translation of the Greek word slave is given in the New Testament as 'servant.' Honesty of interpretation or translation has never been a strong feature with Christian apologists.... Our endeavor here is merely to show that there was no clear word of condemnation of slavery in either the Old Bible or the New Testament.

Quoting Renan on page 6 Cohen says, "Christianity never said

that slavery is an abuse.... The idea never came to the Christian doctors.... No word occurs in all the ancient Christian literature to preach revolt to the slave.... Never is the master Christian who has Christian slaves compelled to free them."

And on page 7 Cohen quotes Professor Westermarck who says in his *Origin and Development of Moral Ideas*, "Christianity recognized slavery from the beginning. In the early ages martyrs possessed slaves, and so did abbots, bishops, popes, monasteries, and churches.... The Church was concerned with saving souls. Slavery of the body or mind did not matter."

FUNDAMENTALISM--On page 29 in a pamphlet entitled "Religious Bunk Over the Radio" published by Haldeman-Julius, L. M. Birkhead answers liberal critics of publications like BE by saying, Why bother about campaigns against the fundamentalists? Let them alone! Why stew and fret and work one's self up over such insignificant, stupid people? Let science, education, books, magazines, travel, more rapid means of communication, the industrial revolution, a better knowledge of comparative religions, and time do their work. And then fundamentalism will be as dead as a doornail. Such is the line of reasoning of the majority of liberals.

The only trouble with this attitude is that there is a menacing possibility that the above enumerated forces have not, and are not likely to have, a chance at the fundamentalists. The fundamentalist millions might be cured of their fundamentalism if they could have a thorough exposure to the liberating forces of the modern world. It is just possible, however, that the fundamentalists may put these forces into a theological strait-jacket. The battle in behalf of liberalism has by no means been won yet. Right off, I must break down and confess that I number myself among the minority of liberals--I mean the minority that 'views with alarm' the rise of fundamentalism. I must also admit that I have actually been out campaigning against the fundamentalists.

On page 32 Birkhead says, "The great majority of the liberals do not appreciate the temper and tactics of the fundamentalists. The fundamentalists mean business. They propose to capture the reins of government and make modernists, liberals, atheists, Unitarians, etc. bow down and put their necks in the yoke of medieval theology."

Later on page 43 Birkhead proves BE is by no means alone in its thrust toward rationality by saying,

The one thing on which the hand of modernists, atheists, agnostics, liberals, etc. must not be laid, is the Bible. Fundamentalists rave, storm, shout, and denounce when the Bible is criticized. When I was speaking on 'The Truth About the Bible,' in Oklahoma City, I mentioned particularly the historical inaccuracies in the Bible, the contradictions, the unworthy ideas of God, and then came to a discussion of the inadequacy of the teachings of Jesus. When I began to point out the contradictions in the teachings of Jesus, the belief of Jesus in devils as the cause of disease, and the fact that Jesus cursed a fig tree because it did not bear fruit out of season, a lady with her ten-year old son, became very restless, squirmed about in the seat, mumbled some words, and suddenly jumping up, shouted, 'I protest,' and, grabbing her son, left the church. As she walked hurriedly down the aisle, she made a most peculiar, 'sput, sput' sort of noise. It sounded something like the sputtering of a small motor boat out on a lake. As she went sputtering out the door, someone said, 'That's fundamentalist language.'

In that same address on the Bible, I pointed out some of the unfulfilled promises in the Bible, among others the warning to Adam by Yahweh that in the day that he ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, he would die. I mentioned the fact that according to the Bible, Adam lived several hundred years after eating of the forbidden fruit, and the promise that he was to die on the day that he ate the fruit didn't come true. A very belligerent looking fundamentalist gentleman stood up, pointed his finger at me, and shouted, 'But he died, didn't he?'

One can't help but note the similarity between Birkhead's situation and ours, even though everything he said was written in 1929.

JESUS--Ruth Green made a poignant observation with respect to Jesus on page 205 in her book *The Born Again Skeptics Guide to the Bible*,

Much of the morality taught by Jesus is impractical to the point of the absurd: Turn the other cheek, pay double damages, judge no one's behavior, go farther than forced to go, don't use your mind but be as children, sell all and give the proceeds to the poor (thus becoming poor yourself), have no thought for the morrow, make no plans, don't worry about food and clothing, be passive and meek, let everybody walk all over you, love people who persecute you as much as those who are kind to you and have regard for your feelings, be mournful, be smug and self-righteous and goad

others into mistreating you, forsake everything of this world in preparation for the next, agree with everyone, deny sexual urges, mutilate yourself, have no deep love for your family and seriously consider deserting them, if robbed give the thief the same amount again, don't resist attackers but let them abuse you once more, avoid coarse people not on your level, accept every misfortune gratefully, don't share your culture with dolts, and behave as you please as long as you finally repent.

Anyone well acquainted with the Gospels knows the high degree to which Green's observations are applicable to Jesus.

In so far as scriptural information on the life of Jesus is concerned, John Jackson said the following on page 8 in *Pagan Origins of the Christ Myth*,

The paucity of our information concerning the Christian savior is concisely expressed by Mr. Robert Keable, in his work, *The Great Galilean*: 'No man knows sufficient of the early life of Jesus to write a biography of him. For that matter, no one knows enough for the normal *New York Times* obituary notice of a great man. If regard were had to what we should call, in correct speech, definitely historical facts, scarcely three lines could be filled. Moreover, if newspapers had been in existence, and if that obituary notice had had to be written in the year of his death, no editor could have found in the literature of his day so much as his name. Yet few periods of the ancient world were so well documented as the period of Augustus and Tiberius. But no contemporary knew of his existence.... His first mention in any surviving document, secular or religious, is twenty years after.

INTERPRETATION--On pages 52 and 53 in *Lucifer's Handbook* (A tactically questionable title) Lee Carter says, The great bulk of the Bible is made up of stories, poetry, and parables which are ambiguous enough to enable anyone to read anything he pleases into them.... no one can believe all the Bible; if one is to believe any of it, it is necessary to select a few passages which agree with each other on some point that one already believes anyway and ignore all the rest. However, any group of passages is just as valid (or as invalid) as any other, and the result is the thousands of Protestant sects, or denominations.... The very reason there are different sects is that they cannot agree on which parts are literal and which metaphor.

Later on page 68 he says, "It should be apparent to all by now that the Bible is so ambiguous, and says so many different things, that anyone can take a passage out of context here, and another

there, and piece them together to form any kind of doctrine he pleases, then claim the Scriptures prove him right."

SCRIPTURE AND MENTAL HEALTH--While discussing religion and mental health, Carter makes the following blunt comments on page 75,

Until the advent of modern psychiatry, the deranged have always been considered holy men. In fact, according to historian Vardis Fisher, the Hebrew word for 'prophet,' and 'lunatic' was one and the same. Epileptics were thought to be seized by God--catatonics to have left their bodies--hebephrenics to be speaking in angelic tongues. Psychotics have always been the shamen, seers, prophets, witch-doctors, wizards, and oracles--up until now. Today, a potential Jeremiah, or John the Baptist is simply kept under sedation. But since we cannot reach the ones of the past to examine their blood chemistry..., many assume they must have been the real article.

On the next page he states, "In point of fact, much sociological data is now available which indicates that the more devoutly 'religious' a person, the more likely he is to be mentally disturbed." And he concludes his powerful assault by saying on page 66,

Any psychologist, social worker, and prison warden can easily explain the simplest way to make a criminal. Take one otherwise normal child, or adult, and repeatedly humiliate him until he has no pride, dignity, or self-respect left. We then have an ideal Christian. We also have a criminal. A person who no longer respects himself can no longer respect anything. One who does not love himself, cannot love anything. If he hates himself, he hates the world.

EDITOR'S NOTE: We would like not only to advertise but endorse the publication entitled *THE SKEPTICAL REVIEW*. The editor, Farrell Till, is a former fundamentalist minister who critiques the Bible in a manner very similar to that found in BE. Based upon several phone conversations and the content of *TSR*, I find him to be both genial and knowledgeable. For a copy of his periodical write to Skepticism, Inc., P.O. Box 717, Canton, Illinois 61520-0717 or phone (309) 647-4764

P.S. Since *TSR* has been available for approximately four years and appears to have staying power, our subcaption has been altered accordingly.

Issue No. 142

October 1994

For a long time we have had a policy of periodically devoting an entire issue to letters from readers. This month's edition marks another addition to that sequence.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #595 from TD of Morgantown, West Virginia

Dear Dennis.

On pages 4-5 of BE #140, you responded to my previous letter, but you seem still to have not comprehended the issue. It could be initially posed as a simple question: what can an omnipotent being do? My answer is: any action whatever. But then the question becomes this: what restrictions must be placed on sequences of words for them to describe actions? I would say that they at least need to express something intelligible. You seem to agree with me that "make he were he if" does not describe any action, but you disagree with me about the words "create a square circle". You say that those words do describe an action, whereas I say they do not.

What about the sequence "make green ideas sleep furiously"? Does that describe an action? You seemed to flounder on that example, in one place suggesting that it expresses no action because it relates concepts that are not associated with one another, but in another place suggesting that it does describe an action, but one which not even an omnipotent being can perform! (You wrote: "Can God create green ideas? ...of course not.") If there is an action there at all, then how is it that an omnipotent being cannot perform it? Some explanation is needed. Here are some other sequences to try out. Can an omnipotent being:

- (1) create an if but mountain?
- (2) brightly extricate makeshift brawny flashbacks?
- (3) know carefully that a tree is brightly even?
- (4) state, season, ride, and caution one and the same thing?
- (5) see a book carefully?
- (6) paint the theory of relativity blue?
- (7) make it be 5:00 PM on the sun?
- (8) create an object that is red and not red at the same time?
- (9) create an object that is all red and all green at the same time?

My view is that all of the examples are unintelligible. I would not say (as R.C. Sproul apparently would) that the answer to them is "No". I would say, instead, that there can be no answer because no intelligible question is being asked. And it follows from that that there is no action described in any of them. You said in BE 137-2 that "omnipotence" is an absolutist word that allows no exceptions. So in that case you ought to be able to apply to the above examples and come up with answers to the nine questions. What are your answers to them?

Editor's Response to Letter #595

Dear TD.

With all due respect, you are repeating yourself. All you are doing is adding additional examples to the same point you made with your "make he were he if" illustration. So all I can do is ask you to reread the answer I gave earlier. You say I "have not comprehended the issue" and tended to flounder when I think the floundering lies elsewhere. You say words need to describe actions and "express something intelligible" but immediately reinterpret that to mean "express something possible." Sentences don't have to express something intelligible. All they have to do is "be intelligible." When I ask if God can create a square circle or a two-sided triangle that is clearly referring to an action. Your first, second, third, and fourth examples are unintelligible because the sentence (assuming an omnipotent being is the subject) in which they are contained is itself unintelligible. The problem lies not with the concept being conveyed, because we never get that far. The problem lies with the sentence itself. That's the problem with your "make he were he if" example as well. On the other hand, your seventh, eighth, and ninth examples are intelligible sentences but convey unintelligible concepts. They are like asking God to create a square circle or a two-sided triangle. The sentence is intelligible but the idea conveyed is not. As I said in the 140th issue, you are confusing an unintelligible sentence with an unintelligible concept. The biblical ideas of someone being both God and man simultaneously (the Trinity), predestination directing a free-willed human being, and the emergence of evil in a world created by a perfectly good being are excellent examples of unintelligible Christian concepts that can be put into intelligible sentences. Christians constantly say, for example, "Jesus was God and man simultaneously." According to you that is an unintelligible sentence, on a par with "make he were he if." I disagree. The sentence is intelligible but the concept it is attempting to convey is not. According to you, the sentence "Can God count to infinity?" is unintelligible. Again, I disagree. The sentence is intelligible, while the act or concept is not.

Letter #596 from DM of Pasadena, California

Dear Mr. McKinsey.

I have to agree with TD's final conclusion (Letter #591). Since all triangles have three sides by definition, there can never be such a thing as a two-sided triangle. When we use the word "triangle" in the mathematical sense we are referring to a three-sided figure. Whatever two-sided figure God might create, whether we could comprehend it or not, would not fit our idea of a "triangle."

I would go one step further and say that an all-powerful god could not create a three-sided triangle or a round circle! When we draw a triangle we are not creating a triangle. Rather, we are creating an approximation in graphite or ink of an abstract concept. Being an idealized concept, a triangle is not an object which can be created or destroyed. It has neither substance nor beginning nor end in time or space. Therefore, it makes no sense to speak of a triangle as being created or destroyed....

I enjoyed your handling of Johnson's attempt to explain away a number of Bible contradictions. The contradictions you selected were excellent. You really nailed his hide to the ground!

Editor's Response to Letter #596

Dear DM.

You may agree with TD's conclusion, but your reasoning is different. In simple terms, all you are saying is that God can't do it because it can't be done. I couldn't agree more. You say that "whatever two-sided figure God might create, whether we could comprehend it or not, would not fit our idea of a 'triangle'." Precisely! In other words, God can't make a two-sided triangle. It can't be done, even by a being with alleged unlimited powers. So how could he have totally unlimited powers? How could he be omnipotent, when there are feats even he can't accomplish? I appreciate your compliments regarding Johnson.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #597 from Mickey Jako of 4 Chickering Court, Andover, Mass. 01810

(Mickey is a believer in the philosophy of Thomas Paine (deism) and specializes in making audio tape recordings of his meetings with Christian fundamentalists. What follows are some of his conclusions, based upon numerous encounters--Ed.).

(a name="libxtian">STRAWMANISH STUFF I think the liberal Christian, in fact I would say, the average Christian, views things like disputing the Noah's ark story as a "strawmanish"

endeavor, as somehow a bit spiritually immature or retarded, or foolishly literalist. They would say that surely there are many valuable, instructive myths in the Bible that do not have to be taken as literally true. I tended to think this way myself for many years. But not any more; and here's why.

Christianity, whether fundamentalist or liberal, rests on the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus...believed in the literal truth of the OT accounts! He does not refer to them as mere stories; he refers to them as actual happenings. The flood, in Matt. 24:37-41. Lot's wife turning into salt, in Luke 17:32-33. Jonah and the whale, in Matt. 12:40. I just recently spoke to an astute minister who agreed with me, that Jesus regarded these stories as literally true, because he does not refer to them as "the story of" or "the parable of" but simply straightforwardly as actual occurrences.

Therefore, if Jesus considers these things as actual happenings, and if such accounts can be shown to be literally impossible, then Jesus is not the son of God, and Christianity is not valid. I believe one cannot judge the validity of Xity by selecting parts of only certain teachings of Jesus and probing them for their deep spiritual insight. Instead, you must examine all of what Jesus said, taught, claimed, and supported, and if specific passages do not hold up, in their wisdom, in their morality, in their scientific credibility, or if they are irreconcilable with other passages, then Jesus was not divine, and was not the representative of God as claimed.

I agree with Dennis's approach here. To resolve whether or not Xity is valid, you don't go off meditating on the wonders of love and the brotherhood of man apart from the actual words of the Bible; instead, you examine what the book says, you get down to the verses, you study the specifics of key passages, like examining a crime scene, to determine the truth. I do not think it's strawmanish. I do not think it's letter-of-the-law quibbling. I think it's examining clues to determine the truth.

A 450 foot wooden boat (Noah's Ark) puts the lie to Jesus, because such a vessel could not be seaworthy, according to modern shipbuilding experts, and a divine person would have known that. A divine person would have known the difference between a mythical story and reality, and surely would have taken care to make that distinction clear to his followers.

If Jesus believed in the OT, which he did, the liberal Christian is not justified in overlooking serious contradictions in it, or labeling those issues "strawmanish."

LIBERAL CHRISTIANITY I find the liberal Christian's position to be untenable on other points of principle, also. The liberal will believe there are many paths to God. But Jesus says he is the only way - John 14:6 "No man comes to the Father except

through me." Acts 4:12 "Nor is there salvation in any other."

The liberal is tolerant, views intolerance as a definition of evil, and tends to respect the sincere beliefs of other faiths; but Jesus supports, if not identifies with, the nobleman in Luke 19:27, who says, "Bring here those enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, and slay them before me."

The liberal regards errors in the Bible as largely irrelevant, but Jesus said in John 10:35 "Scripture cannot be broken." I say you cannot, as a liberal Christian, consider Jesus to be the essential source of divine wisdom, and simultaneously disagree with what he says.

THE SPIRITUAL SCAM Christians approach Biblical passages with the **PRESUMPTION** that divine wisdom underlies them, and then proceed to play fast and loose with what the passage actually says, so that they get something positive out of it, regardless. For example, Jesus can get away with saying you can move mountains (Mark 11:23-24) and Christians marvel at his wisdom and "advanced spirituality," instead of saying, "Man, that's simply not true, that's utopian, that's just rhetoric, you're feeding people's fantasies, you're just selling dreams!"

Of course, if you make that criticism, Christians respond by firing their all-purpose bazooka...their master mental trick: Jesus was speaking figuratively! not literally! **FIGURATIVELY!**

Oh, I beg to differ. **HE MOST CERTAINLY WAS NOT!!** Read the passage. If he meant figuratively, he would have given some indication that that's what he meant, saying something like "If there is a mountain **IN YOUR HEART**, you can move it." The moving mountains comment immediately follows Peter's astonishment at the **PHYSICAL**, repeat **PHYSICAL**, miracle of the withered fig tree.

No, I think Jesus and the NT writers were just prone to overblown rhetoric, overstatements, telling people what's exciting to hear. It's promiscuous spirituality, in my opinion. Jesus taught the greatest spiritual idea, regardless of reality--which is not the greatest spiritual idea, only the most temporarily exciting. The greatest spiritual ideas must be rooted in reality.

I'm reminded of one of the Who's songs, a song called "It's Hard." The lyric goes, "any kid can fly, but only a few can land." If you fly with the idea that you can move a mountain by just commanding it to move, you're going to crash. That's not wisdom, that's dumb.

It's so dishonest, all this making excuses for the Bible and Jesus. All this forced figurative interpretation. I'm not the literal-minded dummy that can't grasp the spiritual aspects of passages. I'm very spiritual. I see spiritual aspects, if they're there. The Christian is the dummy who won't read it for what it says. He has

a vested psychological interest in positive spin, and in drawing sense out of nonsensical passages. Not me. Not any more. I've studied it long enough and hard enough. There's too much indisputable evidence that Christianity is flawed at its very core.

I think it's one of the most extraordinary intellectual scams of human history, how everyone gives Jesus all this extra credit! Even atheists tend to think of Jesus as at least a good moral teacher. But read the book! Read the passages objectively. Step outside your cultural conditioning. Stop distorting many of his dubious teachings into presumed pearls of wisdom.

Stop making excuses for Jesus, simply because you want or need to believe in an ideal man. Believe in some of the ideals you've seen in Jesus, yes, believe in those ideals, but don't believe in Jesus as that ideal man, because I don't think he was. Jesus as a whole doesn't cut it; only parts of him do.

You can believe, for example, in the spirit of generosity, without believing in Santa Claus. You can believe in love and compassion, without believing in Jesus. Don't tie the reality of a spiritual quality to the reality of a myth describing it. That's immature.

Rejecting Jesus as the Son of God does not mean rejecting some of the good values he espoused, although that is exactly the box Christianity tries to lock you into. Christianity does NOT have a monopoly on good spiritual values, nor is it the source of them.

I say follow the dictates of compassion and common sense. Can anybody who taught and supported the things Jesus did, the things Dennis points out month after month in Biblical Errancy, be a representative of God? I think not. Myself, I take the Thomas Paine position. I believe in a different God, a tolerant God, who is deeply dishonored by those who claim Jesus and the Bible represent him.

Editor's Response to Letter #597

Dear MJ.

I think the conclusions you have drawn based upon many encounters with biblicists are well considered, and for that you are to be complimented. Keep up the good work, and I look forward to the distribution of your audio tapes.

However, I do have a few reservations. First, you say, "I'm very spiritual. I see spiritual aspects, if they're there." The word "spiritual" is a metaphysical term that should be replaced by a more accurate word such as "ideological" or "philosophical." Belief in the spiritual realm is equivalent to saying one believes in spirits, ghosts, devils, demons, and other disembodied entities. I think it would have been wiser to have said you have high ideals or aspirations or ethics or morality. Secondly, you say, "The

greatest spiritual ideas must be rooted in reality," "Don't tie the reality of a spiritual quality to the reality of a myth describing it," and "I see spiritual aspects if they're there." The spiritual realm has no reality and, therefore, could not be rooted in anything, especially reality. Third, you say, "...follow the dictates of compassion and common sense." The problem with this advice is that far too many people are doing exactly that. They are following the dictates of compassion, and unfortunately in all too many cases that represents anything but common sense. They need to think critically more and operate by emotion less. Fourth, you refer to the "good values he espoused" and say, "Jesus as a whole doesn't cut it; only parts of him do." I would go even farther by saying that those parts which cut it are far outweighed by those that don't. As our quote from Ruth Green's book showed in last month's issue, the ideals of Jesus are by no means as admirable as is commonly believed. Jesus is not only unqualified to be God incarnate, but doesn't even past muster as an advocate of a proper Weltanschauung. A few platitudes about brotherly love and forgiveness are by no means sufficient to overcome a plethora of escapist, submissive, unrealistic teachings. The negative aspect of Jesus far outweighs the positive. And lastly, by saying Christianity does not have a monopoly on good spiritual values, you are exposing the degree to which you have been subtly influenced by Christian propaganda. As is true with Jesus, the so-called "good spiritual values" are far outweighed by negative Christian teachings. Christianity not only doesn't have a monopoly on "good spiritual teachings," but the latter aren't even its central thrust.

Letter #598 from JL []of Seattle, Washington

Dear Dennis.

I wanted to share with you and all of your readers some resources that are available on the Internet computer network. There is a wealth of freethought material available to anyone who has Internet access. Some of these resources include: The Usenet newsgroups alt atheism and alt atheism moderated. These newsgroups are sometimes my only escape from the religious mindset so prominent at the Christian university I attend. These newsgroups have prepared documents called FAQs (answers to Frequently Asked Questions) which answer some of the most common arguments used by Christian apologists. There is even a 200+K file devoted just to Josh McDowell's book *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*. They have also scanned many freethought books, including many that are out of print. All of the newsgroup resources are available via FTP and WWW. The alt atheism web can be accessed via <http://mantis.co.uk/atheism>. The alt atheism FTP site can be accessed via [ftp.mantis.co.uk](ftp://mantis.co.uk). I strongly

encourage everyone with Internet access to check out the sites I just mentioned.

A second, and just as impressive, freethought web is also available on the net. It can be accessed via <http://freethought.tamu.edu/freethought/>. There are many freethought books available here (including some by Robert Ingersoll), and there isn't too much overlap with the other web mentioned above.

On a different note, those readers who are interested in the subject of evolution can contact the National Center for Science Education at ncse@crl.com.

I have been researching the alleged resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, and have found many valuable documents on-line. These have been very helpful in my research. They have also saved me a lot of money, because I was able to download them for free. Clearly this is a resource that many of your readers will want to take advantage of, if they haven't already. Perhaps other readers know of some other freethought resources available on the Internet? Like Biblical Errancy for example? When is Biblical Errancy going to get on the Internet?

Editor's Response to Letter #598

Dear JL,

Your letter was included within BE because many people use Internet. Personally I haven't gotten around to using this vital means of communication, but hope to do so someday. I'm juggling so many balls now that one more could put me under. But we intend to enter this arena eventually.

Letter #599 from DR of La Mesa, California

Dear Dennis.

I appreciate the information you publish in Biblical Errancy, and have found it to be quite useful and informative. I would be interested in obtaining all of the back issues of your publication.... I find it easiest to read and utilize materials when they are stored electronically, as I can do rapid searches for key words rather than flip through hundreds of pages looking for the example. Do you offer the back issues of Biblical Errancy on disk, perhaps in ASCII format? If so, what is the cost involved? I also operate a computer bulletin board here in La Mesa, entitled Dante's Inferno, and host several discussion echoes on religion and biblical errancy. What is your position on my quoting from Biblical Errancy articles to support my positions? When I have quoted from other publications in the past, credit is always given, as are references listed in the article or book. However, different publishers have differing preferences on how this is handled. *The Skeptical Review*, for instance, permits posting of entire articles

and distribution of their publication via the electronic media, as long as their address is always listed at the bottom of the article. Thanks again for publishing Biblical Errancy, and I look forward to receiving your response to this letter.

Editor's Response to Letter #599

Dear DR.

The publisher of *Skeptical Review* and I have similar policies. Please feel free to quote from BE at will, as long as the source is properly identified. We don't offer anything on disc, although we may do so later.

Letter #600 from HM of Bellbrook, Ohio

...in case you have not yet been informed, your latest newsletter was stamped by the post office with two PRAY FOR PEACE messages. It's up to you, but this is something that should be looked into. You might demand that you be permitted to watch the postal clerk stamp the copies. What's more, the religious message was stamped twice, right across the printing on the back page.

This nation "under God" is becoming increasingly intolerant and belligerent toward non-Christians...

Editor's Response to Letter #600

Dear HM.

Other people sent letters mentioning the postal stamp as well. As far as I am aware, the post office is a governmental agency, which has no business promoting a religious concept. In no way did I authorize or approve my literature being used to carry a message with which I am in complete disagreement. We are again faced with a blatant violation of the separation of state and church. If the message had said WORK FOR PEACE I would not object. But prayer is a debilitating mental exercise in which no one should ever be asked to participate. It makes one vulnerable to outside forces which are often inimical to one's interests, promotes sloth and laziness, advances a negative self-image, creates low self-esteem, fosters a belief in gaining something for nothing, generates escape rather than involvement, and activates reliance upon miraculous rather than this-worldly solutions to one's problems. Realistically, putting this message on our periodical is like putting IN GOD WE TRUST on our coins. It's completely unconstitutional, although little can be done. I can think of many slogans Christians would not like to see placed on churches or Bibles; yet they have no hesitation about slapping propaganda on our property.

EDITOR'S NOTE: FINALLY IT'S HERE, IT MADE IT, IT HAS ARRIVED.

Mark JANUARY 1995 on your calendar. The latest catalogue issued by PROMETHEUS BOOKS has the following ad on page 17. We encourage everyone to purchase a copy of our encyclopedia and interest others in doing the same. We need the money. No, seriously. It should be an excellent reference book, providing a wealth of readily-accessible anti-biblical information and documentation. It should also be of great assistance in furthering our cause, and could very well act as an incentive for the publication of additional writings. The essence of 12 years of BE commentaries has been compressed into 24 poignant chapters, crammed with citations and potent polemics. In order to purchase the book be sure to contact Prometheus rather than us. You might want to contact them at their 800 phone number in order to obtain their latest catalogue.

Issue No. 143

November 1994

This edition will continue our potpourri of invalid and dubious biblical observations found in a variety of apologetic sources that was begun several months ago in the May 1994 issue.

SCRIPTURE MIXTURE (Part 2)

SISSON'S ANSWERING CHRISTIANITY'S MOST PUZZLING QUESTIONS, Vol. 2--On page 4 Sisson defends one of Christianity's most absurd concepts, the Trinity. He begins by admitting, "It is not an easy doctrine" which is not only an understatement, but nothing more than a backhanded attempt to make it appear as if some rationality were involved. He later states, "The doctrine of the Trinity, however, is of vital importance to us all--not just theologians. It helps us to understand truths about God and salvation...." No. It's real purpose is to provide a backdoor, an escape hatch, for all those contradictions that are obvious to anyone reading Scripture with a reasonable degree of objectivity. He states the concept of the Trinity "may irritate your sense of logic," as if logic came in varieties. It doesn't irritate a particular sense of logic; it conflicts with logic, period. Logic has no gradations or degrees. Logic is logic, and no one has a corner on the market or a variety superior to that of others.

On page 6 Sisson defends Jesus' claim to be God incarnate by

saying, "Ultimately, we must let the Savior speak for Himself. In 7 ways He defended His claim to be God incarnate. First, He gave evidence by His works as stated in John 5:36 ('...for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me') and John 14:11 ('Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me; or else believe me for the sake of the works themselves')." How this helps establish his credentials is baffling, to say the least, in light of the fact that Jesus performed no work that was not performed by other biblical figures. He rose from the dead, but so did others. He performed miracles, but so did others. He healed, but so did others.

Sisson continues by saying, "Second, He had authority only God could claim--authority to give life. John 5:21 says, 'For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will.'" Merely because a man claims to have a power makes it true? Many people have claimed to give life throughout history. Does that mean it's automatically true? Merely because somebody alleges something is sufficient to establish its validity? Hardly! Just because he claimed it, doesn't mean he had it. Peter raised Tabitha, and Paul raised Eutychus from the dead. Does that mean they can justifiably claim to be God incarnate? Sisson's argument is pathetic!

He expands on his second point by saying, "He had authority to exercise final judgment over men (John 5:22-23); authority over heaven's host (Matt. 26:53); authority over nature (Mark 4:39-41); authority to forgive sins (Mark 2:5, 10); and authority to expound the truth of the Scriptures (Matt. 5:27-28)." Again, mere assertions prove nothing. Proof going beyond mere words must be forthcoming. Anyone could claim to have comparable powers, and we would be obligated to believe them as well, if they weren't required to substantiate their assertions. Words are cheap. Saying something doesn't make it true.

Sisson continues, "Third, He fulfilled OT prophecies, which indicated an incarnate deity as shown by Isa. 7:14 ('Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel') and Isa. 9:6 ("For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace')." Issues 76 through 80 of BE clearly showed that no OT prophecies pertain to Jesus. They proved that the child mentioned in Isa. 7:14 could not be Jesus; nor could the one in Isa. 9:6, because it says he shall be called 'The everlasting Father,' when Jesus was the everlasting 'son'.

Sisson continues by saying, "Fourth, His character and

relationship with God the Father were unique. Jesus never spoke of 'our Father' when he was with the disciples. It was always 'My Father' or 'your Father,' because the two kinds of relationships were distinct." Millions of people say "my Father" and "your Father" when referring to God. Does this mean they have the same relationship to God as Jesus allegedly did? By offering this argument, Sisson appears to have been merely trying to extend his list in order to make it appear more impressive. Apparently desperation was setting in.

He continues by saying, "Fifth, He was eternal as shown by John 8:57-58 ('The Jews then said to him, You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham? Jesus said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am')." How John 8:57-58 proves Jesus is eternal is enigmatic. Jesus merely asserted that he lived before Abraham. Why would that automatically mean that he existed for all eternity prior to Abraham? And how does that prove Jesus will live for an eternity? Jesus alluded to time gone by, but that says nothing about time to come. Even more importantly, from a biblical perspective we are all eternal. Whether you go to heaven or hell, immortality is unavoidable, according to the Christian interpretation of Scripture. You are immortal, whether you like it or not. Jesus is no more eternal than the rest of us. The biblical annihilationist who says his destiny is nowhere and the rest of mankind will follow suit is one of the few to deny eternal life.

Sisson proceeds to dig his hole even deeper by saying, "Sixth, He demonstrated His power over death and hell by His resurrection (Matt. 12:38-40). That is the ultimate proof of His deity (Rom. 1:4--'And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead')." As was shown in prior issues of BE, biblical resurrections from the dead were a dime a dozen. If rising from the dead proved one were God incarnate, then Lazarus, Jairus' daughter, the Widow of Nain's son, and many others were God incarnate as well.

Sisson concludes by saying, "Finally, He appealed to people to believe in Him the same way they believed in God as shown by John 6:29 ('Jesus answered them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent') and John 11:25 ('Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live')." Again, words; nothing but words. Mere acclamation does not make something true. Throughout history others have said the same. How can we be sure their claims weren't valid?

On pages 18 and 19 Sisson reveals the lengths to which apologists will go to close the minds of their followers, by saying,

"Jesus Christ must be fully God and fully man. If He is not, we are still in our sins.... Our task is not to explain the unexplainable, but to expound on the essential. May such antinomies (a euphemism for contradictions--Ed.) give us a great appreciation for God's wisdom and knowledge. As we discover such antinomies in Scripture, may they serve as constant reminders that God expects us to put His revelation ahead of our comfortable logic." In other words, don't think and critique; just listen and believe. Advice of this kind exposes religion in general, and the Bible in particular, to be among the most dangerous opponents of mental health and rational thought.

On page 23 Sisson tackles the free will versus determinism problem, under the heading of God's sovereignty versus man's responsibility. He states, "Twenty years ago, as a college student, I first became aware of the paramount theological controversy of all time: 'Is salvation the result of man's choice or God's choice?' I remember twin reactions. I was intellectually confused, and I suffered great emotional frustration over the issue. Two decades later I am still intellectually mystified.... I entertain no thoughts of resolving the difficulty.... the Scriptures teach both that God is sovereign and that man is responsible. It is commendable to try to harmonize both side of an antinomy (there's that euphemism again--Ed.) into one rational system, but it is not always possible...." Sisson is wrestling with the problem of how man can have free will if everything is determined by God. He tries to reconcile the conflict by saying, "The doctrine of God's sovereignty as taught in Scripture never negates human significance. God is working out His sovereign plan. But He truly depends on His people to accomplish that plan." But how can people be free to accomplish what God has already pre-ordained? Not only does God's sovereignty negate man's free will, but scores of biblical verses buttress predestination. On page 26 Sisson says, "Perhaps we never will be able to satisfy our human intellects with an answer." That's true! At least not until man also finds a square circle. While attempting to submit some sort of plausible defense, Sisson says on page 27, "In God's mercy He has chosen to save those who believe." But that can't be! The reverse is true. They chose to believe because they had already been selected. Sisson has it backwards. In concluding this topic, he tells Christians, "Don't be afraid to acknowledge what you perhaps do not understand completely." His modifiers are disarming. There is no "perhaps" to it, since no one can understand a blatant contradiction. Understand "completely"! Most Christians would be happy to understand it even minutely. Sisson concludes his sales pitch by saying, "God is sovereign. Salvation is His work. He chooses whom He wills to be objects of His mercy. But it is

also true that men are responsible for their choices. No one will go to heaven without trusting Christ. Your choice determines your destiny." How could your choice determine your destiny when Sisson admits "God chooses whom he wills to be objects of his mercy"? God and God alone determines who will be saved. Sisson concludes by saying, "Is your mind troubled by the antinomy (again read this as contradiction--Ed.)? You are not alone. Be willing to live with unresolved questions. Accept the inevitable--that you will go to your grave with questions unresolved." In other words, you'll just have to trust me on this one. Square circles are possible. Sisson's explanation is understandable, considering the fact that it's based on a book that says people can rise from the dead, sticks can turn into serpents, people can mutate into pillars of salt, and donkeys can talk. Is one any more incredible than the other?

RYRIE'S *BASIC THEOLOGY*--Having discussed Sisson's defense of the Trinity, we might note the following admission found on page 79 of a book entitled *Basic Theology* by Dallas Theological Seminary professor Charles Ryrie, "It is fair to say that the Bible does not teach the doctrine of the Trinity, if by clearly one means there are proof texts for the doctrine. In fact, there is not even one proof text, if by proof text we mean a verse or passage that 'clearly' states that there is one God who exists in three Persons."

Moving to an analysis of the sabbath, Ryrie states on page 268, "What caused the day of worship to change? All the first Christians were Jewish accustomed to worshipping on the Sabbath. Yet suddenly and uniformly they began to worship on Sunday though it was an ordinary workday (Acts 20:7). Why? Because they wanted to commemorate the resurrection of their Lord which took place on Sunday, they changed their day of worship. Christ's resurrection, the cause; Sunday worship the effect." Whether or not this correctly explains why the day of worship was changed, the fact remains that the alteration cannot be supported biblically.

BOWMAN'S *WHY YOU SHOULD BELIEVE IN THE TRINITY*--In 1990 Robert Bowman, a staff member of the Christian Research Institute, issued a book entitled *Why You Should Believe in the Trinity*, which was created to refute the misconceptions of Jehovah's Witnesses regarding the Trinity. Although the Jehovah's Witnesses are as lost as any other fundamentalist group, they at least have enough intelligence to realize that the Trinity is a concept without substance. Jesus couldn't possibly be God. While attacking the JW's, Bowman made several noteworthy observations. On page 10 he stated, "It is true that many trinitarians--Catholics especially, but also Protestants and

Orthodox--state flatly that the Trinity cannot be understood and that it is in this sense a 'mystery.' ...Trinitarian theologians do not mean to imply that the Trinity is unintelligible nonsense. Rather, the point they are making is that the Trinity cannot be fully fathomed, or comprehended, by the finite mind of man.... the Trinity can be understood, or 'apprehended,' but not 'comprehended.'" The only appropriate adjective for Bowman's convoluted explanation is "doubletalk." He says the Trinity is not "unintelligible nonsense" and immediately turns 180 degrees by exuding some unintelligible nonsense about its being understood and apprehended but not comprehended. If it is understood and apprehended, then it is comprehended and vice versa. How could it be understood but not comprehended?

In regard to the Canon's formation, Bowman says on page 22, "No verse in the Bible explicitly states that a certain collection of books is the only inspired writing to be recognized as God's Word. There is no list in the Bible of books that belong there--no inspired 'table of contents.' Yet the belief that these books, and only these books, belong in the Bible is itself based on the Bible's teaching,...." What on earth is he talking about? Where does Scripture teach the specific books that are to be in the Bible? Where does it enumerate the specific writings that are to be deemed inspired? Where does it say "only" these books are to be included? And where are other writings specifically excluded?

BLAIKLOCK'S *JESUS CHRIST, MAN OR MYTH?*--One of the most ridiculous arguments on the market for the existence of a real Jesus was made by E. M. Blaiklock in his book entitled *Jesus Christ, Man or Myth?* On page 86 he states, "Consider how impossible it would have been for the writers of the gospels, whoever they might have been and whenever they might have written, to create out of aspiration and imagination the character which confronts the reader of the gospels. Consider how equally impossible it would have been, after close association and fellowship, to imagine and graft into their story details not obviously known and observed." Blaiklock stated earlier on page 77, "And then read the story of the conversation at Sychar's well, with the Samaritan fighting her losing battle of words with the strangest Jew she had ever met. Read on to the poignant account of the Passion Week with its climax in the vivid resurrection stories, paralleled for simple reality only by the narrative in Luke. Simply read. These men were not writing fiction. This is not what myth sounds like." And Blaiklock concludes his vapid argument by saying, "It is as Rousseau said, men who could invent such a story would be greater and more astonishing than its central figure." To all of this one can only say, Surely he isn't serious? He

says "this is not what myth sounds like" when precisely the opposite is true. The events surrounding the passion, the resurrection, etc. are directly comparable to numerous myths in other religions. They are precisely what mythology does sound like, and Christianity reeks with stories of this kind. In effect, Blaiklock is contending that stories become more credible as they become more incredible. Almost any child's imagination could concoct stories as fantastic than those found in the gospels, and for Blaiklock to say that "men who could invent such a story would be greater and more astonishing than its central figure" is almost too absurd to discuss. This is one of the weakest arguments imaginable for the existence of a real Jesus and gospel truthfulness.

With respect to the character of Jesus, Blaiklock says on page 107, "There was no violence, no lashing in anger, only the tremendous power of His presence." Again, his allegiance superseded his prudence. Or maybe Blaiklock has never read John 2:15 ("And making a whip of cords, he drove them all, with the sheep and oxen, out of the temple; and he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables"), Matt. 10:34 ("Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword"), Luke 22:36 ("...and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one"), Luke 12:51 ("Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division...."), and Luke 12:49 ("I am come to send fire on the earth...."). Obviously Jesus is not the paragon of quietude his followers have pictured in their minds. In fact, Jesus even downgraded his own character by saying in Matt. 19:17, "Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God..." What Jesus would have to say or do in order for biblicists to radically alter their image of his character is anyone's guess. Christians have a specific concept of his personality, and nothing anyone says or demonstrates to the contrary, including Jesus himself, is going to modify their mindset.

LITTLE'S *KNOW WHY YOU BELIEVE*--One of the most widely distributed apologetic books of recent decades is Paul Little's work entitled *Know Why You Believe*. It's essentially a wide ranging theological defense of Christianity in general, rather than the Bible in particular. But some comments contained therein cry out for analysis. While discussing whether or not God exists, Little says on page 15, "...Suppose we knew he existed, but that he was like Adolph Hitler--capricious, vicious, prejudiced, and cruel. What a horrible realization that would be!" Apparently Little is unacquainted with the God of the OT. Issues 115 through 120 of BE clearly revealed a disreputable being of the highest

order. If Little reread the OT ,or read it more thoroughly, he might experience his "horrible realization." Then, again, perhaps, like most apologists, he would turn a blind eye to whatever clashes with his preconceptions.

On page 17 Little correctly uttered something which many liberal Christians would do well to note. He stated that many of, "those who deny the deity of Jesus affirm that they think Jesus was a great moral teacher. They fail to realize those two statements are a contradiction. Jesus could hardly be a great moral teacher if, on the most crucial point of his teaching, i.e., his identity, he was a deliberate liar." In other words, if he said he was God and wasn't, he certainly couldn't be considered a great moral teacher or a man of integrity.

While answering the question of why God allows suffering and evil, Little inadvertently dug himself into a deep, deep hole. He stated, "Many ask, Why didn't God make man so he couldn't sin? To be sure, he could have, but let's remember that if he had done so we would no longer be human beings, we would be machines. How would you like to be married to a chatty doll? Every morning and every night you could pull the string and get the beautiful words, 'I love you,' There would never be any hot words, never any conflict, never anything said or done that would make you sad! But who would want that?" How incredible! Unbeknownst to our apologetic friend, while trying to prove mankind is not composed of automatons, he destroyed heaven's perfection. Isn't heaven supposed to be the place in which conflict, sadness, and hot words no longer exist? Yet Little says of such a condition "who would want that?" In light of his inadvertent renunciation of heaven, one can't help but wonder why he is a Christian at all. Jesus is only the means to the end. The end is heaven itself.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #601 from EM of Tucson, Arizona
To Whom It May Concern:

It may be in your best interest to eliminate number four in your *JESUS CHRIST IS THE ANSWER* flyer/advertisement or make some minor adjustments. [It states, "Isn't Jesus a false prophet since he wrongly predicted in Matt. 12:40 that he would be buried three days and three nights as Jonah was in the whale three days and three nights? Friday afternoon to early Sunday morning is one and a half days--Ed.]. Those with a critical eye may catch an inconsistency in your flyer and perhaps become skeptical about the merits of your publication.

There's an inconsistency in the author's logic or the way in which you chose to depict a biblical error. Why in #20 ["In Luke 23:43 Jesus said to the thief on the cross, 'Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.' But how could they have been together in paradise that day if Jesus lay in the tomb three days?--Ed.] is three days used and in #4 only one and a half days? Do you feel that three is interchangeable with or equal to one and a half? If the three days in #20 was moved to #4, and the one and a half days in #4 was moved to #20 then the point you are trying to prove seems rather trivial. In #4 it may not have been three "whole" days, but it certainly was three "whole" nights. Thus the argument in #4 is rather insignificant. In #20 however, the argument is valid, but its weakened by the word choice in #4.

I think it's best to call attention to inconsistency and at the same time be consistent. Leave dishonesty and hypocrisy for fundamentalist publications.

If you decide to edit your flyer, please send me a copy. If corrected, the Arizona Student Atheists, at the University of Arizona, would be more than happy to distribute them with other materials we have.

Editor's Response to Letter #601

Dear EM.

I think you have confused me with someone else. Why in #20 is three days used and in #4 only one and a half days? Because that's what Scripture states. I never said "three is interchangeable with or equal to one and a half," That's what the text is saying indirectly. You've confused me with the Bible. Apparently you want me to present a biblical contradiction in a non-contradictory fashion. I certainly don't intend to rewrite the script in order for it to be more amenable to a logical sequence. There is no inconsistency, whatever, in my flyer/pamphlet. It merely highlights an inconsistency in Scripture. And we certainly don't intend to move or alter figures in order to make the text more palatable. You say, "In #4 it may not have been three 'whole' days, but it certainly was three 'whole' nights." What was three whole nights? The prediction or what actually happened? Certainly the prediction was. But what actually occurred was not. I think you need to reread the script, and after having done so you'll feel more comfortable distributing our pamphlets. We appreciate your assistance..

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #602 from RR of Altamonte Springs, Florida

Dear Mr McKinsey,

I thank you for the sample issue of BIBLICAL ERRANCY. I thought it was very good.... I spent 40 years in the Seventh-Day Adventist church and now I am having the most wonderful time of my life reading philosophy and reading about people who were skeptics throughout the centuries. I feel that those people who believe that the Bible is "inerrant" have never really read the Bible, or else have refused to believe the things it says. Surely the main reason people believe it is out of fear and from having been brain-washed.

Letter #603 from KF of Lancaster, Pennsylvania

Dear Dennis.

As a long-time subscriber I have carefully read all issues of BE and find the material well thought out and devastating to the Christian cause. You have a great enterprise going in your publication and I wish you the best.

I was thinking the other day, what's the biggest, most obvious contradiction in the Bible, especially one involving Jesus, that no one to my knowledge, even you perhaps, has managed to bring to our attention? Jesus commands, "Love your enemy." Matt. 5:44 says, "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them who despitefully use you, and persecute you...." Yet does he follow his own advice? I think not. Who's one of the biggest baddest enemies around? It's the devil, isn't it? Matt 13:39 says, "The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels." Now does Jesus love *his* enemy (and yours too)? Yes? Bzzzzt! Wrong! Far from loving, blessing, doing good to, and praying for his enemy the devil, Jesus has simply built a bizarre eternal fiery hell-pyre for him, as is shown by Matt. 25:41 ("Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels"). If Jesus, the paragon of Christian morality, cannot bring himself to do what he preaches, what does that say about the whole Christian enterprise? So much for Jesus' strength of character, honesty, and integrity. On a higher level, though, I really think that the scriptwriters who formulated Christian theology over the years went so far in complexity that they simply couldn't avoid deep philosophical contradictions such as this one. Christianity is often trapped by its own rhetoric.

Letter #604 from Greg Erwin, ai815@ Freenet. Carlton.CA 100
Terrasse Eardley, Aylmer, Qc J9H 6B5

Dear Dennis.

Looking forward to reviewing your new book. I have always

thought that it was a bit unfair of us atheists to require an omnipotent god to perform acts linguistically possible to state, but realistically impossible to perform, such as creating a square circle or a two-sided triangle. I thank you for reminding us all that these acts are merely some of the impossibilities that god is already claiming credit for, such as being god and man simultaneously; looking, tasting, and having all the qualities of bread, while being actually human flesh; likewise for wine and blood; and being equal to three and one at the same time. If god can perform these miracles, it is only fair to require that he make square circles. It is certainly no harder to make something all red and all green simultaneously than to make it be both flesh and bread, or to make $3=1$.

The fact that god's defenders so readily give in, admitting that god cannot make square circles, shows that they don't really believe in the other miracles. If you intellectually and viscerally accepted that three is the same as one, that Jesus had brothers and sisters, and that virgins can give birth and stay virgins; square circles and simultaneous redness and greenness would seem to be trivial accomplishments in comparison....

Priests, politicians, and advertisers all use language to conceal or convert, rather than to communicate. Christians, in particular, speak and write with the sole intention of justifying what they wish to believe, or forcing you to assent to it. It is rare to find one that can actually be brought around to rationality, but it is important that rational people maintain a constant denial of the truth of Christian propaganda. Every time somebody claims that the bible is a wonderful book, it is necessary for someone else to state it is not.

Issue No. 144

December 1994

HALEY'S *ALLEGED DISCREPANCIES OF THE BIBLE* (Part I)-
-One of the most famous of all apologetic works is entitled *Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible* by John W. Haley, which appeared in 1874. Because this work is quite specific and voluminous, several issues will be devoted to an examination of its contents. In the Preface Haley states, "I have restricted my attention to the so-called 'discrepancies,' that is, to those cases in which the statements or narratives of the Bible are said to conflict with one another. I have kept within the Bible. Cases in which the scriptures seem to be at variance with secular history or with

science have been left to other and abler hands." Surprisingly, that mirrors the philosophy of BE. So far so good. But after listing how biblical problems can arise, Haley begins a long series of rationalizations, justifications, and obfuscations of hundreds of the most prominent biblical contradictions. Since it would not be possible to discuss every problem addressed in his book, we are undertaking the less ambitious task of simply exposing many of the most egregious.

Haley begins with what are commonly known as doctrinal problems. The first is on page 55, and pits Jer. 32:27 ("Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh: is there anything too hard for me?") and Matt. 19:26 ("With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible") against Heb. 6:18 ("It was impossible for God to lie"). This problem was discussed in some recent correspondence in BE, and highlights one of the most intractable religious conflicts. Haley's explanation is that, "Omnipotence does not imply the power to do every conceivable thing, but the ability to do everything which is the proper object of power. For example, an omnipotent being could not cause a thing to be existent and non-existent at the same instant. The very idea is self-contradictory and absurd. When it is said that God can do 'all things,' the phrase only applies to those things which involve no inconsistency or absurdity." His explanation won't stand the strain for several reasons. In the first place, the verse neither says nor implies anything relative to "the proper object of power." It says nothing is too hard for God to accomplish, and no expressed or implied qualifications are attached. Secondly, God can't lie because the moment he lied he would cease to be God. And God can't cease to be God. And thirdly, Haley says, "an omnipotent being could not cause a thing to be existent and non-existent at the same time." He says the very idea is self-contradictory and absurd. Precisely! And that's why God's not omnipotent. If he were all-powerful, he could do it, and since he can't we'll rest our case.

On page 89 Haley tackles the conflict between Luke 11:10 ("For every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened") and James 1:5 ("If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not: and it shall be given him") on one side and Isa. 1:15 ("And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yes, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood"), Micah 3:4 ("Then shall they cry unto the Lord, but he will not hear them: he will even hide his face from them at that time, as they have behaved themselves ill in their doings") and James 4:3 ("Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon

your lusts") on the other. His explanation is, "The limiting clauses of the last three texts, 'hands full of blood,' 'ill behavior,' and 'asking amiss,' show clearly why God withholds his blessings in these cases. Moreover, the connection in which the first two texts stands evinces that these texts were not intended to be of universal application. They contemplate those persons only who 'ask in faith.' Every one that asketh aright, receiveth. The principle upon which God, in answer to prayer, bestows his blessings, is thus enunciated: "If we ask anything according to his will, he heareth us." Haley says the first two texts "were not intended to be of universal application" but only apply to those who "ask in faith," even though Luke 11:10 clearly refers to "everyone who asks," period, and no restrictions or limitations are involved. Where does the verse say or imply that it only applies to those who ask "in faith"? The word "faith" doesn't appear in either verse. And where does Luke 11:10 say anything about asking in accordance with God's will? The word "will" doesn't appear either.

Upon reading a verse with obvious difficulties, apologists often race off to find another verse that can somehow be twisted in order to escape, modify, alleviate, or counteract the original dilemma. And this conflict is a classic example. Haley has, in effect, chosen the version of God's response to requests that suits his purpose. He's acted as if Luke 11:10 and James 1:5 were non-existent, because they don't say what he wants to hear.

On page 97 Haley tries to reconcile Mark 1:2-3 ("Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the Lord: yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau") with Psalms 145:9 ("The Lord is good to all") by saying, "The word 'hate' is used here, as often in scripture, in the sense of to love less. If one person was preferred to another, the former was said to be 'loved,' the latter 'hated.' As the opposite of love is hatred, when there is only an inferior degree of the former exhibited, the object of it is regarded as being hated, rather than loved."

Haley is a past master at convoluted distortions and perverted thought, as this example readily attests. In the first place, He admits "the opposite of love is hatred," but then says an inferior degree of love, which remains love nevertheless, is hatred, which is only another way of saying love and hatred are the same. In other words, black is white and up is down. Secondly, "hatred" either means no love at all or it has no meaning. Haley is trying to have it both ways. His phrase "to love less" still involves love; yet he tried to equate it with hatred, its opposite, which is only another way of saying love and hate can be the same. The bottom line is that "hate" means "to not love at all"; it does not mean to "love less," and that's why the contradiction stands. Thirdly, he says "hate" is often used in scripture to mean "to love less." Yet

only three instances are cited.

The first is Prov. 13:24 which says, "He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him." This verse is not saying hate is only a diminished form of love or implying hate means to love less. It isn't even analogous to the original problem. Instead of equating love with hate, it is making a rather sharp distinction between the two.

The next verse is Luke 14:26, which says, "If any man comes to me, and hates not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." Apparently Haley is under the impression that "hate" in this instance means "to love less" because Jesus wouldn't actually tell people to hate members of their family. But what does it say? How could Jesus have phrased his comment to prove that is exactly what he meant? How could he have written it more clearly or more definitively? If he had meant "love less" or something comparable, it would have been very easy for him to have said just that. He could have said, "You should not love your parents more than me" or "You should not be more dedicated to your parents than to the mission I am assigning to you" or "You should be more dedicated to the cause than even to your closest relative", or something comparable. Any one of these would have been far clearer and resolved the problem. But none of them were mentioned.

The third citation comes from Gen. 29:30-31, which says, "So Jacob went in to Rachel also, and he loved Rachel more than Leah, and served Laban for another seven years. When the Lord saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb; but Rachel was barren." This is the only citation which appears to lend support to Haley's contention that "hate" means "to love less." The problem is that even though Leah is loved less than Rachel, she is still loved. Love is still present even though the amount may be diminished. How then can the verse say that "Leah was hated"? How can she be loved if she is hated? According to Webster's Dictionary "love" is an antonym for "hate". They are opposites. According to Haley and Gen. 29:30-31, they can mean the same, which will be true when black can be white and up can be down as well.

On page 99 Haley addresses the clash between Mal. 1:14 ("Cursed be the deceiver...") on one side and 1 Sam. 16:2 ("And Samuel said, How can I go? If Saul hear it, he will kill me. And the Lord said, Take a heifer with thee, and say, I am come to sacrifice to the Lord"), Jer. 20:7 ("O Lord, thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived..."), and Ezek. 14:9 ("And if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the Lord have deceived that prophet...") on the other.

In essence, God curses deceivers in Malachi, while practicing deception in Samuel, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel. Rather than manufacturing his own explanations for this dichotomy, Haley merely recites those of famous Christian apologists. He states that, "On the text from 1 Samuel, Calvin says: 'There was no dissimulation or falsehood in this, since God really wished his prophet to find safety under the pretext of the sacrifice'." Pretext! Did he say pretext? And what is a pretext if not a deception? Calvin is all but proving God is promoting deception. Haley continues quoting Calvin by saying, "A sacrifice was therefore really offered, and the prophet was protected thereby...." Yes, but the sacrifice was merely part of the deception.

Haley then offers an explanation from the German biblical scholar Keil. The latter states, "There was no untruth in this; for Samuel was really about to conduct a sacrificial festival, and was to invite Jesse's family to it, and then anoint the one whom Jehovah should point out to him as the chosen one. It was simply a concealment of the principal object of his mission from any who might make inquiry about it because they themselves had not been invited. It is our privilege to withhold the truth from persons who have no right to know it, and who, as we have reason to believe, would make a bad use of it."

This explanation is little short of drivel. To begin with, Keil doesn't even have his facts straight. He says "Samuel was really about to conduct a sacrificial festival" which is false. The sacrificial festival was God's idea, dreamed up in order to deceive Saul. Secondly, the concealment was devised to fool Saul so he would not kill Samuel, not in order to fool those "who might make inquiry about it because they themselves had not been invited." Thirdly, Keil admits that a concealment is involved, and what is a concealment but a deception, a deception instigated by God? Fourthly, like most sophisticated apologists, Keil sought to shift the focus by saying "It is our privilege to withhold the truth from persons who have no right to know it," when he knows the problem does not lie merely in the truth being withheld. The problem resides in the fact that a deliberate lie was told. There was a positive act, not just passive inactivity. He did not just conceal; he actively lied. Lastly, and of great importance, Keil finessed God's key statement, which is, "Take a heifer with you, and say, I have come to sacrifice to the Lord." It's totally false. That's not the real reason he came. The Lord deliberately told a man to lie.

On page 110 Haley confronts the clash between Matt. 28:18 ("Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and earth") and John 3:35 ("The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into his hand") on the one hand

and Matt. 20:23 ("To sit on my right hand, and on my left, is not mine to give, but it shall be given to them for whom it is prepared of my Father") and Mark 6:5 ("And he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hand upon a few sick folk, and healed them") on the other.

Is Jesus omnipotent or isn't he? Haley says, "Matt. 20:23 is rendered by Grotius, Chrysostom, Clarke, Barnes, and others thus: 'is not mine to give, except to those for whom,' etc. With this the Syriac Peshito precisely agrees." Realizing there is no possibility of escaping this dilemma, Haley has decided to simply rewrite the script by relying upon one lone version of Matt. 20:23--the Syriac Peshito. None of the 14 versions in the repertoire of BE has the word "except," and unless the translators of virtually every available major version of the NT are incompetent, his explanation is worthless. He proceeds to sink even further by saying, "The real sense is: 'It is not fitting that I should bestow it upon others.' The question is not one of power at all, but of fitness." Wrong! According to the verse the real sense is that God will pick who'll sit where. Jesus could not determine it even if he wanted to. Thus, he is not all powerful.

After discussing the omnipotence of Jesus, Haley turned to a problem relative to the omnipresence of Jesus. On page 114 he relates the problem created by Matt. 18:20 ("For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them") and Matt. 28:20 ("Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world") vis a vis Matt. 26:11 ("For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always") and John 11:15 ("I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe....").

Haley's explanation is short and sour. He states, "The first texts refer to his spiritual presence with his people; the second series relates to his visible presence, in the body. Paul, in Col. 2:5 ("For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit....") employs language of a quite similar import." But Paul's situation is not analogous, because he made a clear distinction between flesh and spirit, whereas Jesus does not. How could "In the midst" have a spiritual meaning? Jesus did not say he was in them spiritually; he said he was "in the midst", which would mean he was among them, not in them. Haley provides no evidence that Matt. 18:20 and 28:20 have a spiritual connotation while Matt. 26:11 and John 11:15 have a physical one. That's a completely unsubstantiated, expedient distinction, created purely for purposes of evasion-- in other words, a snow job.

On page 115 Haley sticks out his neck even further by attempting to reconcile Psalms 72:17 ("All nations shall call him--Jesus--blessed") with Gal. 3:13 ("Christ hath redeemed us from

the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree"). If Christ is being referred to in both Psalms 72 and Gal. 3, as most Christians allege, then Jesus is being called both a blessing and a curse.

Since that's too much for Haley to swallow, he says, "Luther and some other commentators, taking the language in Galatians too literally, have supposed that by some mysterious transference of human guilt to Christ, he actually became a sinner. This interpretation is, however, uncalled for, and repugnant to our feelings." Rarely do I agree with Martin Luther on much of anything, but in this instance his interpretation and that of other commentators is far more accurate than Haley's. The problem lies not with Luther taking the verse too literally, but with Haley refusing to take the verse at all. It's more than he can stomach. Rather than providing some kind of evidence to support his position, he merely says it is "uncalled for" and "repugnant to our feelings."

If that were all the proof one needed to substantiate a position, I could have blown away the Bible years ago. Haley has opted for one of the most common of all apologetic subterfuges: That's what it says, but that's not what it means.

And finally, Haley approached this problem from still another direction by quoting the scholar Barnes, who said, "Jesus was subjected to what was regarded as an accursed death. He was treated in his death as if he had been a criminal." The problem with this explanation is that it ignores the unmistakable assertion in Gal. 3:13 that Jesus was "made a curse." It does not say "as if" he were made a curse or criminal. It says he was a curse, period. (To Be Continued)

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #605 from RH of Hubbard, Ohio (Part a)

(RH, a liberal religious supporter of BE, entered into a written debate with a fundamentalist baptist minister named Rev. BB, who lives in Richford, Vermont. He wrote to us and said, "I am in the process of housecleaning and ran across the enclosed correspondence and because it contained references to you, decided to send it to you. You may toss it in file 13; as far as I'm concerned it should have been ditched a few years ago.... However, I am becoming aware that perhaps some good could come out of dialog with fundamentalists. You are my inspiration for that change of heart.... I just wanted to let you know of another attack on your pamphlet." Although RH waited nearly 4 years before sending us a copy of their dialogue, we are glad it was sent,

nevertheless. Their acerbic interplay involved such words as irrational, overtones of hatred and self-righteousness, hermeneutical hocus-pocus, worse than useless liberal trash, self-excusing lies, liar, pseudo-religious doubletalk, sickening, cloud of falsehoods, groundless, venomous attack, hateful disposition, erroneous rhetoric, barnyard matter, liberal bunk, slanting the truth, and insane. I think you get the idea. In one of Rev. BB's letters he states, "As for McKinsey's awful little tract, I will, in the second part of this lengthy tome, refute his alleged arguments." It is his alleged refutation of our *THE BIBLE IS THE ANSWER?* pamphlet to which we will now turn our attention. It is packed with the kind of material we love to refute, expose, and critique. Sometimes I think I'd rather debate the Bible than eat--Ed.).

As regards McKinsey's little tract it's interesting to see how the introduction already exposes his hypocrisy. First, the same man who is about to debunk the Bible as being unreasonable and inconsistent appeals to it! I know the Book of Mormon IS an unreliable and inconsistent document. That's why I would never quote from it to persuade anyone of anything other than its faults.

Editor's Response to Letter #605 (Part a)

To say Rev. BB missed this one is an understatement. He wants me to refute the Bible's validity without citing anything other than its faults. How can you show what is wrong with a body of literature without first reading it and then citing every difficulty worthy of consideration? I use the Bible against itself and he calls that "appealing" to the Bible. How is that "appealing" to the Book? What could be more destructive to the Bible than the Bible itself? The Bible is its own worst enemy. I would hardly call that "appealing" to the book. It would be foolish to focus your attention upon something else, especially when that something else is not inspired in the eyes of the Bible's adherents. Hypocrisy would only be involved if I denied the Bible's validity and then turned around and cited it as an authoritative and reliable source. I, on the other hand, deny the Bible's validity and cite it to prove as much. There is no turning around whatever. Instead, I am merely fortifying my original premise. I don't appeal to the book in the manner he implies; I merely cite it to prove my case and because it's a source to which he appeals.

Secondly, he says he "would never quote from the Book of Mormon to persuade anyone of anything other than its faults." How myopic! There are other reasons to quote from a book with which you disagree than to cite its faults. What could be more effective than quoting from a book in which someone believes fervently in order to prove that it denounces something they are doing, teaching, believing, or saying? As we have said before, BE focuses on more than just contradictions to prove the Bible is

anything but divinely inspired. Now who is being hypocritical? Rev. BB implicitly portrays himself as an open-minded individual, while admitting that he would never quote from the Book of Mormon except to accomplish a very narrow agenda.

Letter #605 Continues (Part b)

(The pamphlet entitled *THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD?* begins by saying, "I can't accept the Bible as God's Word because it contains hundreds of problems and contradictions that can't be solved, only rationalized." Rev. BB says the following in response--Ed.)

Second, to "rationalize" can be a positive effort as well as a negative one. In a positive sense, to rationalize is to employ reason to prove an assertion is rational, reasonable. If McKinsey slurs defense of the Bible as "rationalization", he's not necessarily charging the defender with doing anything other than what he urges us to do - to be reasonable!

Editor's Response to Letter #605 (Part b)

I am well aware of the fact that "rationalize" can have one of two meanings as Rev. BB suggests. But apparently he is unable to distinguish the one being employed, even after having read the entire pamphlet. Is he so immature that it must be spelled out in detail? *Webster's Dictionary* defines "rationalize" as meaning "to make rational; make conform to reason; to explain or interpret on rational grounds." That's quite true, as most people are well aware. But it also means "to devise superficially rational or plausible explanations or excuses for (one's acts, beliefs, desires, etc.), usually without being aware that these are not the real motive." If Rev. BB can't tell which of these wholly divergent meanings BE employs, then he's either in over his head or just doesn't know all the meanings attached to the word "rationalize". Then again, maybe he is just banking on his audience not knowing the widely disparate meanings attached to the word "rationalize" and wants to make it look as if BE is endorsing his approach, in which case he is more than a hypocrite; he's a deceiver.

Letter #605 Continues (Part c)

Third, it is a self-serving argument to label (and libel) one's opponents as unreasonable (or non-reasoning) without offering any authoritative proof of same. This is specious, and, again, argument by "wishful thinking". "Hundreds" is a puerile exaggeration. Sweeping exaggerations are a sure sign the individual actually knows nothing about which he is writing, and is bluffing.

Editor's Response to Letter #605 (Part c)

It's hard to believe the lengths to which Rev. BB will go to prove he knows almost nothing about that of which he speaks. Were he to read all 144 issues of BE and listen to our 24 audio commentaries, he would more than likely retract such an injudicious comment. If there is anything BE does not lack, it is "authoritative proof." Indeed, some readers feel that I tend to overprove my points and saturate them with citations and evidence. Obviously either Rev. BB has little or no acquaintance with our publication, or he's whistling in the dark. I would STRONGLY recommend that he read every back issue of BE, and then come to me and say with a straight face and a clear conscience that I'm "bluffing" and engaged in "wishful thinking." He's the one who's wishing. He's wishing my philosophy would vanish and he could propagandize unhindered.

The opening sentence to the pamphlet is merely an outline of what I'm about to prove. Would Rev. BB prefer that I just jump into my points without any explanation of where we are going and why? In his hatred of what I'm doing, he ignores one of the most elementary principles of responsible writing--a clear introductory statement of purpose and intent. If he feels the pamphlet does not contain an adequate number of problems and contradictions to make my case, then he obviously chose to ignore my final sentence, which was that the pamphlet contains "just a few of the Book's many shortcomings." Surely he is not going to be so narrow-minded as to think I would base my entire refutation of the Bible's validity on 24 points in a brief pamphlet. In truth, Rev. BB is desperately looking for something to criticize, and this is about all he could concoct.

In a real fit of hyperbole he says I failed to offer "any authoritative proof." That isn't even true of our short pamphlet, let alone our entire publication. All 24 points were buttressed by biblical citations and impeccable logic.

As far as "hundreds" being an exaggeration is concerned, I probably should have used the word "thousands" instead. "Hundreds" is more applicable to individual books within the Bible than all of Scripture. "Puerile" is only applicable to those who are so foolish as to think they can restrict the number of biblical contradictions to hundreds. And if "sweeping generalizations are a sure sign an individual actually knows nothing about which he is writing and is bluffing," then Rev. BB qualifies unreservedly. He hasn't hesitated to make grandiose generalizations concerning not only my approach, but also a publication which he has never read, and about which he knows almost nothing. It provides the "authoritative proof" which he claims is lacking.

(To be Continued)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #606 from SA of Brooklyn, New York

Dear Dennis.

Your publication is excellent and I agree 100% with your objectives in your critical examination of the Bible. The Bible, just like any other book, should be subject to cross examination and critical review. I am enclosing an item that I put together called "The Bible--The Book of the Five B's." Perhaps you may be able to use it in one of your issues of Biblical Errancy. Keep up the excellent work. (What follows is his item--Ed.)

As a result of about 2,600 years of brainwashing, most Jews and Christians believe that the Bible is: a) "The Good Book" and b) "The Word of God." However, those people who read the Bible carefully, and with their reasoning switch in the on position while doing so, will eventually come to the conclusion that it is neither. This is easily confirmed by referring to statements made by the two most famous "Doubting Thomases" and "Princes of Reason," Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine.

Thomas Jefferson - "I find some passages of the Bible of correct morality, and others of so much ignorance, untruth, charlatanism and imposture." (Letter to William Short, April 13, 1820).

In a letter to John Adams, dated October 13, 1813, Thomas Jefferson describes how he wrote the *Jefferson Bible* by cutting verse by verse from the printed book and arranging the matter that contained morality, and wound up with 47 pages out of 615 from the NT. He stated that good passages were as easily distinguishable from dross as diamonds in a dunghill.

Thomas Paine, in a letter to Thomas Erskine, dated Sept. 1797, stated that the Bible makes God to say to Moses (Deut. 7:2) "And when the Lord thy God shall deliver them before thee, thou shall smite them and utterly destroy them, thou shall make not covenant with them, nor show any mercy unto them."

He concluded the letter by stating that he could never believe that the Creator of the Universe would give such an order to Moses, and could therefore not believe that the Bible is the Word of God.

As Jefferson stated, there are some moral teachings in the Bible, but they are few and far between. The rest of the Bible, however, can be described as a book of the five B's - Barbarism, Bestiality, Bigotry, Bloodshed, and Brutality. If you do not believe this then please read the following passages. (1)

Barbarism: Num. 31:1-20, Hosea 13:8, 2 Kings 2:23-24 (2)
Bestiality: Num. 21:21-25, 21:3, Ex. 22:18, Isa. 45:7, Ezek. 5:10
(3) Bigotry: Ex. 3:21, 11:1-2, 34:7, 20:5, Deut. 14:21, Matt.
13:12, 10:35-36, Luke 14:26, John 15:6 (4) Bloodshed: Ex. 32:27-
28, Num. 14:1-37, John 15:6 (5) Brutality: Ex. 32:19-26, 34:7,
Gen. 9:20-25, 2 Sam. 12:14, Isa. 14:21, Ezek. 4:12-15, Lev.
21:18, Mal. 2:3.

The above passages are but the tip of the iceberg. There are many more. What sayest thou Brother Evangelist, Brother Rabbi, Brother Priest, Brother Minister?

Issue #145 Editor: Dennis McKinsey

Jan. 1995

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

This month's issue will continue our analysis of Haley's book that was begun in the last issue.

REVIEWS

HALEY'S ALLEGED DISCREPANCIES OF THE BIBLE (Part II)--One of the more well known biblical contradictions involves the conflict between John 8:14 ("Though I bear record of myself, yet my record is true:....") and John 5:31 ("If I bear witness of myself my witness is not true") which Haley addresses on page 117. He offers several reconciliations and begins by noting that, "Grotius takes the first passage as a mere hypothesis, 'even though I should bear witness of myself,' etc." This tactical attempt to change the mood won't stand for several reasons. First and most obvious is the fact that Grotius inserted the hypothetical words "even" and "should" which are not in the text. If you can insert words at will, then you can make Scripture say anything you want. Second, the second half of the sentence is in declarative form. It's a direct statement and nothing hypothetical is involved. John 8:14 isn't "iffy" or hypothetically written; it's assertive. Third, even if the statement were hypothetical, it wouldn't matter. Jesus is still saying his witness is true.

Haley continues by saying, "Bishop Pearce, Wakefield, and others render the second text thus: 'If I bear witness of myself, is not my witness true?'" In other words, they decided to eliminate the contradiction by completely rewriting the script and putting John 5:31 in interrogatory form. Although not a question originally, it was refashioned to escape the dilemma. How's that for objective scholarship!

Haley carries this charade even further by saying of John 5:31, "Should the common version be retained, the meaning is, 'If I alone bear witness of myself.' The Mosaic law required at least two witnesses. Jesus therefore admits that his own testimony alone would not be 'true'; that is, would not be regarded as legal proof; hence he proceeds to adduce the corroborative testimony of another."

This is the kind of rationalization that makes you want to stay as clear of the Bible and religious institutions as is possible. First, the word "alone" is neither present nor implied in the script. It's nothing more than a gratuitous insertion. Secondly, Haley says, "the Mosaic law required at least two witnesses. Jesus therefore admits that his own testimony alone would not be true; that is, would not be regarded as legal proof." But who said anything about "legal proof?" Where is that in the text? The text is talking about truth or accuracy, not testimony admissible in court according to the Mosaic law. Finally, if we are going to judge these verses on the basis of what is required by Mosaic law, then Jesus lied in the first verse, John 8:14, when he said that if he bore record of himself his record is true. If we are going to apply the Mosaic law to the second verse,

then it applies to the first verse as well. After all, what is good for one is good for the other. In John 8:14 Jesus says his record is true, but how can that be true if two witnesses are required according to the Mosaic law which Haley seeks to invoke?

On page 118 Haley confronts the clash between Isa. 9:6-7 ("The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end") and John 14:27 ("Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you") on the one hand and Matt. 10:34-36 ("Think not that I am come to send peace on earth, I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father...") on the other. He states that, "the object of his mission was peace, but a result of it would, in many cases be strife and war. Often, in securing a valuable end, we cannot avoid certain incidental evils. The object of the surgeon in amputating a diseased limb is the preservation of life, yet pain, as an incidental evil, follows the stroke of his scalpel."

Haley's explanation is without merit because his injection of the word "result" is not in harmony with what Jesus said in Matthew. He said he came to "send" a sword, not peace. He came to set men at variance with one another. This was his intent, not the "result" of a far more beneficent motive, i.e. to create peace. He said he came to create strife; it was not a mere by-product of his mission.

A conflict addressed by Haley on page 119 involves Isa. 49:6 ("I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth") and 1 Tim. 2:6 ("Christ Jesus who gave himself a ransom for all") versus Matt. 10:5-6 ("Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel") and Matt. 15:24 ("I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel"). Haley's relatively brief explanation is, "He made atonement, 'tasted death,' for every man, and the benefits of his mediation are, to a certain extent, enjoyed by all, but his personal mission was chiefly to the 'house of Israel.' And the first, but not the later, mission of the apostles was similarly restricted."

His rationalization is deficient for several reasons. First, since when did Jesus have two assignments? Where is scriptural support for the allegation that Jesus had two missions, one of which was personal? And where is scriptural support for the allegation that his mission changed? Surely Haley isn't contending Jesus changed his mind? Secondly, even if Jesus had a personal mission, that's not the issue. Where he told his disciples to go is what matters. Thirdly, how can Haley say Jesus "gave himself a ransom for all" and then say "his personal mission was chiefly to the 'house of Israel'?" Fourthly, how can Haley say the mission of Jesus "was chiefly to the house of Israel" when Matt. 15:24 says, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel?" It was only to the house of Israel, not chiefly to the house of Israel. And finally, there are no modifiers or qualifiers in the verses cited. So how can Haley employ words and phrases such as "to a certain extent" and "chiefly"?

Haley confronts a similar difficulty on the same page. Jesus said his followers were to go to the Jews only in Mark 7:26-27 ("The woman was a Greek...and she besought him that he would cast forth the devil out of her daughter. But Jesus said unto her, Let the children first be filled: for it is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it unto the dogs"). Yet, this conflicts with the behavior of Jesus according to Luke 17:2 ("And it came to pass as he went to Jerusalem, that he passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee"), John 4:3-4 ("He left Judea, and departed again into Galilee. And he must needs go through Samaria"), and John 4:40-41 ("And when the Samaritans were come unto him they besought him that he would tarry with them: and he abode there two days....").

Haley's rationalization for this clash is. "It is impossible says Zeller to reconcile these different accounts. Now the truth is that the infrequent exceptions alluded to in the second series of texts, only prove the general rule, that Christ's personal mission was to the Jews. The mere fact that, in journeying from Judea to Galilee, he passed through Samaria, which lay between the two, or that he wrought a miracle upon one Samaritan, and virtually commended another, or that he actually tarried two whole days in Sychar, does not, in the slightest, militate against the certainty that his personal ministry was among the children of Israel."

Haley is again trying to legitimize a wholly unbiblical concept. Where does Scripture state that Jesus had a personal mission distinct from that of his followers or later intent? Secondly, it's important to note that to some extent Haley built a strawman by failing to insert the most potent verse supporting Mark 7:26-27. He used Mark 7:26-27 which says go to the Jews only but omitted a more powerful verse which specifically rules out going to the Samaritans in particular. Matt. 10:5 states, "Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not." Jesus directly violated this instruction in John 4:3-4, 40-41, and Luke 17:11. Apparently Haley decided to omit consideration of this verse and cited Mark 7:26-27, instead, so he could more easily sell his "personal ministry" theory. And lastly, what is this nonsense about "infrequent exceptions"? Any exception is one too many and destroys the rule.

On page 120 Haley tackles the conflict of John 5:22, 27 ("For the Father judgeth no man; but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: and hath given him authority to execute judgment also") and John 9:39 versus John 8:15 ("Ye judge after the flesh; I judge no man"), John 12:47 ("And if any man hear my words and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but save the world"), and John 3:17. Haley seeks to escape this dilemma by playing with the meaning of the Greek word "krino" (to judge). He states, "The Greek word 'krino' has the distinct, though associated meanings of, to judge merely and to condemn. In some of the above passages it seems to be used in one sense, in others a different one is employed. Jesus came, in a sense, to 'judge' the world, that is, to determine, by means of the gospel, the moral status, and consequent final destiny of men; yet his primary object was not to condemn men, though, in the process of judgment, the condemnation of some will be a certain although incidental result."

Again we are faced with typical apologetic weaseling. First, all of the references to the word "judge" in these verses come from the same Greek word "krino" which means, according to Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, "to distinguish, i.e. decide (mentally or judicially); by implication to try, condemn, punish:--avenge, conclude, condemn, damn, decree, determine, esteem, ordain, call in question or to sentence to." Nowhere does Strong make the distinction between "merely to judge" and "to condemn" that Haley makes. What part of the verses cited lead credence to a distinction of this nature. Second, Haley doesn't even state which verses have the former meaning and which have the latter. He leaves that to his reader, hoping one of them will "click." Third, by saying "it seems to be used in one sense, in others a different one," Haley is all but admitting he's hypothesizing; he's guessing. Fourth, Haley says, "Jesus came, in a sense, to 'judge' the world, that is, to determine...the final destiny of men; yet his primary object was not to condemn men, though, in the process of judgment, the condemnation of some will be a certain although incidental result." Haley loves to toss in qualifiers at regular intervals. What does he mean "in a sense"? The text says he came to judge the world (John 5:22, 27). There is no "in a sense" to it. Fifth, we are talking about "judging" the world. True, that could have either a positive or negative result. But where does the text say his primary object was not to condemn men? That isn't even at issue. Haley hopes his reliance upon the word "condemn" will save the day. He hopes that if he can draw a distinction between judging, which can be either positive or negative, and condemning, which is viewed as negative only, he'll be able to pull a rabbit out of the hat. The fact is that verses on both sides of the equation refer to judging and it's irrelevant as to whether or not that has a positive or negative connotation. One says he came to judge and the

other says he did not come to judge. Neither refers to judging only in the negative sense or what Haley refers to as condemning.

Our last example of Haley's duplicity emerges from his reconciliation of John 9:5 ("As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world") and John 1:9 ("That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world") with Matt. 5:14 ("Ye are the light of the world") and Phil. 2:15 ("Among whom ye shine as lights in the world"). So who is the light of the world? Jesus or his followers? On page 129 Haley states, "In the primary and highest sense, Christ is the Light of the world; in a secondary and subordinate sense, Christians, viewed as receiving and reflecting his light, may be designated as the 'light of the world'." Again Haley seeks to resolve a conflict by drawing a whimsical distinction lacking textual support. Jesus is referred to as "the light" in John 9:5 and calls his followers "the light" in Matt. 5:14. If Jesus has top billing in the former, then his followers have top billing in the latter. There is no difference. Both "he" and "they" are referred to as "the light" not "a light." Both are referred to in the primary or highest sense. If one is primary then so is the other. If one is not referred to as primary, then neither is the other. If one is secondary then so is the other. They sink or swim together. In fact, why couldn't Haley's explanation be reversed 180 degrees and say, "In the primary and highest sense, Christ's followers are the Light of the world; in a secondary and subordinate sense, Christ, viewed as receiving and reflecting their light, may be designated as the 'light of the world'?" After all Christ's light is only reflected throughout the world as a result of the evangelistic and proselytization efforts of his followers. They activate the light coming from Christ. His secondary status is dependent on their primary efforts. Without them he would either be unknown or could very well fade into oblivion.

(To be Continued)

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #605 Continues from Last Month (Part d)

(The first question on our pamphlet, *THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD*, asks how fetuses and the mentally deficient can be saved if you must accept Jesus as your savior. In responding to our question via a subscriber's letter, fundamentalist Rev. BB says--Ed.)

I wonder about the wisdom of putting your strongest argument first. I also wonder about the smallness of a mind that cannot imagine the broadness of God's love and justice. Likely, McKinsey is already guilty of creating a "strawman" - an easily defeated argument construed to belong to one's opponent, created falsely for the sole purpose of knocking it down. It is a deception, a forensic sleigh of hand. I do see straw here - after all, he is using an ultra-Conservative line of reasoning to come to a Liberal conclusion.

Editor's Response to Letter #605 (Part d)

How does God's alleged love and justice adequately address this issue? If Rev. BB would only answer the question and not bring in a lot of extraneous grandiloquence, we'd both be better off. In addition, "The broadness of God's love and justice" is an assumption for which there is not only very little biblical proof but much evidence to the contrary. Secondly, the real difficulty lies not with my creation of a strawman but with Rev. BB's attempt to evade the issue by giving people the impression that the question is some sort of trick undeserving of a reply. Thirdly, I'm not using any line, ultra-conservative or otherwise. I'm just asking a simple, straightforward, logical question that should disturb anyone concerned with the reliability of Scripture. And

fourthly, I fail to see how my question automatically classifies me as an ultra-conservative or a liberal. Atheists, agnostics, and humanists could very well pose the same dilemma.

Letter #605 Continues (Part e)

My answer to this complaint is in the first case, very broad. "If we cannot trust those incapable (for any legitimate reason) of accepting Christ as Savior to God, then to whom can we trust them?" I would rather rely on the justice of God (as revealed in the Bible) than on the weening, sentimental, foolish sense of justice exercised by Liberals like McKinsey (who's name does not, by the way, appear on this little tract - an act of cowardice?). In a related vein, God's thoughts and ways are clearly higher than ours (Is. 55:8+9), and beyond our capacity to understand (Rom. 11:33+34). Given these conditions, I'm willing to trust persons legitimately unable to make a faith-commitment to God's justice and His love and His mercy, all of which exceeds our human ability to understand or measure it.

Editor's Response to Letter #605 (Part e)

In other words, to cut through the verbiage and make a long story short: Rev. BB doesn't have an answer. He could have saved a lot of rhetoric by admitting as much at the beginning. All he's really saying is that, although he doesn't understand how God will provide, somehow he will, which is no answer at all. Secondly, I would respectfully request that Rev. BB read Issues 115 through 120 on God's behavior before relying upon God's alleged justice. Thirdly, in true apologetic style he denounces an alleged shortcoming on my part--possessing a weening, sentimental, foolish sense of justice--without providing so much as a shred of proof for its existence. The problem lies not with my foolish sense of justice but with his lack of justice. Fourthly, Rev. BB should stop referring to me as a liberal since inane comments of this nature show he knows little or nothing about my religious or political views. Fifthly, my name was left off the pamphlet because I could think of no good reason for inserting it. Who wrote the pamphlet is of far less importance than the accuracy of the arguments contained therein. Why would I be afraid to put my name on a pamphlet when my name is on locally produced cable access TV programs, hundreds of audio tapes, thousands of BE issues, and a soon to be published book. I'm displaying cowardice? Is he serious? Again, he proved that he knows little or nothing about that which he speaks. And lastly, Rev. BB's final sentence is nothing more than a restatement of his contention that he will leave the matter in God's hands, which is only another way of saying he has no answer. His critics will just have to accept his contention that God will find a way out. Of course, God doesn't have to find a way out because he never found a way in. It's not his book, so it's not his problem. It's the problem of those who created the mess known as Scripture.

Letter #605 Continues (Part f)

More specifically, in my own study of this topic, I have found at least one-half dozen verses that imply a different kind of Judgement for those who have had a chance to believe. I find the Bible DOES address this issue by stating that God judges people first and primarily on the basis of belief and unbelief (the conscious decision NOT to believe, when given the opportunity to choose). And, secondarily, on the basis of works - good or evil. The person who had no legitimate opportunity to choose belief or unbelief is not included in this process. While their fate is a matter open to biblical conjecture, and best entrusted to God as I've already stated, it can be shown from the Bible that God will indeed show mercy on them. In other words, the contradiction is only apparent until we realize that we're talking about two different things here, two different situations, a Day of Judgement, and (perhaps) a time on non-judgement. This is

NOT a different (or opposing) kind of salvation, but a different (not opposing) category of judgement.

Editor's Response to Letter #605 (Part f)

Rev. BB is sinking deeper and deeper. First, he earlier said God would eventually provide an answer to this question and now he says he has "found at least one-half dozen verses that imply a different kind of Judgement for those who have had a chance to believe." Yet he fails to provide so much as one. What verses? But even more importantly, who cares? He should quit trying to shift the focus. We are not discussing people "who have had a chance to believe." That's not the issue, so it should not have arisen and was only mentioned in order to muddy the waters. We are talking about those who could never believe because of their circumstances. Second, what is a different kind of Judgement? Does he mean there are degrees of justice and the goal posts are set further back for some than for others? Isn't justice supposed to be blind? Third, he says people will be judged "first and primarily on the basis of belief and unbelief" and "secondarily on the basis of works - good or evil." Where is this kind of outline formulated in Scripture? But even more importantly, how is that relevant to those who have neither belief nor works. Fourthly, he says "the person who had no legitimate opportunity to choose belief or unbelief is not included in this process." According to what verses? Where is this in Scripture? He's writing his own text. Fifthly, I would again suggest the Rev. BB read Issues 115 through 120 before saying "God will indeed show mercy to them." Judging from the manner in which God treated infants and sucklings in the OT, one would be foolish, indeed, to conclude that they are going to receive any more justice in the next world than they did in this one. After all didn't God order the slaying of "both man and woman, infant and suckling" in 1 Sam. 15:3 and Ezek. 9:6. Rev. BB says, "it can be shown from the Bible that God will indeed show mercy on them." Where? What verses say they will get special treatment? Sixthly, because the last two sentences of Rev. BB's monologue have no biblical foundation and fall, like much of his discourse, into the category of esoteric gibberish, I'll do him the favor of forgetting he ever mentioned them. Based upon his use of the word "perhaps," even he is uncertain about what he's saying. Finally, and on top of everything else, Rev. BB should realize the word "judgment" is almost never spelled "judgement."

Letter #605 Continues (Part g)

(The second question on our pamphlet asks: Why are we being punished for Adam's sin. After all, he ate the forbidden fruit, we didn't. It's his problem, not ours, especially in light of Deut. 24:16 which says children shall not be punished for the sins of their fathers. Rev. BB's answer is as follows--Ed.).

Deut. 24:16 is part of a section of miscellaneous laws given to Israel by God. It's teaching regards capital punishment, that "each is to die for his own sin." In other passages, God does talk about "inherited punishment" and "inherited righteousness" both of which have natural, logical and/or theological explanations. In other words, "inherited punishment" is a right God reserves for Himself but denies His people. This verse has NO direct link with the Genesis account.

Editor's Response to Letter #605 (Part g)

In the first place, is Rev. BB saying Deut. 24:16 only applies to capital punishment and only in regard to capital punishment shall each man be punished for his own sins? If a man robs, rapes, maims, or vandalizes another, then it doesn't really matter who is punished as long as someone pays the penalty. Only in the case of killing another human being should the perpetrator die? I've never been a fan of the Bible but I don't think that's one of its ridiculous statements. Secondly, his attempt to divorce this problem from "inherited punishment" has no substance, since mankind

is clearly adversely affected by what Adam did according to the Bible. Third, Rev. BB states that, "In other passages, God does talk about 'inherited punishment'." Very true! I'm surprised he'd admit it. In Rom. 5:12 ("Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned") Paul clearly alleges we are all paying the penalty for what Adam did. In effect, in Rom. 5:12 Paul talks about the very inherited sin which Rev. BB denies exists--the sin we all inherited because of Adam's sin. Rev. BB says, "inherited punishment" is a right God reserves for Himself but denies His people. What's his point and how's it relevant? And lastly, his concluding comment--"This verse has NO direct link with the Genesis account"--has no validity whatever as is proven by the worthlessness of his entire rationalization.

Letter #605 Continues (Part h)

(Rev. BB concludes his comments on our second point by saying--Ed.).

Further, this man (I think he is referring to me--Ed.) is either a gimpy theologian, or is fond of creating 'strawmen.' We'll have a whole hayfield full of 'em soon! We are NOT being "punished" for Adam's sin. We live under its effects, which are certainly sufficiently horrible (including the kind of non-reasoning that leads a man to write nutty papers like this one). The effects of Adams's sin have compromised creation, and will continue to do so until the New Creation at Christ's Second Coming.

Editor's Response to Letter #605 (Part h)

As far as NOT being punished for Adam's sin is concerned, Rev. BB had better consult Paul before opening his mouth again. What did Rom. 5:12, which we quoted earlier, say? Did he try to find out or did he just assume that the theology with which he had been indoctrinated would naturally agree with anything Paul asserted? We aren't just living under the effects of Adam's sin. We sinned, period. Rom. 5:19 says, "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners." We "were made sinners." And what happens to sinners? They are punished! If that's not being punished for what Adam did, what is? Rom. 5:18 says, "...by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation," again showing we are all being punished for what Adam did. And 1 Cor. 15:22 says, "For as in Adam all die...." How many verses does he want? He tries to hide man's punishment for Adam's sin under a smokescreen of nebulous nonsense about a "compromised creation" and living under the "effects" of Adam's sin. We are being punished for Adam's sin, and if he doesn't believe it he should ask Paul. The latter said that when Adam sinned we all sinned. Instead of calling others "gimpy theologians," Rev. BB would do well to acknowledge his own lack of theological expertise. The only non-reasoning and nutty papers involved in this whole affair are those emanating from an amateurish reverend projecting a counterfeit aura of sophistication that seems to never end.

Editor's Note: We apologize for not having contacted those who volunteered to play our video tapes on their local public access channels, but we have been incredibly busy throughout all of 1994. In fact, I can't think of a year in my life in which I have been more preoccupied. Just making tapes has been quite an accomplishment, let alone circulating them. Baring any unforeseen circumstances, we hope to get there eventually. We just finished our twenty-first program.

Erratum: In the first column on page 2 in last month's issue we should have printed Mal. 1:2-3 instead of Mark 1:2-3.

Issue #146 Editor: Dennis McKinsey

Feb. 1995

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

This month's issue will continue our discussion of Haley's classic apologetic work.

HALEY'S ALLEGED DISCREPANCIES OF THE BIBLE (Part III)--One of the most famous biblical inconsistencies arises from Paul's statements in 1 Cor. 15:51-52 ("We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump"), Phil. 4:5 ("The Lord is at hand"), 1 Thess. 4:15 ("We which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep") and 1 Peter 4:7 ("But the end of all things is at hand") that the coming of Christ is at hand versus his statement in 2 Thess. 2:1-3 ("Now we beseech you, brethren,...that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand, Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there be a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition....") that the coming of the Lord is far off. Simply put, Paul said he and others would live to see Jesus return; whereas, Jesus not only failed to return in Paul's lifetime but is yet to make an appearance.

Quoting Dr. Davidson on 1 Cor. 15:52 Haley's "explanation" for this conflict is that, "The expression we means such Christians as shall then be alive; all believers then living are grouped together. On 1 Thess. 4:15-17 he (Dr. Davidson--Ed.) says we which are alive and remain, etc., can only mean such Christians as live and remain. Paul employs himself and the early Christians as the representatives of those succeeding Christians who should be alive at the Redeemer's second advent." Sometimes one can't help but feel apologetic "explanations" should not even be read much less taken seriously. The text says WE--WE which are alive. And that must include the speaker if it is to make any sense. Paul did not say "those" who are alive or "whoever" may be alive. He said WE, clearly showing he expected to among those who would be alive at the second advent. There is no evidence whatever that Paul was merely employing himself and the early Christians as representatives of those succeeding Christians who should be alive at the Redeemer's second advent. Later Haley says, "The Thessalonians, though a very amiable people, were by some means mistaken on this subject, so as to expect that the end of the world would take place in their lifetime, or within a very few years." They weren't mistaken at all. There was no "by some means" to it. They were simply taking Paul at his word. That's what Paul said and they believed him. There is nothing mysterious involved. They trusted him and were deceived.

Haley continues his defense by making an analogy with Deut. 30:1 which says, "Thus in Deut. 30:1 ('And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God has driven you...') the generation addressed is the representative of a succeeding one; and in John 6:32 ('Jesus then said to them, Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven'), a succeeding generation is

employed to represent a past one." These situations are not even parallel with our original verses. No one in Deut. 30:1 is saying he or she will personally experience a future event. Paul's statements set a definite time limit on what is to occur. It had to occur before he died. There is no such limit in the Deut. 30:1 verse where God is addressing the nation of Israel whose existence could extend into the future indefinitely. Nowhere in Deut. 30:1 does it say a particular person had to still be alive when the prediction materialized. God is addressing the nation of Israel generally. All members of the particular generation who are listening to him could die and the prediction could still come true. John 6:32 is even more irrelevant. Not only does it lack a specific time line but is addressed to all followers of Jesus, both then and now. The giving of "the true bread" is something that happens over a period of time. It's not a one time only specific event.

Our second and final conflict for this month involves the clash on page 135 of Matt. 10:23 ("But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come") versus Matt. 24:14 ("And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come") and Mark 13:10 ("And the gospel must first be published among all nations"). One verse says Christ's followers will not have even covered the cities of Israel before Jesus returns, while the others say all nations shall hear the gospel before Christ's return. Haley's "reconciliation" is, "Strauss works hard to make a contradiction here. He remarks: 'On one occasion Jesus says to his disciples that the Son of man will return before they shall have completed their Messianic preaching in all the cities of Israel; another time he says that the second advent will not occur until the Gospel has been preached in the whole world among all peoples.' The difficulty is obviated by the following interpretations, any one of which may be adopted." His explanations, which follow, "may be adopted" but they certainly aren't valid.

Haley states, "Regarding Matt. 10:23 Barnes states, 'That is, in fleeing from persecution, from one city to another, you shall not have gone to every city in Judea, till the destruction of Jerusalem, and the end of the Jewish economy.'" What on earth does the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the Jewish economy have to do with what's predicted? It's talking about the arrival of the Son of man, not the destruction of a city and an economy.

Haley continues by quoting another apologist named Wordsworth who says, "In a primary sense, you will not have completed your missionary work in Judea before I come to judge Jerusalem. In a secondary and larger sense,--the missionary work of the church for the spiritual Israel will not cease till the second coming of Christ. There is a successive series of 'comings of Christ,' all preparatory to, and consummated in, the great coming." Oh, for goodness sake! Where in the world is he getting all this gibberish? Where does the Bible make reference to a "successive series of comings of Christ?" Talk about writing your own script! In addition, Wordsworth shifted the focus from specifics to generalities. What does Matt. 10:23 say. It says, "Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel...." That is a specific statement referring to a definite group of cities. There is nothing vague or nebulous about it. But Wordsworth refers to "the missionary work of the church for the spiritual Israel" which is not only vague but unscriptural. That's not in the text. And where is a "secondary and larger sense" even implied, much less stated? And finally, "the missionary work of the church for the spiritual Israel" can be portrayed as a never-ending, on-going activity which can be made parallel with the prediction of the return of Jesus which is yet to occur; while covering the cities of Israel is a specific accomplishment that did occur, even though Jesus is yet to return. In other words, he changed the prediction from a specific achievement which was fulfilled to a goal that is yet to come to fruition, in order to make the non-arrival of Jesus parallel to the non-accomplishment of a missionary assignment. As you might have noticed Haley relies upon some of the most deceptive and sophisticated rationalizations ever devised. You have to think more deeply than normal or you'll miss the

subtle shifts that are made in everything discussed. Some apologists are past masters at derailing the truth train. They can get you involved in more extraneous, irrelevant, twaddle than you ever thought possible.

Haley continues by citing the comments of other apologists on the phrase "Till the Son of man be come." He states, "Baumgarten-Crusius says, 'Until the victory of the cause of Christ'; Michaelis, 'To the destruction of Jerusalem'; Calvin, 'To the outpouring of the Holy Spirit'; Norton, 'That is, before my religion is established and its truth fully confirmed';.... Lightfoot: 'Ye shall not have travelled over the cities of Israel, preaching the gospel, before the Son of man is revealed by his resurrection.'" And Haley concludes his illusory defense by saying, "These interpretations, almost any of which may be adopted without an arbitrary exegesis, serve to show how slight is the foundation for the objection urged by Strauss."

The only "arbitrary exegesis" involved in this whole affair is that emanating from a deceptive defender of the Bible citing a group of biblicists engaged in specious interpretations. As far as the explanation of Baumgarten-Crusius is concerned, nothing is said about a "victory of the cause of Christ." Who said anything about a victory? The word "victory" doesn't even appear in the verse. And the verse is not even referring to the "cause" of Christ. It's referring to Christ himself. It says the "Son of man." That's a human being, not a cause or mission. How much clearer can the verse be? In addition, even if the "victory of the cause of Christ" were intended the explanation is all but worthless because the same problem exists with this as with the arrival of Jesus personally. Just as Jesus did not arrive before they had gone over the cities of Israel, the "victory of the cause of Christ" did not occur before they had gone over the cities of Israel. So, either way the contradiction stands.

The explanation of Michaelis is hardly worth considering since the word "Jerusalem" is non-existent in Matt. 10:23. It was just whimsically thrown in by Michaelis.

Calvin refers to the Holy Spirit which is also not the topic of conversation. Wouldn't it be nice if people talked about what verses discuss rather than heading out on some kind of tangent that strikes their fancy but is wholly divorced from the topic at hand!

Norton's defense suffers from the same malady that plagues the defense of Baumgarten-Crusius. Matt. 10:23 is referring to a man, a person, a human being, not a cause or mission. It is not talking about "my religion" but me (Jesus--Ed.) personally. It's talking about the physical appearance of a real live human being, not his cause, his purpose, his mission, his victory, his religion, or the full confirmation of truth. And also like the Baumgarten-Crusius defense even if "my religion is established and its truth fully confirmed" were intended the explanation is all but worthless because the same problem exists with this as with the arrival of Jesus personally. Just as Jesus did not arrive before they had gone over the cities of Israel, "my religion being established and its truth being fully confirmed" did not occur before they had gone over the cities of Israel. So, again, either way the contradiction stands.

Lightfoot's "rationale" is afflicted with the same shortcoming as that of Michaelis. While the latter uses the word "Jerusalem" which isn't even in the text, the former employs the word "resurrection" which isn't in there either.

Anybody could explain anything to anyone's satisfaction if they were allowed to gratuitously insert words and phrases with utter disregard of the text itself. That is one of the most obvious flaws in the explanations offered by the apologists cited by Haley. Haley says these explanations "may be adopted without an arbitrary exegesis" when precisely the opposite is true. They can only be adopted with an arbitrary exegesis. Haley's allegation that the interpretations of these

men "serve to show how slight is the foundation for the objection urged by Strauss" rests on no foundation whatever. Quite the contrary, Strauss was one of the most meticulous of all biblical critics and he knew exactly what he was talking about. (TO BE CONTINUED)

COMMENTARY

Nearly every time I hear a fundamentalist tell me the exact time, place, and occasion under which he or she underwent the born-again experience, I can't help but think of a movie released in 1956 entitled "Invasion of the Body Snatchers." The parallels are striking if not unnerving. In the movie, large football shaped pods are placed beside people while they are sleeping and the latter awaken with an entirely new personality. With respect to Christianity, Jesus and the Bible are placed near people and they, too, are absorbed, transformed, and awaken with a new character. In the movie, the absorbing pods are the product of a being or beings from another world just as the Bible is supposedly an emanation from God and heaven. In the movie, people are troubled with life in general before they change but afterwards they testify to a feeling of contentment, serenity, and happiness. Being born-again generates the same feeling according to fundamentalists. In the movie, those who are absorbed by the alien force devote a tremendous amount of time and energy trying to convince the unconverted to accept the inevitable, succumb willingly, and join them in their realm of bliss. The comparison between this and the amount of religious propaganda on radio and TV programs throughout this country is all too obvious. In the movie, people are betrayed by those whom they trust the most--relatives and friends--who have already been absorbed. And that is no less true of the process by which most people join religious rigidity and are changed today. People are suckered in by those in whom they place the greatest confidence. In the movie, people had the same outward appearance before and after being incorporated, but the inner change was sinister, insidious, deceptive, and devastating. And that is no less true of those who have been co-opted by the born-again experience. In the movie people are only assimilated when they lower their guard and are lulled to sleep. How true that is of the process by which people are taken in through fundamentalist cunning and duplicity. In the movie those converted to the alien force do not hesitate to resort to coercion when persuasion proves to be ineffective. When peaceful measures are ineffective, imposition and violence are readily employed. Recent torchings of abortion clinics and the killing of their personnel, as well as events in the Ayatollah's Iran, show that's no less true of those who have undergone the born-again experience or something comparable. In the movie, those who have succumbed to the alien force behave as mindless, uncritical robots, blindly following every command or whim of their new cause. Those who have undergone the born-again experience adopt a similar mind-block to any concepts or ideas emanating from a source other than the one to which they have succumbed. But undoubtedly the most important parallel is that in the movie, the hero, the sane man, the sensible man, was doing everything in his power to either escape or destroy the alien force and its agents. And when it comes to the Bible in general and Jesus in particular, that's no less true of sanity today. In the movie, the hero puts up great resistance, escapes from the town controlled by his enemies, is chased by them through the hills out onto a busy highway occupied by people still unconquered by the alien force. As he is running up and down the highway saying and doing everything in his power to alert the unwary, a leader of his band of pursuers tells the others to stop the chase and then turns to them and says paraphrastically, "Never mind, let him go. They'll never believe him anyway." How well that applies to today's society. How well I know the feeling of that poor man on the highway trying to alert Americans to the ideology that is seeking inroads everywhere. When I see my programs on public access cablevision I can't but feel there are some influential figures in the audience saying to themselves: Never mind, let him go. They'll never believe him anyway.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #605 Continues from Last Month (Part i)

(The third question on our pamphlet, THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD, says God created Adam, so he must have been perfect. How then, could he have sinned? Regardless of how much free will he had, if he chose to sin, he wasn't perfect. In responding to our question via a subscriber's letter fundamentalist Rev. BB says--Ed.),

God's verdict on His creation was that it was "very good" (Gen. 1:31), NOT that it was "perfect." Just because God created it doesn't mean that He created man and/or the rest of creation as "perfect" in exactly the same way that God Himself is perfect. Obviously not, since God's perfection is original, and the best creation could boast would be a derived perfection. But the Bible never describes creation as having any measure of perfection.

Editor's Response to Letter #605 (Part i)

First, by definition God is perfect. Everything he does is perfect. If he creates something it must be perfect. How could a perfect being create something that is less than perfect? Rev. BB is relying on Gen. 1:31. But what does "very good" mean? Does it mean perfection or less than perfection. If "very good" is a surreptitious way of saying God's creation was less than perfect, if Rev. BB is contending the Bible is saying a perfect being committed a less than perfect act, then we have an impossibility. A perfect being cannot do anything that is imperfect or flawed. Second, Rev. BB chose the translation of Gen. 1:31 that best served his purpose. If he had consulted the Modern Language Bible or the Living Bible he would have seen "...everything He had made was excellent" and "it was excellent in every way," respectively. If something is excellent in every way, then it is perfect. Something with even the slightest imperfection is not excellent in every way. Third, Rev. BB is trying to shift the focus. We are talking about the Bible's analysis of Adam, not what the Bible says about creation in general. Regardless of the nature of Creation, Adam sinned. He was not perfect as Paul makes clear in Rom 5:12. Fourth, Rev. BB says, "Just because God created it doesn't mean that He created man and/or the rest of creation as 'perfect' in exactly the same way that God Himself is perfect." Yes it does. How else could he have created it? It had to be as perfect as himself. After all he created it! Fifth, Rev. BB asks if that means God created man and/or the rest of creation as "perfect" in exactly the same way that God Himself is perfect and answered his own question by saying, "Obviously not, since God's perfection is original, and the best creation could boast would be a derived perfection." What kind of doubletalk is this? What is "original" and "derived" perfection? Perfection is perfection, period. Something is either perfect or it's not. There's no inbetween. Even the Bible is not so absurd as to make a wholly arbitrary distinction of this nature. One can't help but ask where on earth Rev. BB is getting all of this nonsense. And sixth, Rev. BB says, "the Bible never describes creation as having any measure of perfection." If that is true, if no part of creation is perfect, then how does Rev. BB account for Gen. 6:9 ("Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations") and Job 1:1 ("There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright....")? Clearly some parts of creation are perfect and we are back to square one.

Letter # 605 Continues (Part j)

Also, perfection does not necessarily include incapability of sinning. In fact, Heb. 4:15 teaches that Jesus was perfect precisely because He withstood temptations to sin; that He resisted the capacity to sin that was born in His humanity. There's no virtue in resisting sin if one is incapable of committing it in the first place. "Perfection" that exists only as the incapability of doing otherwise is not true (at least not truly human) perfection.

"Free will" is an essential theological issue and cannot be so lightly dismissed as McKinsey attempts. As will prove to be typical, his argument has only the barest appearance of logic.

Editor's Response to Letter #605 (Part j)

Rev. BB says, "perfection does not necessarily include incapability of sinning." Yes it does. Otherwise the being in question is not perfect. If Jesus could sin, then Jesus was not perfect. If Jesus could sin, then Jesus was not God. Rev. BB says, "Jesus was perfect precisely because He withstood temptations to sin." If Jesus had to withstand temptations to sin, then Jesus was not perfect. Rev. BB says, "There's no virtue in resisting sin if one is incapable of committing it in the first place." Precisely! And that's why Jesus deserves no credit. As God, he was incapable of sinning in the first place. If he could have sinned, then he was neither God nor perfect. Rev. BB says, "Free will is an essential theological issue and cannot be so lightly dismissed," while failing to realize that perfection negates free will from the outset. No being can be free to do something that negates an essential aspect of his nature. If Jesus or God is perfect, then neither is free to do anything that is less than perfect. And if a man, in our case Adam, was created by a perfect God, then he had to have been created perfect. He couldn't have sinned or committed an act of imperfection, even if he had wanted to. The overriding error made by Rev. BB and all of his compatriots on this issue is that they just don't realize "perfection" negates "free will." No being can be both free and perfect simultaneously, unless that being is only committing perfect acts. Among perfect acts he does have a choice. Only in regard to perfect acts does he have options. Imperfect acts, however, are ruled out ab initio.

Letter #605 Continues (Part k)

(The fourth question on our pamphlet, THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD, asks how Num. 23:19, which says God doesn't repent, be reconciled with Ex. 32:14 which clearly says he does. In responding to our question fundamentalist Rev. BB says--Ed.),

Num. 23:19 describes God's consistency, truthfulness and trustworthiness. "Repent" is used in the KJV in a variety of ways, one of which describes what seems to be a change of mind that is inconsistent, and thereby untruthful or untrustworthy. As the writer points out, God, unlike human beings, does not engage in such inconsistency or deception. Ex. 32:14 describes the mercy of God and uses "repent" to describe the appearance of God changing his mind, to show mercy rather than wrath to His people. These passages are talking about two different things. If anything, all McKinsey has "proven" is the general unreliability of the KJV translation, and his own desire to create inconsistencies where none truly exist.

Editor's Response to Letter #605 (Part k)

First, we aren't discussing a change of mind that exhibits inconsistency and deception which God allegedly would not do versus a change of mind to show mercy rather than wrath which God allegedly would do. We are discussing a change of mind, period. Num. 23:19 says, "God is not a man that he should lie; neither the son of man that he should repent." There are no qualifiers, modifiers or restrictions applied to the word "repent." It simply says he won't repent. Why he later repents is irrelevant. What evidence does Rev. BB provide to prove that the word "repent" in Num. 23:19 has the very narrow meaning he attaches to it. It simply says God does not repent. Second, Rev. BB says God does not engage in "a change of mind that is inconsistent," but later says Ex. 32:14 uses repent "to describe the appearance of God changing his mind, to show mercy rather than wrath to His people." In other words he changed his mind; he was inconsistent. Any change of mental direction exhibits inconsistency. Rev. BB is trying very hard to shift the focus from the fact that he changed his mind to why he changed his mind. Third, Rev. BB says, "God,

unlike human beings, does not engage in such inconsistency or deception." If he changes his mind then he is engaging in inconsistency and to the extent it deceives people he is engaged in deception. Fourth, what does he mean "the appearance of God changing his mind?" There is no "appearance" to it. It says he changed his mind, period. Fifth, many modern versions use the word repent in the same manner employed by the KJV. Rev. BB hopes he can mislead readers and improve his case by attacking the KJV as if it were the only version on the market containing this contradiction. In fact, it's not. And lastly, the "repent" in Num. 23:19 and the one in Ex. 32:14 come from the same Hebrew word which is transliterated "nacham." The two "repents" do not come from two separate Hebrew words which can't help but weaken dramatically the possible apologetic argument that they have separate meanings. (TO BE CONTINUED)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #607 from FS of Anaconda, Montana

Dear Dennis. Regarding Charles Ryrie's "explanation" for the change of day-of-worship from the Jewish Sabbath to the Sun's day.

Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln wrote on page 340 in the book entitled Holy Book, Holy Grail, "By an edict in A.D. 321...Constantine ordered the law courts closed on 'the venerable day of the sun' and decreed that this day be a day of rest."

Thus Christians, formerly "worshipping" on the Jewish Sabbath, named for the planet Saturn, began their worship on the Sun God's day, the day of "Sol Invictus," the Invincible Sun.

Editor's Note: D. L. Smith is in the process of compiling a larger WORD INDEX of BIBLICAL ERRANCY than that which has been distributed in the past. He needs your assistance and sent me the following letter.

Dear Dennis. I'm writing to ask you and your readers for help. As you know I have offered to index the BE's from 1983 to 1994 and hopefully update every year or so. However, I have run into a bit of a problem that only you and your readers can solve. A VERSE INDEX is no problem because once a verse appears, its in the index list. BUT - words, that's a horse of a different color. I could use the old index and pick words I would like to see, but would that be adequate for others? I need readers and yourself to send me a list of words they would like to see in the index. If you or they would send them to me on 3.5 in. disks, in either PC, MAC, or PRODOS format, it would make the job easier, but a written list is still good. Then I could compile all the lists and use that as the index. I don't need issue dates or pages, just a word list. Word 6.0 should do all the marking and pagination once the list is compiled. Send disks or list to: Index, Box 513, Tiffin, Ohio 44883, (419) 447-0669. The deadline should be around APRIL 1995 for lists. Full index should be available before summer 1995. Thanks for your help.

Issue #147 Editor: Dennis McKinsey

Mar. 1995

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

Most of this month's issue will concentrate on continuing our response to Rev. BB's crude and intemperate attack on our pamphlet entitled THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD? Few acts fire my ire more than an assault on this publication's veracity or the materials we distribute. For some reason I'm attracted to that kind of challenge like iron to a magnet.

Many of Rev. BB's responses to the following questions were refuted in prior issues of BE and are probably not deserving of reconsideration. But because of Rev. BB's cockiness, arrogance, and insulting demeanor and the number of years that have passed since our prior discussions of these issues, I can't resist reviving a few old battles and making some new points.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #605 Continues (Part 1)

(The fifth question on our pamphlet asks how 2 Kings 8:26, which says Ahaziah began to rule at age 22, can be reconciled with 2 Chron. 22:2, which says he was 42. In responding to our question fundamentalist Rev. BB says--Ed.),

In my NIV Bible the 2 Chron. 22:2 text is described as a variant reading favored by SOME Septuagint and Syriac manuscripts, and can be explained by textual criticism, perhaps as a "scribal error." It is certainly NOT indicative of an inconsistency in the original autographs.

Editor's Response to Letter #605 (Part 1)

As I said in regard to the "you have to go back to the originals" defense on my 20th TV program, "When it comes to the inerrancy of the Bible, its advocates are required to provide adequate evidence of the inerrant originals, because certainly everything that comes after them is full of errors and contradictions. Why on earth anybody would assume the originals have no mistakes, when all of the copies reek with errors and contradictions is beyond me. That's a leap in logic that only the irrational can fathom. Of course, the problem lies in the fact that there is no logic involved. If you have never read or seen a book, how can you be sure of what it really says? No living human being has ever read a copy of the original Bible and that's assuming there was an original Bible. The entire 'you have to go back the originals' defense is basically the mark of a desperate man trying to defend a hopeless position. People who want to return to the originals are using that as a defense, a subterfuge. They know there are contradictions in the writings facing them. That's obvious. But, they say there are no contradictions or inaccuracies in the originals, knowing full well the originals can't be produced by anyone no matter how hard they

may try and hoping that will provide seclusion. As Peter Ruckman, founder of the Pensacola Bible Institute alleges, 'it is nothing but cowardice and desertion in combat'."

When Rev. BB says, "it is certainly NOT indicative of an inconsistency in the original autographs," he couldn't be more incorrect. Precisely the opposite is true. It most assuredly is.

Letter #605 Continues (Part m)

(The sixth question on our pamphlet asks how can Ex. 33:20, which says no man can see God's face and live, be squared with Gen. 32:20, which says a man saw God's face and his life was preserved. In responding to our question Rev. BB says--Ed.),

The answer is found in the Gen. 32:20 text ("And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved"). Had McKinsey bothered to read the whole verse, he would've found it on his own -- "and yet my life was spared." This verse is a fine example of the love, forgiveness and mercy of God, that He allowed Jacob to see His face, and relaxed one of His "personal rules" and did not punish Jacob with death. Uniformity is not necessarily just, and sometimes justice is served by observing the spirit of the law even while violating its letter.

Editor's Response to Letter #605 (Part m)

Rev. BB would have done better to have avoided this problem entirely. His explanation is not only pathetic but an open admission that a contradiction exists. His assertion that God "relaxed one of his personal rules" along with his last comment that "sometimes justice is served by observing the spirit of the law even while violating its letter" is nothing more than a defensive concession. Need more be said? His melodramatic injection of a lot of irrelevant bleeding-heartism about God's alleged love and mercy is little more than a doomed attempt to play on the reader's feelings at the expense of his logic. In essence, all Rev. BB is saying is that God violated a rule he laid down personally in Ex. 33:20 but it was done for a good cause. Nevertheless, the fact remains that God said in Ex. 33:20 that no man, NO MAN, can see God's face and live, while in Gen. 32:30 Jacob saw God's face and his life was preserved. Why God relaxed one of his rules is irrelevant. Reality exposes an exception and that's all that's necessary for the contradiction to exist.

Letter #605 Continues (Part n)

What McKinsey doesn't realize is that Jacob isn't the only man to see God's face. In fact, later in the book of Exodus, God allows Moses to see His face and live. This is then, in both cases, an act of divine intimacy: God mercifully extended to two very important men this great honor. The "contradiction" exists only in McKinsey's mind.

Editor's Response to Letter #605 (Part n)

No! A "non-contradiction" exists only in Rev. BB's imagination. I fully realize Moses saw God as well and Rev. BB has only managed to provide another event contradicting the rule laid down in Ex. 33:20. Instead of resolving the dilemma, he's only strengthening my case and weakening his. He seems to think that if God contradicts himself for a justifiable reason, somehow the contradiction vanishes. Hardly! God flatly stated something would not happen and it did, which is all that's needed for the contradiction to stand.

Letter #605 Continues (Part o)

(The seventh question on our pamphlet asks how Rom. 3:23 ("All have sinned and come short of the glory of God") can be reconciled with Gen. 6:9 ("Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations") and Job 1:1 ("Job...was perfect and upright..."). In responding to our question Rev. BB says--Ed.),

What the admittedly inferior KJV renders as "perfect" the NIV translates as "blameless." Thus, the contradiction with Rom. 3:23 is eliminated.

Editor's Response to Letter #605 (Part o)

Now let's don't be ridiculous. Of course it's not eliminated. "Blameless" means someone has done absolutely nothing for which he can be blamed. In other words, he's morally perfect. Changing the word in no way resolves the dilemma.

Letter # 605 Continues (Part p)

McKinsey is also guilty of simplemindedly taking these words at their English face value, just for the purpose of making complaints such as this. Taimiyim is the Hebrew word in Gen. 6:9. It means "entire integrity, truth: without blemish, complete, full, perfect, sincere, sound, without spot, undefiled, upright" (Strong's). The root word, tam, is found in Job 1:1, 8, and means "complete; pious; gentle, dear; completely together, perfect, plain, undefiled, upright" (Strong's). With all these other, better translations available, to assume that the OT author meant to convey any kind of perfection, let alone a spiritual one, is, again, to be guilty of constructing a conflict.

Editor's Response to Letter #605 (Part p)

No one needs to construct a conflict, that's already present. Rev. BB should have read all of our back issues before signing his name to such an inane letter. If any simplemindedness were coming from me it would only exist if I were so naive as to accept his rationalizations. In the first place, he would have done well to have avoided Strong entirely because words and phrases such as without blemish, complete, without spot, and undefiled are identical with perfect. He's only proving my argument, not his. Secondly, as I said in a prior issue, if Noah was not perfect then he had no more right to be on the Ark than anyone else. He should have drowned with the rest of humanity. Thirdly, I'm becoming increasingly perturbed with these Johnny-Come-Lately's who always think they have better translations of biblical verses than those of the scholars who created the most prominent modern versions. I'm tempted to ask: Just how much Greek and Hebrew have you had? Never mind about their credentials or mine. What about yours? As I've told several people who resort to this technique: Why don't you create your own version of the Bible and send me a copy which I would be glad to critique. Until you do, we are going to go with what is available. Fourthly, the word perfect in Gen. 6:9 which is applied to Noah comes from the same Hebrew word which is applied to God in Deut. 32:4 and Psalm 18:30. If there is no reason to say Noah is perfect according to Gen. 6:9 then there is no reason to say God is perfect according to Deut. 32:4. If Noah wasn't perfect then neither is God. If it applies to one, it applies to the other. And lastly, Rev. BB isn't very well acquainted with modern translations because the King James is not the only version to use the word "perfect." The American Standard Version of 1901 also says "perfect" and few people call it inferior.

Letter #605 Continues (Part q)

It is highly unlikely the author meant to convey in any way that these men lived in the same perfection as God, especially when the narrative of their lives is much less glowing than the

glowing praise of a perfect being. Therefore, this argument is spurious, false, and contrives a nonexistent contradiction.

Editor's Response to Letter #605 (Part q)

Rev. BB feels it is "highly unlikely" that "these men lived in the same perfection as God." That's supposed to be proof! Since when is the gut reaction of a narrow-minded ideologue comparable to hard evidence? If he thinks God's behavior is immaculate, then I would strongly suggest that he read issues 115 through 120 of BE. That should cure him of any delusions regarding the perfect behavior of his biblical God. He also needs to reread what is stated in the fourth point in the prior answer regarding the application of "perfect" to God and Noah. The only thing spurious, false, and contrived is the bogus defense of an unctuous escapist.

Letter #605 Continues (Part r)

Let us now observe another contradiction (a sure sign of untruth and hypocrisy) in McKinsey's writing. While he would decry a wooden, strictly literal method of Bible interpretation (because he thinks the Bible is too unreliable to support such a method), he is certainly guilty of employing such a method.

What we have just read is an example. Since Rom. 3:23 literally says all have sinned, and as he observes "All means all," McKinsey adopts an extremely literal interpretation that "all" means all persons, at all times, in all places and situations, can never be described as "perfect." Obviously (according to this interpretation) that "all" includes Noah and Job, who, in his KJV Bible, are literally described as "perfect." And there appears the specter of contradiction.

Editor's Response to Letter #605 (Part r)

To begin with, untruth or hypocrisy is a crime of which Rev. BB is far more representative than I will ever be. I've made a mistake now and then, but I've never displayed the kind of consistent pattern of falsehood and deception that is so prominent in the apologetic circles he represents. By denying that "all" means all persons at all times in all places, Rev. BB is saying there are some instances in which people are perfect. But he doesn't provide so much as one example. There is no "specter of contradiction"; there's a real contradiction. Secondly, the problem lies not with my adoption of an extremely literal method but with his repeated abandonment of the literal interpretation every time he feels the pinch. Talk about dishonesty and shoddy scholarship! Unlike him, I operate on the principle that the Bible says what it means and means what it says. His operative standard is that the Bible means what he says and says what he means. My approach is neither wooden nor strictly literal, and is far from being extremely literal. If I had been pushing an unwarranted or excessively literal approach over the years, there are hundreds of arguments I could have submitted that have never been broached in the history of this publication. Some of the most obvious examples are the following: Gen. 3:20 says, "Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living." I don't know about Rev. BB but I have a mother and her name is not Eve. Except for a few people in the Book of Genesis, Eve was not the mother of anyone in history. Genesis 7:11-12 says, "...the windows of heaven were opened. And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights." The argument could be made that heaven has real windows. After all that's what it says. Matt. 16:19 says, "And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven..." According to this you must have some keys to get into heaven. Imagine actually unlocking some kind of door and then entering the promised land! Job 1:20 says, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb; and naked shall I return thither." That would be quite an accomplishment considering the fact that many mothers are deceased and many children are bigger than their mothers! But that's what it says. Matt. 10:12 says, "And

when ye come into a house, salute it." So why don't Christians salute a house after entering it? In 1 Tim. 5:23 Paul says, "Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities." So why don't Christians stop drinking water when they are sick? That's what it says. Proverbs 15:3 says, "The eyes of the Lord are in every place." One could argue from this not only that the Lord actually has eyeballs like human beings but that he has trillions of them. Otherwise how could they actually be in every place? In 1 Cor. 4:17 Paul says, "For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord..." So Paul must be the father of Timotheus. John 3:7 says, "Ye must be born again." Consequently, you have to reenter the womb and make another appearance. What a feat! Job 21:24 ("His breasts are full of milk") and Prov. 30:28 ("The spider taketh hold with her hands") could also be pushed to the wall. After all, Scripture says males have breasts with milk and spiders have hands. In John 10:7 Jesus says, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep." Jesus said he was a door; so he must be a door. He called his followers sheep. Therefore all Christians are real sheep. Otherwise he's a liar. First Cor. 10:4 says, "...for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ." If the Bible says Christ was a rock, then he must be a rock. In Matt. 5:29 Jesus says, "If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee" and in Matt. 5:30 Jesus said, "If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off and cast it from thee." I don't see any Christians walking around with plucked out eyes or severed hands. But that's what it says. And how could a hand or an eye offend you to begin with? I have never known of one to display intellect or will power. In light of these citations and scores of others that are available, one can now understand what a real strict literalist sounds like. Obviously a zealous biblical critic could press many additional points home if he really stuck to the letter of the script.

But I don't emphasize these verses, because I don't think in all fairness they should be taken literally. You could, and some do, but I don't. The ones I have stressed over the years, however, are meant to be taken literally and only those feeling the heat contend otherwise. A reasonable balance must be maintained and in all honesty I think that I have attained that equilibrium quite well. The Rom. 3:23 versus Gen. 6:9 and Job 1:1 example, to which Rev. BB takes exception, has the necessary qualifications. A literal interpretation is fully warranted, especially in light of the rest of Scripture and the attitude Paul has toward humanity in general.

Letter #605 Continues (Part s)

As we have already proven, McKinsey's hypocritical method ignores a whole set of grammatic factors, and all three contexts in a blatant attempt to rationalize disharmony. "Nature abhors a vacuum," scientists proverbialize. Similarly, true Bible interpretation abhors a vacuum between the ears of the interpreter. McKinsey's methods are deceitful and illegitimate, arranged solely for the creation of facades like this one. God has reserved a special fate for such false teachers (Matt. 18:6).

Editor's Response to Letter #605 (Part s)

When Rev. BB mentions "a blatant attempt to rationalize disharmony" one can't help but feel he is referring to himself, for surely that describes his entire biblical defense to a tee. He refers to my violation of "a whole set of grammatic factors" without mentioning so much as one. What factors? This is nothing more than an attempt to impress his readers without being required to put up or shut up. To quote Mondale: Where's the beef? One of the most common tactics of apologists is to make grandiose generalizations without providing a shred of solid data in an attempt to prove without proof. Without explaining how or where, Rev. BB alleges that I ignore contexts and interpret too literally. Critics of BE have to fortify their allegations with chapter and verse, if they expect to be taken seriously. Otherwise, I have no way of knowing what they are referring to. If they can't be specific; if they can't provide the nuts and bolts necessary for a

credible argument, then they should do everyone a favor by remaining dormant. The "taking out of context" argument is one of the most overused, misused, perverted, twisted, and distorted arguments ever devised by biblical mouthpieces. It's a catch-all that can be thrown at any criticism without doing minimal research or putting forth any effort to prove one's case. I for one am tired of hearing this enervated defense that more often than not emanates from those least able to defend Scripture. It's the lazy man's out while projecting an aura of sophistication and erudition. When Rev. BB refers to my methods as being deceitful and illegitimate, when he refers to a vacuum between an interpreter's ears, he is only attempting to rid himself of his own inadequacies by projecting them on to another. His entire biblical philosophy is illegitimate and deceitful, which can no doubt be attributed in large part to the deficit lying behind his own forehead. But enough of this puerile namecalling which would not have been invoked were it not for the fact that his diatribes are so plentifully endowed with same. As far as the terrorism inherent in his citation of Matt. 18:6 is concerned, I can't help but think of the terror he should feel when the Koran condemns him to hell in Sura 5:72-75 for believing in the Trinity. One's as childish as the other.

Incidentally, the words "grammatic" and "proverbialize" aren't even in my Collegiate Dictionary and I've never heard of them. Either my vocabulary has just been increased or Rev. BB has further demonstrated his ineptitude with the English language. As far as "grammatic" is concerned, I think he means "grammatical."

Letter #605 Continues (Part t)

(The eighth question on our pamphlet asks how Moses could have written the first five books in the Bible (the Pentateuch) when his own death and burial are described in Deut. 34:5-6. In responding to our question Rev. BB says--Ed.),

First of all, there is no internal evidence for Moses' authorship of the Pentateuch, of which I am aware. (In other words, nowhere in those five books does Moses identify himself as the author.) Moses' authorship is commonly and widely accepted...on the basis of tradition. Therefore, what appears to be at odds here is NOT the Bible with itself, but the Bible with tradition. There's nothing self-contradictory about this.

Editor's Response to Letter #605 (Part t)

For once Rev. BB and I are in agreement. There is no internal evidence for the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. When he says "nowhere in those five books does Moses identify himself as the author," he is correct. In fact, there is a sizable body of evidence proving precisely the opposite. So why doesn't Rev. BB enlighten his fundamentalist friends who continue to claim Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible? He is also correct when he says the Mosaic "authorship is commonly and widely accepted...on the basis of tradition and therefore what appears to be at odds here is NOT the Bible with itself, but the Bible with tradition. There's nothing self-contradictory about this." But he's wholly incorrect when he alleges I claimed the Bible contradicted itself. I never said anything of the kind. If he had taken the time to see what was actually said, he would have noticed the question was directed toward those who claim Moses was the author. I never said the Bible was contradictory. I said the fundamentalist claim that Moses was the Torah's author contradicted the internal evidence. As I've said so often, and apparently it bears repeating, Biblical Errancy is concerned with everything bearing on the Bible's validity and that includes more than just internal contradictions. Exposing contradictions is only one phase among several in our program. BE is not, I repeat, IS NOT concerned only with biblical contradictions.

Letter #605 Continues (Part u)

Again, McKinsey indulges in excessively rigid, simplistic reasoning. There is a simple explanation that can reconcile this tradition (of Moses' authorship) with the Bible. Perhaps Moses authored the majority of Deuteronomy, writing until his death. Afterward, an anonymous scribe wrote the epilogue that chapter 34 clearly is. No, I cannot "prove" this theory, but it's certainly a more natural explanation than the antagonistic construction McKinsey's imagination creates.

Editor's Response to Letter #605 (Part u)

As has been stated on several occasions and apparently it bears repeating, I really wish our critics would read all of our back issues before sending us a letter that so clearly shows they haven't done their homework. This question was addressed long ago in issues 19 and 20. The only rigid, simplistic reasoning involved is that exhibited by someone who is relying upon his indoctrination, did not sufficiently research the question, and is obviously unaware of the response we gave to this common apologetic ploy. Even if Moses could not have written the last part of Deuteronomy, which Rev. BB is reluctantly willing to concede, he could not have written the remainder of the Pentateuch for other historical reasons as well. He admits he cannot prove his theory, but that's only a small part of his problem. He must also refute the historical arguments made in BE years ago regarding Moses and the Pentateuch. For him to say my imagination is creating an antagonistic construction is nothing more than a whimsical escape into grandiloquent rhetoric for purposes of "scholarly" exhibition and obfuscation. In other words, he's trying to hide his ignorance with a flurry of high-falutin rhetoric. If there is anyone who should not be free with the word "imagination" it is Rev. BB. TO BE CONTINUED

EDITOR'S NOTE: IT'S HERE, IT'S ARRIVED, THE WORLD HAS BEEN RENDERED AN IMMENSE SERVICE. OUR BOOK ENTITLED THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF BIBLICAL ERRANCY IS NOW BEING DISTRIBUTED AT BE'S OFFICE AND BY PROMETHEUS PRESS. MY FIRST COPIES ARRIVED ON VALENTINE'S DAY AND WERE A WONDERFUL PRESENT. THE BOOK WOULD MAKE A FINE GIFT AND IS COMPOSED OF 552 PAGES, INCLUDING A WORD INDEX OF 28 PAGES AND A VERSE INDEX OF 19 PAGES. IT'S DARK GREEN WITH BIG GOLD LETTERING AND LOOKS GREAT. WE URGE YOU TO ORDER COPIES FROM US OR THE PUBLISHER [PROMETHEUS BOOKS, 59 JOHN GLENN DRIVE, AMHERST, NEW YORK 14228-2197] WHICH HAS THE FOLLOWING AD IN ITS 1994/1995 FALL/WINTER TRADE CATALOGUE. AND DON'T FORGET TO TELL ALL YOUR FRIENDS, RELATIVES, AND EVERYONE ELSE ABOUT THE TREMENDOUS BIBLICAL CRITIQUE THAT IS NOW AVAILABLE.

Issue #149 Editor: Dennis McKinsey

May 1996

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

Because of considerable correspondence, this issue, like last month's, will be devoted entirely to letters from our readers.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #611 from HJ of Charlotte, North Carolina (Part a)

You take issue with fundamentalists when they choose to define a word to suit their purpose. Since listening to a number of your tapes and reading many of your BE newsletters, frankly, I find it necessary to accuse you of doing likewise. It's a sad commentary to fault the opposition for using junk warfare while flailing disembodied or misunderstood words at them yourself.

Case in point: You define perfect as absolute or unwavering in its meaning. In all civilized languages people use words to mean whatever they choose for them to mean at that moment. "I've looked for this dress everywhere. It's perfect! I'll wear it to the Woop-goopers' dinner tomorrow."

Pursuant to your style of argument, this dress, being perfect, must have made itself spontaneously, cannot be damaged or soiled and will fit any and all comers flawlessly, while making them also beautiful beyond perception. Furthermore she sought it looking between every molecule in the universe. Hog wash. The lady obviously meant she'd shopped several stores and the dress suited the occasion. To condemn her to perpetual labor in a tailor shop for her statement would be unkind. So would saying that she used the word correctly.

Editor's Response to Letter #611 (Part a)

When are you and your compatriots going to realize we are dealing with the perfect work of a perfect being? We aren't talking about statements by fallible people but statements beyond mortal man's capability. No man can go everywhere or create something that is flawless. That's beyond his capacity and we all know it. But it's not beyond God's capability and that's what's on the agenda. For that reason your analogy is completely invalid. No one is going to hold any mortal to a standard only God can fulfill. So that's not the issue and you are only trying to deceive people by implying it is. There is a world of difference between God using the word "perfect" and man using it. As I have stated repeatedly, if Noah was not morally perfect, then he had no more right to be on the ark than anyone else. If Noah wasn't morally perfect, then the flood was useless because it did not purify the world by eradicating all the evil people and starting things anew as we are told. And if Noah wasn't morally perfect, then neither is God, because the same Hebrew word for "perfect" is applied to God in Deut. 32:4. In essence, when

you are dealing with God and the perfect book, you have entered an entirely different arena that cannot be compared to everyday living by normal people.

Moreover, what rationale led you to conclude that if something is perfect it must have made itself, spontaneously no less. I don't see the logical connection and why can't it be damaged or soiled. Are you saying that because something is perfect it must remain so forever? And why must your dress fit all comers. That's an impossibility. How could any dress be all sizes simultaneously? Your leaps in logic repeatedly elude me.

Letter #611 Continues (Part b)

I sense that you would want to ask, "Can't God just say what He means even though He is dictating?"

Please tell me what authority you use to claim that if God is perfect he could not make something imperfect? Even experts do a lesser job sometimes because they intend to.

Editor's Response to Letter #611 (Part b)

Don't try to build a strawman. I'm not asking for God to say what He means. The problem is that he said what he meant (assuming it's his book) and you don't like what you heard. You are the one implicitly asking for him to say something different.

You say a perfect being can do things that are imperfect when he intends to. But that is a repudiation of the very definition of God. By definition, everything he does is perfect. He can't do something that's imperfect. How can a perfect being do imperfect acts and still be called perfect? Your reference to "experts" is invalid because you are dealing with mere mortals who are not perfect and couldn't be so even if they wanted to. No expert ever did a perfect job. He is only classified as an expert when compared to others in the trade. He is more qualified than others and performs the same deeds better, but nothing he does is perfect. When experts do a lesser job, they are not moving from perfect behavior to imperfect behavior but are moving from imperfect behavior to behavior that is even further from perfection. Again, you are trying to concoct an invalid analogy.

Letter #611 Continues (Part c)

To argue that God would have to make man perfect in order to be perfect himself flies in the face of the very common sense which is your stock in trade. Why would not man be perfect for His purpose? "Let's cast the die," He might have said, "and see what numbers come up!" (Two dice, in the case of Adam and Eve).

This, of course, refutes His omniscience, but what the heck, nobody's perfect! If God is perfect then he is omnipotent and can do anything even though it be paradoxical. (Yes, Virginia, He can make a rock so big that even He can't pick it up. Then He'll pick it up to prove He's omnipotent!). I made up that rule myself. How do you like it?

Editor's Response to Letter #611 (Part c)

Now you're getting silly! You refer to God casting dice as if he wouldn't know the outcome beforehand. This is an argument? You say God can perform the paradoxical which is a euphemism for contradiction and then admit you made it up. How do I like your rule? I don't! It's childish. You said he can't pick it up and then reversed 180 degrees and said he picked it up.

Your rule is as absurd as your argumentation. But still, I'd like to thank you for saying common sense is my stock in trade.

Letter #611 Concludes (Part d)

...Who told you that excellent in every way means perfect? In spite of the fact that not even perfect always means perfect you have already expressed that perfect is a superlative. "Excellent" falls short of perfect, even if it's the lady's excellent dress! You can't add up enough excellents to have a perfect any more than you can add up a bunch of pretty goods and get an A+....

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #611 (Part d)

At times your letter borders on being incoherent when not puerile. Who said anything about the word "excellent"? And what does that have to do with the issue? We're discussing the word "perfect." Another one of your strawmen? What do you mean by saying I have always said perfect is a superlative? There are no degrees or gradations with respect to "perfect," just as there are no degrees or gradations with respect to God. You seem to think that God and his book should be held to no higher standard than one would expect from mankind in general. Not only are your arguments poor but you possess an amazing ability to express yourself in rambling, disjointed, uncommunicative, sophistic rhetoric. It doesn't take a mental genius to realize that non sequiturs, invalid analogies, and strawmen are your stock-in-trade.

Letter #612 from Rev. WW of Lufkin, Texas

In a discussion of salvation with a local acquaintance (I won't call him a friend because he is an admitted atheist) reference was made to your publication, Biblical Errancy. In several issues you address the subject of salvation, but issues 3, 71, and 94 concern me the most. Your interpretation of biblical passages referring to salvation are on the surface scholarly and penetrating. They give the illusion that we Bible believing Christians are ill informed when we tell others that faith in our Lord Jesus Christ is all that is needed for salvation. However, it is you who have missed the point.

Scripture teaches a great deal about salvation. In treating such an all-encompassing theme, it discusses a number of different facets of that doctrine. But regardless of how esoteric they may appear to the evangelically inept, what it all comes down to when properly interpreted is simply to have faith. Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is a gift of God." Faith and nothing else is required, not works, not grace, not predestination, not choice....

Editor's Response to Letter #612

You haven't proved much of anything, my friend. All you have done is utter some unsubstantiated allegations that blend with your biblical inculcations. First, you refer to my analysis of the Bible as being superficially scholarly and penetrating without providing any substantive evidence. I'd appreciate specifics rather than glittering generalities. Which of my observations in particular are less than scholarly? Second, you said I misled your fellow Christians by giving them the impression that faith in Jesus Christ is not all that is needed for salvation. But that's not my position; that's the Bible's stance. You'd better reread your own book, my friend. You missed more than one point; you missed all of the data in the commentaries of issues 3, 53, 54, 71, and 94 which show that works, whim, predestination, universalism, faith, and grace are all possible avenues to salvation according to Scripture. You've thrown all of your

eggs into the Eph. 2 basket, while discounting a mountain of evidence to the contrary. Your mind is set in ideological concrete because the Bible itself says that faith alone is not the only route to salvation. As I said before, faith alone may be the position of Paul but it does not meld with the assertions of Jesus, James, the OT, and elsewhere. You state that, "Scripture teaches a great deal about salvation." It most assuredly does, but, unfortunately, you have chosen to ignore about 90%. You say that, "what it all comes down to when properly interpreted is simply to have faith," when only the scripturally inept would make such an erroneous comment. You say, "Faith and nothing else is required, not works, not grace, not predestination, not choice." That may be your position but it's not that of the Bible. Again, I would advise you to read the issues cited earlier or Chapter 16 in my book, *The Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy*.

And lastly, you injudiciously quoted Eph. 2:8-9, a passage contradictory within itself. It says you are saved through faith, while simultaneously calling salvation a gift of God. How can it be a gift when it must be earned. If you don't make an effort, if you don't have faith in Jesus, then you aren't saved. How, then, can it be called a gift completely divorced from any works on your part? You must do something-believe in Jesus-in order to receive it. Apparently, even after having read my commentaries, you remain unaware of other roads to salvation and unaware of a substantial contradiction in the passage upon which you are relying for support.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #613 from HK of Randolph, Mass.

Dear Mr. McKinsey. I've now had the chance to read several issues of BE, and like very much what I see. I thought that you might find it useful to have some feedback from a new reader.

Overall, BE is great! It's highly informative, literate, reasoned, etc. And I'm especially glad that you went to a 2-column format--it makes it much easier to read.

OTOH, the dot-matrix printer you use to put the newsletter out is **not** so great. The dot matrix print itself is of very mediocre quality, and it looks worse when you go to italics. Nor is the type font great--a serif'd font would be much more comfortable on the eye.

The reproduction of the newsletter is fine--it's the original printing which could benefit from some work....

Finally, I'd like to suggest another area you might explore in BE, and that's Paul and the automatic acceptance of his writing which is found among Christians. Because Paul wrote that stuff in the bible, Christians automatically accord him respect. But just who the hell **was** Paul? What is the source of his authority as an original source for Christian thought? Did anyone with authority appoint him or bestow his blessing on Paul, or is it possible that Paul was just some kind of con-artist who saw a good opportunity to make a name for himself with this new product line?.... By Paul's own account, he was quite a zealot. Now, there are some things about the behavior of zealots which are quite well-known. For example, Paul boasts of his lying to "save souls"--"I became all things to all men, that I might [save?] some." This confusion of means and ends is one of the things which characterizes demagogues and fanatics of all persuasions (religious, political, social)....

The bottom line is, I think it would be beneficial for Christians, as well as for their victims, and certainly interesting for all concerned, to go back to basics and start thinking anew about who Paul was, how he came to be such a major part of Christianity, how his ideas relate to those of Jesus, how they might be a parody of what Jesus wanted, etc. I suspect he's simply a con artist or

opportunist who saw a good thing and latched on to it, and sold his ideas by force of personality. Thanks. Keep up the interesting work!

Editor's Response to Letter #613

We appreciate your compliments and you'll be happy to learn we will no longer use italics on our dot-matrix printer. I concluded several issues ago that it was just too hard to read. Hopefully we will be able to improve the overall print quality by employing a lazer printer but that's still in the works. Your comments regarding Paul are worth considering, although that's essentially an extra-biblical topic outside our normal purview....

Letter #614 from JV of Chicago, Illinois

Dear Dennis. Recently I came across a problem in the bible you may or may not be aware of. In the essay entitled "Of the Books of the New Testament," the patriot Thomas Paine concludes that most, if not all, the letters attributed to Paul in the new testament were not written by Paul. As proof of this, Paine shows that certain of Paul's letters (1st and 2nd Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians) end with a clear statement claiming authorship other than Paul; in most cases, the city in which the letter was written is also given. For example, the biblical book entitled "The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Ephesians" concludes with this statement: "Written from Rome unto the Ephesians by Tychicus." This letter begins with a statement that Paul wrote it, and ends with a statement that someone called Tychicus wrote it. I decided to check the bible to see just who it was that wrote this particular letter. Well, Paul did, and so did Tychicus--depending on which version of the bible you read. For instance, the New King James version omits not only the closing statement of the Ephesians' letter but all the closing statements of authorship that Paine cites for the other Pauline letters--thereby neatly avoiding one of the more obvious conflicts about who wrote the letters attributed to Paul. But wait--I have a King James version of the bible, published shortly after the turn of the century, and--lo and behold--the end-statements of authorship that Paine mentioned in his 19th-Century essay are there for all to see. I also happen to have a copy of Gideon's version of the King James bible and--presto!--the end-statements disappear again. The end-statements are gone, then they're there, then they're gone again. Since there are many versions (and translations) of the bible, and I have not read even a fraction of them, I'm certain the confusion over who actually wrote the so-called Pauline letters will be with us for a long time.

What disturbs me most about all of this is the gall of the christians. If there's something in the bible that is contradictory or assaults reason, they eliminate it with a new "version" (or new translation). So much for the vaunted inerrancy of the bible.

Editor's Response to Letter #614

Dear JV. I've been aware of this problem for years but never pressed the issue because it works to our advantage for biblicists to strongly assert that Paul was the author of all those letters. The more writings they attribute to Paul the greater opportunity we have of exposing the duplicity of one of Christianity's most important founders. More writings only make him more vulnerable. The more he said, the more we can critique and the greater becomes the number of contradictions, inconsistencies and inaccuracies we have at our disposal. So I wouldn't work too hard to restrict his authorship. He's one of Christianity's creators and the more that can be laid at his doorstep the more open to attack he becomes.

Before closing, there are a couple minor points you might want to reconsider. First, the Gideons have no version of the bible that I am aware of. If my memory serves me correctly the Gideons

are merely a group of people, mostly businessmen, who agreed to finance the distribution of the King James Bible in hotels, motels, etc. Secondly, I don't think you meant to say, "If there's something in the bible that is contradictory or assaults reason, they eliminate it with a new "version" (or new translation)." If that were true, most versions of the Bible could be written on memo pads. I think I know what you meant to say, so I would recommend that you either rewrite or eliminate that sentence. In no way, shape, or form has everything in any version of the Bible been eliminated that is contradictory or assaults reason.

Letter #615 from PC of Bainbridge, Georgia

...You and your work have meant more to me than any of my college courses or professors.

Letter #616 from JR of Saline, Michigan

Dear Mr. McKinsey.I just received my long-awaited copy of "THE ENCYCLOPEDIA". Words cannot describe how pleased I am to have it. I would love to send it to you to have it autographed but it's going to be a long time before I'll be able to part with it long enough to do that. I would like to urge you in the strongest way possible to consider publishing a compacted "vest pocket" edition of your "encyclopedia" so I could keep it handy for "battle" whenever I encounter the "enemy" unexpectedly. You know, a cute little volume printed on that super thin gilt-edged paper, perhaps with a simulated leather cover. I'm serious - I would be willing to pay good money for such a treasure.

I have a teenage son who is very confused by all the christian propaganda he's being bombarded with by his friends so I am forever grateful for your assistance in helping to present the "real" story to him.... Keep up the great work! P.S. I'm already looking forward to receiving your NEXT BOOK!

Editor's Response to Letter #616

Dear JR. Depending on how The Encyclopedia turns out I already have plans for two additional books I would like to publish. One would be a debater's handbook specifically designed for verbal encounters in which all of the notes from my five large notebooks would be condensed into an easy-to-read, readily accessible, tabulated, alphabetized format for quick reference during encounters with biblicists. Instead of being in narrative form, it would resemble a dictionary or almanac with a wealth of biblical citations followed by observations on their obvious implications. More than likely this volume would be even larger than The Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy.

The second book would be far smaller and contain the information found in our Dialogue and Debate and Letters to the Editor sections. Some of the Review sections could be included as well. A lot of good information is contained within these arenas that was never included within The Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy.

Letter #617 from SS of Angels Camp, California

Dear Mr. McKinsey. A short note to thank you for writing The Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy. It should be required study in every school in the country.... Thank you again for what has to have been a Herculean labor of love.

Letter #618 from GL of Waldorf, Maryland

Mr. McKinsey. I recently finished your extensive book on Bible errancy. You really dissect the book. I was curious if you are a wealthy person, as it would seem to me that you would need a staff and a lot of concentrated time to do all that work and analyses. In any event, I enjoyed the book a great deal.

Islam appears to be a rather hard-headed, ruthless, debilitating religion to me and the Koran is a lot of repetitive nonsense. You mention in your book that you have some further analyses concerning the Koran. How could I get them?.... I am 72.... I feel that all religion is bunk, as Edison said.... The tenets, ideas, philosophies, etc. of all religions fly in the face of basic reason, logic and good sense.... I have also read about Mormonism and the Book of Mormon. It is almost impossible to believe that there is a significant number of people who cling to that hogwash. Amazing!!

Editor's Response to Letter #618

I appreciate your compliment and can assure you that I am not a wealthy person, although, like everyone else, I would like to be. I have no staff other than my wife who acts as my bookkeeper and the amount of time I devote to this cause is sizable.

Islam is an exceptionally dangerous religion because the Koran actually advocates the eradication of its opponents. With all their faults, New Testament writers never went quite that far. The Ayatollah Khomeini is far more representative of true Koranic teachings than the Islamic mouthpieces who periodically appear on the media and tailor their propaganda to an American audience. Look at any country dominated by the mullahs and/or their sidekicks and you'll see what Islam really entails. You can find more information about Islam in the commentaries of Issues 105, 106, and 107.

(GL is a periodic writer of letters to his hometown newspaper. We would like to thank him for sending the following letter to the Chairwoman of his local Board of Education, which was also sent to, and published by, his local Maryland paper on November 23, 1994. It would be nice if more people followed his example--Ed.).

Dear Mrs. Patterson: Not surprisingly, I have noted that the Bible, as well as other religiously oriented material, is part of the collections in public schools throughout Charles County. We have no objection to the Bible being included but feel that all views concerning mythology, religion, and rationalism should be available for scholarly research. And since the Charles County Public Schools are subsidized by taxpayer funds, it is important to be cognizant of the establishment clause of the First Amendment.

With these thoughts in mind, I would like to request that the following reference sources be added to the libraries of the schools of Charles County: (1) The Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy by C. Dennis McKinsey. Prometheus Press, 59 John Glenn Drive, Amherst, New York 14228-2197. (2) The Bible Handbook. 11th Edition by Foote & Ball. Published by The Pioneer Press, 1961.

It might be possible that the above books could be supplied with moderate or little cost. Your response to this request would be appreciated.

Letter #619 from HM of Bellbrook, Ohio

Greetings Dennis. It isn't often that I'm overwhelmed by the urge to write a letter of praise to the author of a book I enjoyed reading, but in your case the urge had to be satisfied. If I could save

only one book from my considerably large collection of literature critical of religion (that is, if my house was on fire), it would doubtless be The Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy. It, more than any other, strikes at the very heart of Christianity, reducing the revered scriptures to superstitious rubble. It seems unlikely that any reader could still accept the Bible as God's Word after a journey through the absorbing pages of your Encyclopedia.

This certainly has to be your crowning achievement to date, though your newsletter cannot get lost in the shuffle. Have you ever thought of donating a copy to the U.S. Supreme Court (where "the buck stops here") or to your local library, etc.? I've been tempted to purchase several copies myself and mail them to a chosen few.... Good luck on the sales of your splendid book, Dennis. It's my favorite!

Letter #620 from MC of Santa Clara, California

Finally received your book last week. Definitive! Excellent! I look forward to your monthly issues with pleasure. I am running out of space on my "Religion" shelf!

EDITOR'S NOTE: If you find any errors in The Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy please let me know as soon as possible. The editor and I would like to have them corrected if a second edition is issued. With as many names, dates, places, facts, and citations as are in this book, no errors of any kind would be too much to expect.

Issue #150 Editor: Dennis McKinsey

June 1995

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

This month's commentary will mark a resumption of our critique of Haley's apologetic defense of the Bible which was last addressed in the February issue.

REVIEWS

HALEY'S ALLEGED DISCREPANCIES OF THE BIBLE (Part IV)--On page 178 Haley confronts the conflict between 2 Tim. 3:12 ("All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution") and Prov. 16:7 ("When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him."). How can people who live godly in Christ suffer persecution when the latter verse says the enemies of a man who pleases the Lord will live peacefully with him? As is true in so many instances, Haley cites other authorities to make his case. He quotes Andrew Fuller who says, "The truth seems to be that neither of the above passages is to be taken universally. The peace possessed by those who please God does not extend so far as to exempt them from having enemies; and, though all godly men must in some form or other be persecuted, yet none are persecuted at all times." Now let's don't be duplicitous. If these two passages are not to be taken universally, then what passage is? And if no passages are to be taken universally, then a monkey wrench is thrown into the gears not only of the Ten Commandments but a substantial portion of the entire NT. This defense generates an interesting variation on a point we have made repeatedly: How do you know what is true when you begin to admit certain parts are false. In this instance, how do you know what is to be taken universally when you begin to claim universals are to be taken restrictedly. Both verses are stated as universals and nothing justifies limiting their coverage, other than an apologetic need to escape a cul de sac. Haley says God does not exempt those who please him from having enemies when Prov. 16:7 says he does. He continues by saying "all godly men must in some form or other be persecuted, yet none are persecuted at all times." Yet Prov. 16:7 says they can't be persecuted at any time, let alone at all times. It's frequency is irrelevant. It can never occur, period.

Continuing to quote Fuller, Haley says, "God has always given his people some seasons of rest. The former of these passages may therefore refer to the native enmity which true godliness is certain to excite; and the latter to the divine control over it. Man's wrath shall be let loose to a degree; but farther than what is necessary for the praise of God it shall not go." Fuller's dissimulation becomes even more pronounced when he says "The former of these passages may therefore refer to the native enmity which true godliness is certain to excite." What does this have to do with anything? Whether native or foreign born, enmity is enmity. And the word "persecution" in 2 Tim. 3:12 goes beyond mere dislike and wrath. More often than not physical acts are involved. So we are not talking about some form of "mild enmity."

Haley concludes by saying the latter verse refers "to the divine control over it." But divine control is not divine abolition. Prov. 16:7 says his enemies will always be at peace with him, not that this will usually be the case.

Another conflict addressed by Haley (page 200) concerns Isa. 26:19 ("The dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise") and 1 Cor. 15:21, 52 ("The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible") on the one hand and Job 7:9 ("He that goeth down to the grave shall come up no more") and Isa. 26:14 ("They are dead, they shall not live; they are deceased, they shall not rise") on the other. In reaching for an explanation Haley offers the following. "The quotation from Job expresses the opinion, or perhaps the temporary doubts, of a good, but uninspired man." The speaker in Job is uninspired? One might just as well say the entire book of Job is uninspired and doesn't belong in Scripture, since the same person is speaking throughout nearly all of Job. Using the word "perhaps" is an admission by Haley that he's merely suggesting or guessing. Haley then states, "They cannot counterbalance the express statements of inspiration" that the dead will rise. I beg to differ! Oh yes they can! Most of scripture counterbalances something said elsewhere. Why assume this is an exception?

On the next page Haley seeks to resolve the conflict between Acts 26:23 ("The Christ should suffer, and...be the first that should rise from the dead") which said that Christ was the first to rise from the dead and other verses (1 Kings 17:22, 2 Kings 13:21, and Luke 7:15) which say people rose from the dead prior to Jesus. Haley states, "Romans 6:9 ("Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him") furnishes a solution to this difficulty. Jesus was the first who rose from the dead 'to die no more.' All others who were raised, passed a second time through the gates of death. But over him, death 'hath no more dominion.' Hence, he is the 'first-begotten of the dead,' the first who was raised to immortal life." Haley's explanation is a classic example of switching emphasis. We aren't talking about what occurred after the various resurrections occurred. That's irrelevant. The fact that Jesus did not die again is not germane to the issue. We are discussing who rose from the dead first, not what happened to them afterwards. The contradiction stands.

On page 215 Haley tackles the clash between Psalm 78:69 ("The earth which he hath established forever"), Psalm 104:5 ("Who laid the foundations of the earth that it should not be removed for ever") and Eccle. 1:4 ("The earth abideth for ever") versus Luke 21:33 ("Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away") and 2 Peter 3:10 ("The earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up"). He states, "As to the first texts, the Hebrew word 'olam' rendered 'forever,' does not imply the metaphysical idea of absolute endlessness, but a period of indefinite length, as Rambach says, 'a very long time, the end of which is hidden from us.' These texts do not necessarily teach the absolute perpetuity of the earth." Stripped to its bare essentials, all Haley is saying is that "forever" doesn't mean forever. It has an end which happens to be hidden. But if it has an "end," then it can't be forever. He's hoping his readers will swallow this doubletalk. All three verses in the first group say "forever." What would the authors have had to say in order to convince Haley that when they said "forever" they meant "forever," not merely an indefinite period with a hidden end. It is often hard to imagine how the Bible's authors could have written something to make the Book's defenders admit it means exactly what the words state. One can't help but feel the Book's defenders are telling its authors: You don't really mean that; to which the authors would no doubt reply: Oh yes we do. In this instance, there is no word or series of words the authors could have used that apologists would not have perverted in such a manner as to make them mean something less than "eternal" or "forever."

Haley's "reconciliation" of John 3:13 ("No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven") with 2 Kings 2:11 ("Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven") is exceptionally weak. He states, "In the first text Jesus, setting

forth his own superior authority, says substantially, 'No human being can speak from personal knowledge, as I do, who came down from heaven.' 'No man hath ascended up to heaven to bring back tidings.' But the text says nothing of the kind. Where does Jesus say anything about speaking from personal knowledge or bringing back tidings? Haley continues by saying, "So we, speaking of the secrets of the future world, should very naturally say: 'No man has been there to tell us about them.' In saying this, we do not deny that any one has actually entered the eternal world, but merely that any one has gone thither, and returned to unfold its mysteries." When I read rationalizations of this stripe, as occurs so often, I can't help but think of the political comment that was thrown around so loosely not long ago: What is mine is mine; what is yours is negotiable. The very fact that Haley's vacuous explanation is even given a hearing and seriously contemplated can only work to his advantage. Nothing whatever is said, either expressed or implied, about anyone bringing any information back from anywhere. Where does the verse say or imply anything with reference to someone returning from the eternal world "to unfold its mysteries"? The mere discussion of something so inane provides it a degree of legitimacy, a degree of credibility, which is all Haley desires. In confronting a problem without a sensible solution Haley concocted a brew that he hopes will somehow stick. If any part thereof is seriously considered, then he's halfway home. The whole idea behind a good apologetic defense is to generate any kind of explanation that can somehow be deemed plausible. As long as it is sufficient to create indecision and doubt, that's all that's needed. It doesn't have to be airtight. Apologists are not interested in the attainment of truth. They are only interested in making sure you don't obtain it or remain uncertain once you have. Anything that sows doubt, discord, or uncertainty in your logical processes works to their advantage. That's their stock-in-trade. As long as they can convince you that something is meant other than what you are reading with your own eyes, their assignment is well on the way to completion.

On page 217 Haley's reconciliation of 1 Cor. 15:50 ("Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption") with Heb. 11:5 ("Enoch was translated that he should not see death") is short but not sweet. He states, "A late sceptical writer adduces this as a...discrepancy. It need only be said that, beyond question, Enoch and Elijah, before entering the heavenly world, passed through a change 'equivalent' to death. The corruptible put on incorruption, and their mortal put on immortality." Talk about reading into the text! Where does the Bible either state or imply that they went "through a change equivalent to death" that changed their corruption into incorruption? Second Kings 2:11, which Haley prefers not to cite, vis a vis Enoch's account, says Elijah went straight to heaven. Nothing is said about prior purification. Haley hopes that by using the phrase "beyond question," the sheer force of his words will carry the day. But it's by no means beyond question. Quite the contrary, it's very much in question.

On the same page Haley continues to engage in eisegesis (reading into the text) via an unsubstantiated harmonization of Matt. 21:31 ("The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you") with 1 Cor. 6:9-10 ("Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God"). He states, "The first text does not say that publicans and harlots as such, but merely that some who had been such, and had afterwards repented, should enter heaven. Paul, in the verse succeeding the quotation in Corinthians, observes: 'And such were some of you, but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified.' They had been corrupt and wicked, but were so no longer. Observe also, that our Saviour's assertion amounts simply to this, "The publicans and harlots are more likely to be saved, stand a better chance for salvation, than do you, chief priests and elders.' Neither this passage, nor any other, sanctions the idea of impurity tolerated in heaven."

Haley's rationalization is plagued with dissemblance. First, the first text says nothing about people who "had been such." There is no past tense involved. Haley is making a faltering attempt

to make their status diametrically opposed to what Matt. 21:31 is saying and commensurate with his conception of what heaven allows. It is talking about people who are currently publicans and harlots, not those who formerly retained that status. Where does the first text say anything about them "repenting" and thereby changing their status? Second, Paul's comment in 1 Cor. 6:11 ("And such were some of you, but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified") only substantiates verses 9 and 10. All it is saying is that while they were publicans and harlots they could not have entered the kingdom of heaven, but now that they are washed and sanctified they can. But all of this contradicts Matt. 21:31 which refers to publicans and harlots who entered heaven, even though nothing is said about them having been purified. And lastly, Matt. 21:31 ("The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you") is another one of those absolutist statements upon which the Bible periodically chokes. If Matt. 21:31 had said something akin to, "The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you after they have been purified, sanctified, or cleansed there would have been no problem." But that's not what the text states. Instead, they are going in as harlots and publicans per se. Haley is trying to use 1 Cor. 6:11, in combination with the two prior verses (9 and 10), to modify Matt. 21:31. In essence, we are confronting another instance in which an apologist is trying to use verses in other parts of Scripture to ameliorate the effects of absolutist cul de sacs.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #605 from Rev. BB Resumes (Part aa)

(The fourteenth question on our pamphlet is: Matt. 27:9-10 quotes a prophecy made by Jeremy the prophet. Yet no Bible believer has ever been able to show me where it lies in the book of Jeremiah. Rev. BB responds by saying--Ed.),

Perhaps you weren't listening - at least that wouldn't surprise me. Read Jer. 32:6-9, where Jeremiah buys a field, paying for it with silver. Then read Zech. 11:12-13, where the potter and the thirty pieces of silver are mentioned.

Editor's Response to Letter #605 (Part aa)

Instead of shooting from the hip through his foot, Rev. BB should have read my commentary on page 2 in the 108th Issue regarding the dissimilarities between the accounts in Jeremiah and Zechariah. They are not discussing the same events. But even more importantly, who cares what Zechariah says. We are talking about a prophecy that is allegedly in the Book of Jeremiah. And since it's nowhere to be found in Jeremiah and Rev. BB made no attempt to reveal where it can be found in Jeremiah, I rest my case.

Letter #605 from Rev. BB Continues (Part bb)

(The seventeenth question on our pamphlet is: We are told salvation is obtained by faith alone (John 3:18, 36); yet, Jesus told a man to follow the Commandments--Matt. 19:16-18 (saving by works)--if he wanted eternal life. Rev. BB responds by saying--Ed.),

Half truth! McKinsey lacks any sense of finesse, any flexibility to search for a larger truth beyond the merely obvious. For example, far from making an all-encompassing statement about salvation, further from contradicting Himself, in Matt. 19, Jesus is setting up a surprise for the rich young man. His purpose is to shock him into a realization that salvation is more than a matter of externals, but involves an inward faith commitment as well. His method is to shock the young man with the rigid requirements and further, the radical commitment that true faith demands. Thus, the teaching method produces a statement that may seem contradictory, but is

only superficial. A better understanding of this event and Jesus' purpose in the light of the entire Bible's teaching quickly eliminates any alleged differences.

Editor's Response to Letter #605 (Part bb)

What Rev. BB really means by saying I lack "any sense of finesse, any flexibility to search for a larger truth beyond the merely obvious" is that I don't read into the text whatever tickles my funnybone or what I'd like to hear. I'm too involved in exegesis rather than eisegesis. This "larger truth beyond the merely obvious," which Rev. BB chooses to insert into the script is nothing more than a cloak for his own opinions and conjectures. He says Jesus is trying to shock the rich young man "into a realization that salvation is more than a matter of externals, but involves an inward faith commitment as well," when that is exactly what the text is not saying. The only subject discussed is externals. Nothing is said about believing in anything. In true apologetic style Rev. BB is interpolating at will. Words such as "faith" and "commitment" are nowhere to be found. Rev. BB says, "Jesus' method is to shock the young man with the rigid requirements and further the radical commitment that true faith demands. Thus, the teaching method produces a statement that may seem contradictory, but that is only superficial." What a lot of twaddle! Where on earth is he getting all this? It doesn't seem contradictory; it is contradictory. There is no "may seem" to it. The problem does not lie with my being superficial but with Rev. BB adding a layer that doesn't exist. And then he states, "A better understanding of this event and Jesus' purpose in light of the entire Bible's teaching quickly eliminates any alleged differences." In other words, ignore what Jesus is saying, wander off into other parts of Scripture that say what you want to hear, and then transpose whatever strikes your fancy. Incidentally, to what other biblical teachings is he referring? Citation of chapter and verse are noticeably absent. I wonder why? Instead of providing specifics, he simply refers to "the entire Bible's teaching."

Letter #605 from Rev. BB Continues (Part cc)

(The eighteenth question on our pamphlet is: According to the text there are 29 cities listed in Joshua 15:21-32 (RSV). One need only count them to see that the total is 36, proving biblical math is not to be trusted. Rev. BB responds by saying--Ed.),

Criticisms like this are petty and picayune. They reveal more about the mind and soul of the writer than they do about the Bible. McKinsey has clearly not read the text very carefully. The NIV says "29 towns and their villages." As the number of villages is not given, we can easily assume that 7 of these names designate "their villages" and not the "towns".

Finally, what does it matter? The bible (sic--Ed.) is a spiritually alive work of divinely-inspired art, not a set of IRS tax tables and instructions. An overweening attention to details is unnecessary, and, as we have been forced to repeatedly observe, is culturally inappropriate.

Editor's Response to Letter #605 (Part cc)

How wrong can one be! First, there is nothing petty or picayune about providing facts to prove the Bible is flawed. Rev. BB only wishes the opposite were true. Inerrancy goes to the very crux of whether or not the Bible is the word of a perfect being. If the Bible has mistakes, then it couldn't emanate from a perfect being and 2 Tim. 3:16 ("All Scripture is given by inspiration of God") is a lie. Apologists don't seem to realize that lawyers build their cases on details. That's the meat and potatoes of their profession. The grandiose rhetoric and glittering generalities in which apologists specialize are wholly inadequate. They'll never get the job done, even though biblicists employ them on a regular basis.

Second, Rev. BB asks, "What does it matter? The bible (sic) is a spiritually alive work of divinely- inspired art, not a set of IRS tax tables and instructions." As we have noted on numerous occasions, precision and details matter tremendously. Imagine one lawyer telling another: You're just too concerned with details. The Bible is nothing without accuracy. Without perfection, its spirituality differs from other works only in terms of quantity not quality. How could a book possibly be spiritually alive and divinely-inspired that contains so much dead wood? And its only resemblance to art is that found on ghetto walls and passing buses.

Third, the only one who has submitted drivel for homework and failed to read very carefully is Rev. BB. He employs the NIV to prove his case, when it is no less clear than the KJV, the RSV, and many other versions on the market. They all say the same. Joshua 15:21 in the NIV says, "The southernmost towns of the tribe of Judah in the Negev toward the boundary of Edom were" and then it goes on to list 36 names. Yet the total is supposed to be 29 according to Joshua 15:32 which says "a total of twenty-nine towns and their villages." So the Bible erred by 7. To reconcile this difference Rev. BB says, "The NIV says '29 towns and their villages.' As the number of villages is not given, we can easily assume that 7 of these names designate 'their villages' and not the 'towns'." Rev. BB needs to read more meticulously. He's all but ignored Joshua 15:21 (NIV) which says "towns" situated along and then goes on to list 36 names. In other words, all of the subsequent names were to be those of towns. None of the names following Josh. 15:21 are those of villages. Nowhere does Josh. 15:21 say they are villages, and nowhere in the list does it say they are to be interpreted as such. Haley's reliance upon the word "villages" is nothing more than a gratuitous insertion based upon Josh. 15:32. There cannot be only 29 towns listed with 7 additional villages when the 21st verse said the following names are those of towns. If any version of the Bible is scripted with expediency as the overriding theme, it's the NIV. Yet, even it deserts Rev. BB when the chips are down.

And lastly, since Rev. BB likes to refer me to prior information and material, then I'll ask him to note what we said in prior issues regarding the cultural context and pettiness ploys. (To Be Continued)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #621 from RH of Simi Valley, California

I am burning with curiosity and intrigue to learn more about the 3 resurrections before Christ. Are they well-documented/witnessed as the Christians claim theirs is? I'd like to be able to use this as evidence in my argumentation sessions, so vehement have they become and so easily is the issue defused by showing that Christ was typical, not atypical, in regards to resurrection.

By the way, who decides what is a proof of being God? Even if He did rise from the dead, that wouldn't convince me that He created the whole universe, only that he had some superior knowledge that allowed him to perform resurrections. The degree of creativity and power required for the respective tasks is hugely different. Most Christians don't possess any degree of logic capable of handling degrees of anything. They prefer black and white arguments that make little sense to one who has experienced life even a little bit with an open mind.

Thanks again, and I repeat: you've made my breakfast sessions invigorating, and provided me with excellent defenses against solicitations by zealots. My own logic was fledglingly good, but yours and your data are superb.

Editor's Response to Letter #621

You might want to note the 10th point on our pamphlet entitled THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD? or read 1 Kings 17:17-22, 1 Sam. 28:7-15, 2 Kings 4:32-35, 2 Kings 13:21, and Matt. 27:52-53. All of them describe people rising from the dead before the resurrection of Jesus.

Letter #622 from LB of Firenze, Italy

Dear Mr. McKinsey. ...In BE I've read about the existence of many discrepancies concerning numbers in the Bible. On page 380 in Haley's Alleged Discrepancies in the Bible I read an explanation for this problem. He says single letters were used to represent numbers and often those letters were similar, and so many of those discrepancies arose from mistakes of copyists.

But in a little grammar of biblical Hebrew I've found that cardinal numbers were written literally. For example "Twenty-one" for 21. So a word, and not a single letter, was used to indicate a number. In this case misunderstanding is almost impossible isn't it?

Editor's Response to Letter #622

Dear LB. I think you've answered Haley without my assistance.

Letter #623 from RG of Brooklyn, Ohio

Dear Mr. McKinsey. I greatly enjoy Biblical Errancy and look forward to each issue.... As an ex-Jehovah's Witness who wasted the first thirty-five years of his life on religious nonsense, I can see the need for a movement countering religion. Most people are not able to see the contradictions and lack of logic in religious teachings on their own. For some reason I finally did, but in trying to talk to others still in various religions I can tell you that most of them are afraid to examine anything that challenges their beliefs. We need to keep exposing the contradictions in the Bible. I would be most happy to contribute to this effort by duplicating the tapes or helping in any other way that I can.

Editor's Response to Letter #623

Dear RG. We appreciate your willingness to assist and will notify everyone in a future issue how they can aid our cause. Stay tuned.

Letter #624 from SA of Brooklyn, New York

(SA wrote a letter in the Dec. 1994 issue regarding his 5 B's of bestiality, barbarism, bigotry, bloodshed, and brutality. He was criticized by RH of Simi Valley, California in Letter #609 (Issue 148/April 1995) for making mistakes and I concurred with some of RH's observations. SA sent us a corrected copy and prefaced it with the following comments--Ed.)

I can't seem to locate the Dec. 1994 issue of Biblical Errancy in which my letter appeared. I would appreciate your sending me another copy of that issue.... The writer of letter #609 is correct in stating that I made several mistakes and I should have checked it out more carefully. Your comments were also correct and I must apologize for being "overzealous." Your suggested verses are definitely more appropriate. I am enclosing several items with a Table of Contents and Comments. I hope that you will find them useful. Keep up the excellent work.

Editor's Response to Letter #624

Dear SA. I'm glad to have an ally as openminded as you. If only our opponents were as willing to admit their errors and make corrections! Instead, they prefer to defend hopeless positions at all costs.

ERRATUM: In the 148th issue on page 3 in the right column the 14th line from the bottom should read: "Moreover, would Rev. BB be so kind as to give...." We left out the word "be."

Issue #151 Editor: Dennis McKinsey

July 1995

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

This issue will continue our analysis of Haley's classic work and our exhaustive critique of Rev. BB's denunciation of our pamphlet, "The Bible is God's Word?"

REVIEWS

Haley's ALLEGED DISCREPANCIES OF THE BIBLE (Part V)--On page 230 Haley addresses the conflict between Rom. 7:18 ("For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing") and Gal. 2:20 ("I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me"). His explanation is relatively brief but highly suppositional. He states, "In these passages Paul speaks in two distinct relations. (a) 'In me, that is, in my flesh,'--in my lower, carnal self. (b) 'Christ liveth in me,'--in my higher, spiritual self, in my renewed heart in which Christ is enthroned. This is Alford's view. Hodge takes substantially the same view. Some interpret the first text as describing Paul previous to his conversion; the latter, as applying to him after the event."

Haley says "some interpret" and that's just the problem. Too much interpreting is involved at the expense of reading the words themselves. To begin with, how could the first text be interpreted as "describing Paul previous to his conversion", when it's found in the Book of Romans which Paul allegedly wrote after his conversion?

But even more importantly, this entire defense is based on guesswork. Where does the text state, either expressly or implicitly, that two opposite natures of Paul are involved. There is no evidence one text is referring to a higher spiritual self while the other is referring to a lower carnal self. Gratuitous assumptions are certainly not the hallmark of objective scholarship based on evidence and textual corroboration. This defense is founded far more on what Haley would like to think is the case than what he can prove to be true. A far more sensible explanation is that Paul just didn't remember or take into account his earlier comment that no good thing dwelt in him when he said that Christ dwelt within him. Or perhaps the order of the comments was reversed because Galatians was written prior to Romans. Either way he was more concerned with theological hyperbole than consistency. Of course, if Christ is no good then the contradiction vanishes.

On page 231 Haley submits another short reconciliation of a direct biblical clash. In this instance, Matt. 6:5-6 ("When thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites are: for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily I say to you, they have their reward. But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret"), 2 Kings, 4:33, Luke 6:12 and Acts 10:9 are opposed to 1 Tim. 2:8 ("I will therefore that men pray every where"), 1 Kings 8:22-23, and Dan. 6:10-11. Haley states, "It is not publicity, but ostentation in

prayer, which is prohibited; not praying in public, but praying in conspicuous places 'to be seen of men.' The motive, not the place, is the thing in question. Chrysostom and Augustine both caution us against a merely literal interpretation of Matt. 6:6."

The phrase "to be seen of men" lies at the core of Haley's rationalization. He tries to shift the focus by implying that as long as they pray modestly and with no intent to be seen by others they are behaving well. Motive is supposedly more important than location. If that were true, then there would be no need for Matthew to have said that when you pray you should enter your closet, shut thy door, and pray to your Father in secret. Why even refer to the location of prayer if the motive behind the prayer is more important? Why? Because location is of greater importance than motive.

Moreover, 1 Tim. 2:8 says God wants men to pray everywhere. Why would God give people specific instructions to pray in their closets, if he wanted them to pray everywhere? For understandable reasons, Haley is more interested in discussing one aspect of Matthew than the clash between Matthew and 1 Timothy. Haley falsely says, "It is not publicity, but ostentation in prayer, which is prohibited." The text says that when you pray enter into your closet and shut the door. It does not say public prayer is permissible as long as it is not ostentatious. It says don't pray in public period.

Haley's reconciliation of Ex. 31:15 ("Whosoever doeth any work in the sabbath-day he shall surely be put to death") with Matt. 12:1-5 ("At that time Jesus went on the sabbath-day through the corn, and his disciples were a hungered, and began to pluck the ears of corn, and to eat....") is also relatively brief. He says, "Deeds of necessity and mercy were not forbidden by Moses. Eating, drinking, caring for the sick, and like needful acts were not interdicted. Our Savior did not 'break' the Sabbath. He did, indeed, disregard the foolish traditions of the scribes and pharisees relative to that day, but neither by precept nor example did he sanction its real desecration."

Again, Haley let his imagination assume control and interject whatever it deemed appropriate for the occasion. First, Jesus didn't merely "disregard the foolish traditions of the scribes and pharisees relative to that day;" he directly violated a cardinal tenet of the old law itself. And second, where does Exodus say or imply that caring for the sick and other needful acts are exempted? Haley reads more between the lines than on them. Nowhere does the Bible say there are exemptions or exceptions are permitted. When Haley says "Our Savior did not 'break' the Sabbath" he couldn't be more incorrect. He most assuredly did. And as we have noted in prior issues of this publication, he violated many other OT laws as well. (To Be Continued)

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #605 from Rev. BB Continues from Last Month (Part dd)

(The 19th question on our pamphlet is: Surely you don't believe Eccle. 1:9 (RSV) which says, "What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun." How many cities had an atomic bomb dropped on them prior to 1945 and how many people walked on the moon before 1969? Rev. BB responded by saying--Ed.),

I believe there is nothing new about war or human inventiveness. Both pre-dated Ecclesiastes' "Preacher." The atomic bomb is simply another variation on the war theme. It killed, maimed, injured, and brought grief. Certainly there's nothing new about that. Similarly, the moon landing missions stand in a long line of human technological achievements that began with the wheel and

continue in gene splicing. In this sense, there's certainly nothing new about man walking on the moon.

In this case, McKinsey isn't even presenting a case of the Bible contradicting itself, only a contradiction with his opinion, born in his narrow interpretation of the text and of recent events. Such pickiness is either construed or irrational or both.

Editor's Response to Letter #605 (Part dd)

As usual Rev. BB's thought processes are performing inadequately on extraneous considerations. First, we aren't talking about war in general but an event in particular. Again, he's trying to hide among broad generalizations. Just as we aren't talking about war in general, we aren't talking about technological achievements in general. We are talking about a specific occurrence. Of course, wars have always been fought. Who would deny that? But when was an atomic bomb employed? We are not talking about war broadly speaking but about a specific event which may or may not be included within war. In this instance, it is. The dropping of the atomic bomb is a variation on how to fight a war, a unique variation, having never been used until 1945. Its use in 1945 was not a variation on a war theme but a new way in which to fight a war. Certainly the atomic bomb killed, maimed, injured, and brought grief. But its uniqueness does not lie in what it did but in how it did it.

Second, of course technological developments have always been emerging, but when did one entail walking on the moon. If there is nothing new about men walking on the moon, then Rev. BB should be more than willing to cite an instance that occurred prior to 1969.

Third, Rev. BB says, "McKinsey isn't even presenting a case of the Bible contradicting itself." If Rev. BB had read with a more discerning eye, he would have noticed that I not only never said I was presenting an internal contradiction, but I noted that this involved a contradiction between the Bible and real events, not a conflict within Scripture. As I have said so often, and apparently it bears repeating, this publication does not deal with biblical contradictions alone. Much of its contents involves biblical conflicts with external science or events and this is a prime example.

Fourth, Rev. BB says I am only presenting a contradiction with my own opinion. How ridiculous! People walking on the moon and dropping the atomic bomb are facts, hard facts, not opinions. Opinion has nothing to do with this problem.

Fifth, the only construed and irrational aspect relative to this dilemma is Rev. BB's evasive, disingenuous, deceptive excuse for an answer.

And lastly, nearly every time apologists like Rev. BB are confronted with specifics that play havoc with biblical pontification, they escape into glittering generalities and secondary befuddlement. When the Bible says there is nothing new under the sun, it's lying pure and simple. And only someone possessed by a narrow-minded ideology bordering on fanaticism would deny the obvious by alleging otherwise. The problem lies not with a narrow interpretation of the text on my part but with Rev. BB trying to escape into glittering generalities and avoid specifics at all costs. I'm not interpreting anything. I'm merely reading what is said, while operating on the principle that Scripture says what it means. If only Rev. BB did likewise!

Letter #605 Continues (Part ee)

(The 21st question on our pamphlet is: If God created everything (Col. 1:16, Eph. 3:9, Rev. 4:11, and John 1:3) then he created the world's evil (Isa. 45:7, Lam. 3:38). Thus he's responsible. Rev. BB responded by saying--Ed.),

Neither of the OT texts listed describe God as creating evil. They do attest to the fact that God allows trials to come to the faithful for their training in godliness--there is nothing evil about that. To insist that, as the texts clearly say, God created all things that He must therefore have created evil too is to make an invalid "inductive leap."

Editor's Response to Letter #605 (Part ee)

First, since Rev. BB apparently has serious difficulty reading and comprehending that which lies before him, I'll render some assistance. What do the two OT texts say verbatim? In Isa. 45:7 God says, "I form the light and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things." If Rev. BB will notice, nothing is said about allowing anything. The word "allow" or its equivalent is nowhere to be found in the text. God says he "creates," which means he's the source. Lam. 3:38 says that good and evil proceed out of the mouth of the Most High. Again God is shown to be the source of evil; he doesn't just allow it. He generates it.

Second, Rev. BB says, "to insist that, as the texts clearly say, God created all things that He must therefore have created evil too is to make an invalid inductive leap." He accuses me of making "an invalid inductive leap" when his own stream of logic has no flow but is stagnant and fatally polluted. He admits that the NT texts "clearly say, God created all things" and then immediately reverses himself by saying that does not include evil. If God created EVERYTHING and evil is a part of everything, then the simple syllogistic reasoning of Logic 101 will tell you that God must have created evil. And to think he's denigrating my logic! His logic is neither inductive nor deductive, it's merely elusive and deceptive.

Letter #605 Continues (Part ff)

Evil's existence is not sufficient proof that God created it. The "all" in the verses needs to be qualified in light of the broader Bible teaching that Satan is the source of all evil (John 8:44) and that sin entered creation by means of Adam's disobedience (Rom. 5:19).

Editor's Response to Letter #605 (Part ff)

Rev. BB is creating and fighting a strawman. As usual he's attempting to shift the focus. I never said evil's existence is sufficient proof that God created it. I said that according to the Bible God created everything and simple logic tells us that if evil exists then God must have created it as well. Since Rev. BB believes evil exists and freely admits "the NT texts clearly say, God created all things" the point is made.

Rev. BB incorrectly concludes that "the 'all' in those verses needs to be qualified in light of the broader Bible teaching that Satan is the source of all evil (John 8:44) and that sin entered creation by means of Adam's disobedience." John 8:44 says, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own for he is a liar, and the father of it." And Rom. 5:19 says, "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous." In the first place, John 8:44 does not say Satan is the source or cause of all evil. It says he was a murderer and the father of lies, but many evils involve activities other than murdering or lying. Even more importantly Rev. BB's qualification is nothing more than an attempt to ignore one side of a biblical

contradiction while stressing the other. Who is the source of evil, God or Satan? Several verses, which Rev. BB chooses to avoid, say God, while one verse, John 8:44, which Rev. BB incorrectly interprets and prefers to use, allegedly says Satan. Rev. BB thinks he can run off to another part of Scripture to prove there are other sources of evil than God. But instead of resolving the problem he has only managed to highlight a contradiction.

And on top of everything else, if Adam is the source of evil as Rev. BB proves by citing Rom. 5:19, then God didn't create everything; several verses (Col. 1:16, Eph. 3:9, Rev. 4:11, John 1:3) are a lie, and we are back to square one. Something has to give!

Letter #605 Continues (Part gg)

Thus statement #21 is false. But even if we conceded it, the statement has no direct relationship to biblical authority. This is just another case of McKinsey grinding his own axe of illogical illegitimate theology.

Editor's Response to Letter #605 (Part gg)

The only false aspects regarding this problem are a series of apologetically contrived excuses manufactured to derail the unwary. For Rev. BB to say "the statement has no direct relationship to biblical authority" is to add nonsense to duplicity. Whether or not God created evil bears directly on his character which, in turn, impacts on the validity and reliability of everything contained in what is supposedly his book. Stated differently, how could a book be perfect, if it arose from an imperfect, evil-creating author? The evidence clearly demonstrates who is grinding an axe, protecting his ideological turf, and propounding an illogical illegitimate theology. In point of fact, Biblical Errancy has never propounded any kind of theology, since the very phrase "logical theology" is an oxymoron. Our philosophy is based on logic and proof; whereas, theology is based on hope and theory.

Letter #605 Continues (Part hh)

(The 22nd question on our pamphlet is: In Psalm 139:7-11 we are told God is everywhere. If so, why would God need to come down to earth to see a city (Gen. 11:5) when he is already here? And how could Satan leave the presence of the Lord (Job 1:12, 2:7)? Rev. BB responded by saying--Ed.),

It's hard to believe anyone could overlook figurative language when it's under his nose. The author of this tract is either devoid of imagination, reason, and faith, or he willingly sacrifices in his vain attempt to discredit the Bible. Or, he may appear to give up on these to construct an army of "strawmen" that masquerades as reasoning. Clearly, he is going for a quantity of "arguments", unconcerned with their quality.

Editor's Response to Letter #605 (Part hh)

Rev. BB is only widening the distance between himself and reality. First, he doesn't hesitate to employ the old "figurative" defense when the obvious meaning of any biblical statement makes his dearly-beloved book look like something that emerged from the myopic mind of a child in fantasyland. In truth, it is hard to believe that anyone would try to make something figurative that is so obviously literal. Is Rev. BB also saying that Jacob didn't wrestle with God in Gen. 32:24-30 even though the text says, "...for you have striven with God and with men" and "For I have seen God face to face and my life is preserved."? After all it is difficult to see how God could be seen face to face in a wrestling match without moving. Is he also saying Abraham was

not visited by the Lord, even though the 18th chapter of Genesis says he was? One need only read Genesis to see that there is nothing symbolic or figurative about the entire visitation and movement by God in the flesh is present throughout.

Second, even if Gen. 11:5 and Job 2:7 were intended to be taken figuratively, that would in no way solve the problem. How could God move from point A to point B, even in a figurative sense, if God is everywhere? Whether interpreted figuratively or literally, God either is or is not everywhere. How could he not be everywhere literally; how could he not be everywhere figuratively. Therefore, for one to say God moved is to deny the omnipresence of God. Figurative movement is no more possible than literal movement. One is no more plausible than the other. Rev. BB is so narrowly focused that he doesn't realize he's denying God's omnipresence. As far as my nose is concerned, the only thing under it is the stench coming from an apologetic concoction composed of the foulest of ideological ingredients.

Third, Rev. BB accuses me of being devoid of imagination, reason, and faith. And since he's no doubt referring to these concepts as he understands them, I'll concur. Coming from somebody whose imagination runs wild, whose faith ignores reality, and whose "reason" is nothing more than a perversion of the word itself, I consider this a compliment. The only real imagination involved is that associated with the lengths to which Rev. BB will go to create a defense. I'm glad to see he admits I don't have "faith," which he so obviously possesses in abundance, and which the Bible describes as evidence of things not seen. Faith is applicable to virtually his entire defense in light of the fact that the latter rests wholly on evidence, proof, and data not seen.

Fourth, he vilifies my approach as a "vain attempt to discredit the Bible" when it could only be portrayed as such by someone fully unacquainted with over 150 issues of this publication. No one with even a modicum of objectivity could possibly believe such buncombe. I'd strongly suggest that Rev. BB read all 150 issues and then try to make that statement with a straight face. If he succeeds, then he's no longer with us and has entered the detached world of make-believe.

Fifth, the only "strawmen" involved are the anemic defenses erected by Rev. BB to divert attention from the real issues. In a doomed attempt to appear erudite, he doesn't even use the word strawmen correctly. I am not attributing arguments to him that he did not in fact make. Quite the contrary, I'm addressing direct and unequivocal biblical assertions, while he's resorting to a modified version of the old hackneyed defense: That's what it says but that's not what it means.

And lastly, he says I am "going for a quantity of 'arguments' unconcerned with their quality." If I were going for quantity over quality, does he seriously think I'd rely on a mere 24 questions in a small pamphlet. Can't he get anything right? If he spent as much time on verification and validation as he does on vituperation and vilification, he'd be far better off.

Letter #605 Continues (Part ii)

As I began to say, even though the Bible affirms that God is omnipotent, it sometimes aids our understanding to think of God in figurative language. In this case, that means imposing imaginative spatial limitations on God, when, to be completely literal no such limitations exist. Since Heaven is thereby described as being overhead, God, as Heaven's Chief Resident, occasionally comes "down" to earth to deal directly with His people. Another purpose of this imagery is to highlight the importance of the events so described. After all, anything that merits a special visit from God in Heaven to earth is important indeed.

Editor's Response to Letter #605 (Part ii)

First, figurative language that denies the very nature, the very definition, of God is hardly of use to anybody interested in being accurate. As we noted earlier, a being that is everywhere can't go anywhere either figuratively or literally.

Second, Rev. BB says "it sometimes aids our understanding to think of God in figurative language." No! Far more often it is used merely to provide apologists with an escape hatch.

Third, Rev. BB says that in this case "that means imposing imaginative spatial limitations on God." I'm glad he said "imaginative" because that's why they aren't worthy of being taken seriously. Even from a theological, much less a rational, perspective, they don't exist. "Imposing" is a revealing term because that's exactly what's being done. Because they don't exist they're being imposed.

Fourth, Rev. BB says "no such limitations exist." Then why are they even being discussed, much less imposed? Why discuss something that is no more valid from a Christian perspective than Greek or Roman mythology?

And finally, Rev. BB says, "Another purpose of this imagery is to highlight the importance of the events so described." It's language like this that shows why biblical defenders are past masters at doubletalk. How can you highlight events that couldn't possibly occur and still be discussing the real world? In essence, Rev. BB concludes by begging the question. He refers to an event that can't occur and then acts as if it's a given. He argues as if his initial premise is an established fact when that's the very point in dispute. (To Be Concluded Next Month)

EDITOR'S COMMENT: We would like to thank Dr. Gordon Stein, Editor of The American Rationalist, for his complimentary analysis on page 13 in the May-June 1995 issue of his periodical regarding our book. His final comment that it "belongs in the library of every rationalist, non-theist, or religious liberal" is most gracious. Coming from someone who reads incessantly and is as qualified as anyone to make an accurate comparison with other works, that's quite a compliment. Oddly enough I agree with his only negative comment that the book could more accurately be titled a handbook than an encyclopedia. The word "handbook" was not chosen, because I hope to create another work that will be a true handbook--a compilation of our five notebooks in alphabetized and indexed form. Dr. Stein and I have exchanged publications for years and since he was kind enough to recommend my book I would like to recommend an exceptionally "on target" article he wrote on page 2 in the same issue of The American Rationalist entitled "Shooting Ourselves in the Foot." Although consisting of only 3 short paragraphs, the article encapsulates precisely the feelings of many atheists, freethinkers, and humanists regarding who should, and should not, be our national spokesperson.

EDITOR'S NOTE: FINALLY!! FINALLY!! We are ready to distribute our public-access cablevision programs. But we DEFINITELY NEED YOUR HELP. There is no way this undertaking can be successful without dedicated and determined supporters. Nancy Stanley of Richmond, Indiana, has enthusiastically volunteered to be our duplicator and distributor, so we are all set at this end. As of now 33 programs have been completed and we have more than enough material for approximately 80. Each program is one half hour long and is recorded only on Broadcast Quality Tapes that are 2 hours long. Low quality tapes such as those found in discount stores simply won't do. Since each program is 30 minutes long and each tape is 120 minutes long, we are putting four programs on each tape. So the programs are distributed as follows: Tape #1 (Programs 1-4); Tape #2 (Programs 5-8); Tape #3 (Programs 9-12); Tape #4 (Programs 13-16); Tape #5 (Programs 17-20); Tape #6 (Programs 21-24); Tape #7 (Programs 25-28), Tape #8 (Programs 29-32) etc. We are now asking people throughout the nation to become involved in our ongoing struggle against religious superstition in general and the Bible

in particular. But as with any endeavor of real substance expenses are unavoidable. I simply can't afford to pay for everything. Instead, we are asking you to send \$10 for each tape. Considering what religious programs charge for 2 hour video tapes, \$10 is definitely reasonable. With that money we hope to be able to buy a blank tape, record 4 programs on the tape, purchase the mailer in which the tape will be mailed, and pay postage. With each \$10 you need only tell us which tape you want. Of course, all tapes are yours to keep and circulate. The real challenge will be in getting them played consistently on your local public access stations. Stations have different requirements and some have none. Some want disclaimers at the beginning; some want color bars; some use 3/4" tapes only (ours are 1/2"); some want Super VHS tapes only, some want to see a sample first, and so forth ad infinitum. You will have to contact your local station, find out what is required, and then tailor our tape to their specifications. There is simply no way we can arrange our tapes to meet the specific requirements of every cable station. We are asking you to complete whatever arrangements are involved. Once you have worked out mutually agreeable procedures with your local station we recommend: (a) playing each program at least two times a week; (b) playing each program at least 2 weeks in a row, (c) having each program played as near prime time as possible, not at 2 or 3 in the morning; (d) watching each program enough to see that everything is proceeding smoothly, and (e) asking your friends or relatives to play your tapes on their local public access stations. The greater the circulation the better. Some people have already volunteered to assist our efforts but many more are needed. So, please join this worthy cause. And don't be overly concerned about people finding out what you are doing. Your name should never be broadcast in any way and will not appear in the credits. We have been playing my tapes all over the entire north Dayton-Montgomery County area (a circle with a radius of approximately 50 miles encompassing hundreds of thousands of people) for over 18 months and, although I am undoubtedly the most visible participant, I have never received any negative feedback, except for some textual comments.

Issue #152 Editor: Dennis McKinsey

Aug. 1995

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

This issue will continue our analysis of Haley's classic work and conclude our exhaustive critique of Rev. BB's analysis of our pamphlet, THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD?.

REVIEWS

Haley's ALLEGED DISCREPANCIES OF THE BIBLE (Part VI)--On page 241 Haley relates the conflict between Acts 13:39 ("And by him all that believe are justified from all things from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses") on the one hand and Matt. 12:32 ("Whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come") and Mark 3:29 ("He that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal damnation") on the other. He states, "The texts at the left (Acts 13:39, Rom. 5:20, 1 John 2:1) by no means assert that every sin, wherever and by whomsoever committed, will be forgiven. The general rule is that sins repented of will be forgiven. Matthew and Mark are speaking of sins which will never be repented of, consequently never forgiven; hence they are sins 'unto death'."

Haley's entire resolution of this conflict is based on faulty premises. First, he began by saying, "The texts at the left (Acts 13:39, Rom. 5:20, 1 John 2:1) by no means assert that every sin, wherever and by whomsoever committed, will be forgiven." Nobody said they did. They are only referring to sins committed by those who believe. Second, who cares. The issue is not whether or not all sins will be forgiven but whether all sins can be forgiven, and according to Acts 13:39 they can be for believers. But according to Matt. 12:32 there is one sin--blaspheming the Holy Ghost--that can't be forgiven under any circumstances either in this world or in the world to come. Third, Haley says, "The general rule is that sins repented of will be forgiven." In none of these verses can one find the word "repent" or a comparable concept; therefore, it isn't even relevant. And fourth, Haley says, "Matthew and Mark speak of sins which will never be repented of, consequently never forgiven; hence they are sins 'unto death'." Again, since the word as well as the concept of "repent" are nowhere to be found in Matthew or Mark, this, too, is irrelevant. And why refer to "sins unto death" when only one sin is being discussed?

Probably the most common defense used by Haley throughout his entire book, and this problem is a prime example of same, is to read into the text or read between the lines. Haley is a past-master at adding concepts to the script that aren't present in the original text. He doesn't twist or delete passages as much as he supplements them. He specializes in adding ideas that modify, restrict or redirect what is being said. He redefines words and statements so that they say what he deems desirable and then continues the battle on a new footing. Like a typical politician, he reframes the issue in the light most favorable to himself and proceeds accordingly. Stripped to its bare essentials, he relies most heavily on the old defense of: That's what it says but that is not what it means. But instead of being forthright and frankly admitting that that is the essence of his

approach, he simply restructures the conflict by restating the original dilemma, while hoping his sleigh of thought will stay off his detractor's radar screen. He makes the conflict something it is not and then proceeds to show how easily the conflict can be resolved. Of course, if the original problem were as he defines it, then there would have been no need to have mentioned it to begin with.

Another good example of his ideological shell-game is evident in his resolution of the conflict between Eccle. 1:18 ("For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow") and Eccle. 6:8 ("For what hath the wise more than the fool") on the one hand and Eccle. 2:13 ("Wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness") and Prov. 3:13 ("Happy is the man that findeth wisdom and the man that getteth understanding") on the other. So is wisdom a curse or an asset. That's the issue. You'll never know from these verses. Haley's explanation is that, "The term 'wisdom' is applied, in the scriptures, to at least three things: 1. Worldly craft, cunning, or policy; 2. Mere human knowledge or learning; 3. Enlightened piety. The first is always disapproved; the second, having in itself no moral quality, is not condemned save when it usurps the place of the third kind, or enlightened piety. The latter is invariably commended. In the case before us ethical wisdom is contrasted with carnal wisdom."

The obvious sophistry permeating this explanation, as with so much of Haley's approach to biblical clashes, lies in his constant propensity to embellish the text. There is nothing in these verses justifying these distinctions and they are only offered because of their attractiveness from an apologetic perspective. Where are distinctions of this kind outlined in the text? Where does the Bible say it is referring to 3 different kinds of wisdom? There is no reason to proceed further until Haley establishes the premise upon which his entire rationalization is based. And that he completely failed to do.

Everyone is familiar with the commandment in Ex. 20:14 which says Thou shalt not commit adultery. And Heb. 13:4 says, "Whoremongers and adulterers God will judge." So adultery is clearly condemned. But in Num. 31:18 God condones the practice by saying, "All the women children...keep alive for yourselves" and in Hosea 1:2 he says, "Go take unto thee a wife of whoredoms, and children of whoredoms, for the land hath committed great whoredom departing from the Lord." In defense of the biblical God Haley says on page 255, "In Numbers Keil (a famous German apologist--Ed.) says all the females were put to death who might possibly have been engaged in the licentious worship of Peor, so that the Israelites might be preserved from contamination by that abominable idolatry. The young maidens were reserved to be employed as servants, or, in case they became proselytes, to be married."

Apparently Haley couldn't think of an explanation so he turned to Keil for assistance. Instead of addressing the problem, all Keil did was focus on the alleged justice associated with killing women who might have worshiped Peor. But that isn't the issue. We are not concerned with those women who worshipped incorrectly but with those the Israelites took for themselves without the benefit of matrimony. And Keil is trying to give the impression that these women were merely impressed into servitude without sexual contact being involved and some were later married. If Haley had quoted all of Ex. 31:18 ("But all the women children, that have not known a man by lying with him, keep alive for yourselves") he would have shown that more than mere servitude was involved. The last part of the prior verse ("...kill every woman that hath known man by lying with him") provides further evidence that mere servitude is not on the speaker's mind. In addition, by saying "all the females were put to death who might possibly have been engaged in the licentious worship of Peor," Keil is denigrating the biblical God by accusing him of ordering the killing of people on the mere suspicion that they may have engaged in a forbidden act. That's justice! What happened to a fair hearing?

As far as the Hosea quote is concerned, Haley turned to another famous German apologist, Delitzsch, who takes the prophet's marriages simply as internal psychological events, i.e. "as merely carried out in that inward and spiritual intuition in which the word of God was addressed to him." Apparently Delitzsch was even more at a loss for an answer than Keil, because he submitted an array of words without a ray of light. He needs to go back to the drawing board and return with something considerably more lucid. In commenting directly on the passage in Hosea Haley says, "the word 'whoredom,' in the first part of the verse may mean, as it certainly does in the last part, simply spiritual whoredom, or idolatry." That Haley is guessing seems rather clear. Saying "may mean" shows he's offering a plausible explanation that's by no means airtight. And when other versions of this verse are read, his entire rationale all but collapses. The RSV says, "To, take to yourself a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry...." The Living Bible says, "Go and marry a girl who is a prostitute, so that some of her children will be born to you from other men." And the New International Version says, "Go, take to yourself an adulterous wife and children of unfaithfulness, because the land is guilty of the vilest adultery in departing from the Lord." Clearly none of these versions are referring to "simply spiritual whoredom, or idolatry." The clincher is found in the very next verse which says in the NIV, "So he married Gomer daughter of Diblaim, and she conceived and bore him a son." That eradicates Haley's entire theory that a spiritual meaning is intended. On top of everything else, even if the meaning were spiritual, how could a morally perfect God tell people to take whores?

Haley's rationalization of the conflict between Jesus' comment in Matt. 28:19 ("Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost") and Paul's assertion in 1 Cor. 1:14, 17 ("I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius. ...For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel") is one of his shortest. That's probably because he decided the only way to address a direct conflict of this magnitude would be to hit and run.

He says, "Obviously, 'Christ sent me not so much to baptize, as to preach the gospel.' Paul did not neglect or undervalue baptism, but gave himself to the work of teaching, leaving his associates to administer baptism."

Again Haley rewrote the script. Paul said Christ sent him not to baptize, period. He did not say "Christ sent me not so much to baptize." While acting under the orders of Jesus, Paul specifically said that he baptized no one, except two people, and for that he implicitly apologized.

And finally, on page 258 in Haley's tome can be found the conflict between Gen. 9:6 ("Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed") and Gen. 4:12-13 ("A fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth. And Cain said unto the Lord, My punishment is greater than I can bear"). The problem generated by these verses is that instead of executing Cain for killing Abel as is required by Gen. 9:6, God merely condemned him to a life of wandering throughout the earth. Haley provides an exceptionally poor resolution of this contradiction by saying, "By some unaccountable freak of exegesis, a well-known critic makes the first text the prohibition of capital punishment. Instead, it is a most explicit command, sanctioning it. The case of Cain occurred some 1,500 years before the command was given to Noah."

In the first place what difference does it make how some "well-known" biblical critic misinterpreted the first text. If he understands that to be saying capital punishment is to be prohibited, then obviously he can't read very well. Haley is correct in reprimanding this unknown critic. He shouldn't have even mentioned him. Then Haley says that the command regarding capital punishment was given to Noah 1,500 years after the Cain/Abel incident and, thus, by some strange twist of logic the command does apply. The only "freak of exegesis" involved is

that emanating from the pen of Haley. His entire train of thought in this regard is all but incoherent.

Some of Haley's supporters may say that all he meant to state was that Cain was not executed because capital punishment was not instituted until 1,500 years after Cain lived. Thus, the command would not apply. What? Morality varies with the times? That's "situation ethics" which fundamentalists denounce in no uncertain terms. If one of the Ten Commandments is only applicable to a particular time in history, then a Pandora's box is opened with respect to the applicability of the entire Ten Commandments. (To Be Continued)

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #605 from Rev. BB Continues from Last Month (Part jj)

(The 23rd question on our pamphlet is: For justice to exist, punishment must fit the crime. No matter how many bad deeds one commits in this world, there is a limit. Yet, hell's punishment is infinitely greater. Rev. BB responded by saying--Ed.)

It would be interesting to hear just what McKinsey's definition of hell is. How a biblical concept could find a place in his non-biblical theology is beyond me. At any rate, he has failed to understand first of all what sin is. It is a deliberate act of willful disobedience that has the effect of distancing us from God. It makes us estranged in our relationship with the divine. Only the blood of Christ can bring forgiveness of sin and remove the estrangement, close the distance.

Second, he does not understand what hell is. Hell is the fate of the unrepentant, the unbelieving. It is eternal separation from God. With a correct understanding, you can see that the punishment does "fit the crime," indeed, perfectly. Because sin is a willing separation of ourselves from God, it only makes sense that the separation in eternity is a continuation of the separation begun in this life. The person who dies in unbelief, in sin, has committed themselves to being separate from God, to "going their own way," and God's judgment is, in this sense, a continuation of that separation.

Editor's Response to Letter #605 (Part jj)

To begin with, my definition of hell is irrelevant. What counts is the Bible's description of hell. Second, what does Rev. BB mean by saying, "How a biblical concept could find a place in his non-biblical theology is beyond me." Some of his comments are worse than erroneous, they're muddled. Is he implying I believe in hell? How nonsensical can one be? Does he mean that because I discuss ghosts, goblins, spooks, heaven, and hell for example, I must therefore believe in them? Third, Rev. BB says I "failed to understand first of all what sin is." I have no problem at all understanding what the Christian definition of sin is. But Rev. BB has a big problem showing how his ramblings are relevant. Fourth, his theology is a chaotic mess. If sin is a willing separation of ourselves from God, then all fetuses, infants, babies, and severely mentally impaired people who die in that condition never sinned. Yet, the Bible says all have sinned and come short (Rom. 3:23). Moreover, John 14:6 says no one comes to the father but by me. Since these beings are in no condition to make a conscious decision to come to the father, they are automatically condemned. Yet they never sinned. And fifth, because someone separates himself from God, whatever that means, during his short period of time on earth, he is to be punished forever? That's justice! There is nothing someone could do in the short space of 80 or 90 years that could possibly warrant eternal punishment, including separating himself from God. Even though someone decided to separate himself from God for 80 or 90 years, it is illogical to continue that for an eternity. Has Rev. BB lost his mind? One might just as well say that since

someone spent 10 years in prison for armed robbery, he might as well go the extra mile and spend the rest of his life there. Rev. BB says "it only makes sense that the separation in eternity is a continuation of the separation begun in this life." What's he talking about? There's no sense to it. Doesn't he believe in a man serving his time and completing his sentence?

Letter #605 Concludes (Part kk)

(The 24th and last question on our pamphlet is: In Acts 20:35 Paul told people to "remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, 'it is more blessed to give than to receive'." Since Jesus never made such a biblical statement, isn't Paul guilty of deception. Rev. BB responded by saying--Ed.),

It is transparently false to assume that the Gospels record every word Jesus said. It is this false assumption that is the basis of this "argument." John tells us that his own account is not the complete, verbatim record of Jesus' teaching and preaching. Paul is not logically guilty of deception when we realize the Gospels do not (and cannot) contain everything Jesus said. Here Paul refers to something that went unreported by the Gospel writers. Or, perhaps, Paul is referring to something the resurrected Christ said to him personally. Or, it may have been revealed to him otherwise. What I am trying to show is that there are a host of possible explanations of Paul's statement better than McKinsey's illogical, mean-spirited one.

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #605 (Part kk)

The only false assumption that really matters is the assumption by biblical readers that these words were said by Jesus and are in the Bible. As I have said on several occasions, as long as Christians make it clear to readers and listeners alike that these words are not in Scripture, I am willing to admit that they could have been said by Jesus, although never recorded scripturally. But this distinction is rarely made, even though biblicists repeatedly use this verse for propaganda purposes. When an alleged statement by Jesus is nowhere to be found in Scripture, when people are not told it is nowhere to be found in Scripture, when Paul and his followers give people the impression that the statement is to be found in Scripture, then people are being deceived. A deception based on omission can be as deceptive, damaging, and misleading as one based on commission.

I am well aware of the fact that Scripture could not contain everything Jesus said. That's not the problem. The problem is that Jesus is quoted as if his comment is in Scripture, when it most assuredly is not. As long as everything is kept open and above board I have no problem. But when Christians intentionally give people the impression that their beloved hero said something that, in fact, is not in Scripture and can't be demonstrated, I have qualms and raise objections.

Letter #625 from JS of Grosse Pointe Farms, Michigan

Dear Dennis. Would you please answer this question for me, or refer me to chapter and verse in Biblical Errancy where this may have already been dealt with. On page 39 in your book, you state that the Crucifixion could not have occurred on a Wednesday, and the resurrection not on a Saturday, because all of the special sabbaths mentioned in the OT occurred in the fall, and the Crucifixion occurred in the spring.

However, as I read Leviticus 23 and its parallels, at least one Sabbath did occur around the time of Passover, and that Sabbath is the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Furthermore, the NT does say that the Sabbath on the day after the Crucifixion was a "special" sabbath. Accordingly, it seems to me that perhaps the Wednesday to Saturday scenario is plausible (such as in the year A.D. 31). Any comments on this?

Editor's Response to Letter #625

Dear JS. I'll take your points one by one. First, I did not say on page 39 that "all of the special sabbaths mentioned in the OT occurred in the fall, and the Crucifixion occurred in the spring"? I said that "the sabbaths referred to in the OT all occurred in the seventh month, while the Crucifixion occurred in the first month." But I'm willing to overlook this discrepancy because I assume you are using a Hebrew calendar. Second, you say that "at least one Sabbath did occur around the time of Passover," which is borne out by the early part of Lev. 23. What verses are you referring to specifically, and where do they say the sabbath referred to fell on any day other than the 7th day or what we know as Saturday? The 3rd verse preceding what you are referring to says, "Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the sabbath of rest,...it is the sabbath of the Lord in all your dwellings." It specifically states the seventh day, not one of the other six, is the sabbath. Third, you say the sabbath you are referring to "is the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread." But where does it say it fell on any other day than the seventh day, Saturday? As far as this problem is concerned, if it didn't fall on a day other than the seventh, what difference would it make what it's called or what's being celebrated? Fourth, you say that "the NT does say that the Sabbath on the day after the Crucifixion was a 'special' sabbath" without proving this is any day other than the seventh or citing chapter and verse to show where it is deemed special. From the perspective of Christians no doubt it was special. After all, how many sabbaths occurred on the day after the Crucifixion of Jesus? But where is it cited as such? And lastly, I am at a lost to understand how you feel you have demonstrated a possible faux pas on my part. In order to prove your point, you are going to have to prove that one of the OT sabbaths not only occurred on a day other than the seventh day, specifically Thursday, but also prove this occurred in the first month because, as you noted, that is when the Passover occurs and the Crucifixion occurred around the time of the Passover.

I know you have always been a strong supporter of BE and are submitting this question for purposes of clarification and to eliminate any possible avenues of attack from which I may have left myself exposed. Thanks for the assistance and please don't take umbrage if the tenor of my response seems reminiscent of those directed toward apologists.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #626 from SC of La Honda, California

...Keep up the good work. Those self-satisfied, dangerous religious zealots think they're going to establish a theocracy in this country, and it is ever more important to keep attacking their beliefs and their idiotic "holy book" at every level. B.E. is an inspiration, a delight, and a comfort. So glad you are out there. All the best for 1995.

Letter #627 from WD of Melbourne Beach, Florida

I have found your Encyclopedia of BE tremendously enlightening, stimulating, importantly necessary for study by everyone -- in all religions.... Allow me a moment for a background of myself. For 63 of my 65 years I had a very good relationship with religion. It didn't bother me and I didn't bother it.... I got into the study and research of religions as a matter of protection from some friends who evidenced themselves as good ole fundamentalists who clued me into the absolute truth that if I didn't agree with their beliefs I was going to be welcomed into the Devil's

cadre. Since that didn't make too much sense to me I bolted for the books. Unfortunately the deeper I get the more unbelievable it becomes. At the moment I am at a loss as to how religion, in particular Christianity, has ever survived. Worse, I feel I have been intellectually raped by the church....

Letter #628 from BY of Seminole, Florida

Dear Dennis. Once again, I am happily renewing my subscription to BE. I continue to find it a well-researched source or arguments for debating Christians whose faith is based on an incomplete knowledge of their own Bible. I have also acquired your book, The Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy, and find it immensely useful as a starting point -- one might even say "inspiration" -- for newspaper and other "letters to the editor" responses.

I have also taken the liberty of becoming an unpaid salesman for you (no, I'm not asking for a raise). I've created the enclosed stickers (a couple were included--Ed.) which I place in strategic places in hotel bibles; I will eventually create an entire line of them referring to specific verses and contradictions which I will forward to you. Feel free to make whatever use of them you see fit. As our country sinks deeper into the fanaticism encouraged by radio talk show hosts and ambitious politicians using the Bible as ammunition, I think that your publication will continue to grow in value as a defusing tool for religious bombast.

Editor's Response to Letter #628

Dear BY. I'm glad you are finding my book useful and I have no doubt distribution of your stickers will be useful to our cause. Keep up your great work and I can't help but note that your analysis of the average radio talk show host is similar to mine.

EDITOR'S NOTE: We would like to take this opportunity to thank all those people who have contributed over the years to our worthy cause. It's about time, indeed long overdue, that we gave credit to where credit is due and apologized for the oversight. Many unsung heroes have given funds and other assistance to this periodical without being solicited or pressured because they realize that any undertaking of real consequence can't operate effectively without the appropriate wherewithal. Specifically we would like to alphabetically acknowledge contributions by the following individuals. SA of Brooklyn, New York; GA of Belmont, Massachusetts; JA of New York, New York; JA of British Columbia, Canada; PB of Nova Scotia, Canada; WB of Waterloo, Iowa; EB of Wayne, Michigan; SC of La Honda, California; RC of Altadena in the California Republic; RD of Tempe, Arizona; DG of Sioux Falls, South Dakota; AH of Sonoma, California; RH of Hubbard, Ohio; GK of Brooklyn Center, Minnesota; GL of Saskatchewan, Canada; WL of Cambridge, Massachusetts; DM of Pasadena, California; HM of Bellbrook, Ohio; RM of Baton Rouge, Louisiana; RM of Balwin, Missouri; AM of Bloomington, Texas; RN of Moscow, Idaho; JO of Sonora, California; JP of Meriden, Connecticut; HR of Greendale, Wisconsin; SR of Anaheim, California; VS of Lake Worth, Florida; JS of Grosse Pointe Farms, Michigan; JS of Columbus, Ohio; JS of Ambler, Pennsylvania; JT of Riverside, California; and JV of Chicago, Illinois.

A special thanks goes out to the following individuals for exceptional donations. CB of Prescott, Arizona; JE of Elizabeth, Illinois; PJG of Cincinnati, Ohio; RK of Ruston, Louisiana; DL of Ipswich, Massachusetts; FM of Chicago, Illinois; JO of Jacksonville, Florida; ET of Sanford, Maine, and FT of Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

And finally, a very special, indeed, a unique note of gratitude is extended to a retired Florida businessman whose untiring efforts and generous contributions to our cause have been truly

extraordinary. Without his support and that of everyone else we would not have been able to obtain the computer equipment and other peripherals that will soon be producing and disseminating a much more readable and professional looking periodical. No one is more aware of the need to improve BE's appearance than I. Once, again, we'd like to thank you all. The Best, Dennis.

Issue #153 Editor: Dennis McKinsey

Sept. 1995

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

COMMENTARY

Due to an increase in the volume of mail, we are going to devote several issues to letters from readers.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #629 from HJ of Charlotte, North Carolina (Part a)

Dear Mr. McKinsey. How can you deftly extract so much forensic-type information from a work as complicated as the bible and still not understand the point of a simple--if silly--letter? It appears by your response that you missed the intent of every issue I brought up regarding *word definition* .

I quote from my own letter, "You define *perfect* as *absolute or unwavering* in its meaning." I went on to say, "In *all* civilized languages people use words to mean *whatever they choose for them to mean* at that moment. 'I've looked for this dress everywhere. It's *perfect!* I'll wear it to the Woopergoopers' dinner tomorrow.'"

I must emphasize that it was you who defined *perfect*. I simply established this silly example to make the point that neither you nor God can give an absolute definition to any word as long as human beings -- of any language group -- will *understand* the word to mean what they think you intended to say!

I must assume that while God can proclaim himself to be *perfect*, you can come along and say to Him, "But you have committed genocide so many times!" Then He will say, "Yeah, but I did a *perfect* job of it!" thereby defending his stature. (We must remember that God has all of man's attributes augmented by all of man's fantasies, including omniscience and omnipotence which are mutually exclusive, and is *still* (according to some) perfect in spite of it. It really takes a disjointed group of writers to describe him with *all* these attributes). Forgive the ridiculous examples, but I have no biblical credentials just as I assume you have no more English credentials than I, but I do have English credentials and I'm telling you, words mean what the *listener* (or reader) believes or wants them to mean, not what the speaker intends to say -- and authority has nothing to do with it. That's how the fundie shuffle was born and how you used it so skillfully when you commented, "That there's a world of difference between God using the word *perfect* and man using it." Wrong! It's who *hears or reads it!*

Editor's Response to Letter #629 (Part a)

You don't listen very well, HJ, when you're repelled by what you hear or your ego is

involved. But we'll go through it again. Gen. 6:9 ("*Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations*") was originally written in Hebrew. A group of scholars read the verse and then translated it into English. Those who did the translating felt that the English word "perfect" was the best duplication available of the Hebrew term. The English word "perfect" is clearly defined in Webster's Dictionary, so the translators had no doubt about the full implications of the word they were using. Therefore, your complaint is not with me but with those who did the translating. In effect, you are saying you know

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Hebrew better than a group of Hebraic scholars. And to coin a current comment making the rounds: I don't think so!, especially in light of your admission that you "have no biblical credentials." That's readily apparent. Many additional mistakes accompany your poor analysis. *First*, I didn't miss the intent of every issue you brought up. I was fully aware of the points you were making because they're nothing more than a variation on the cultural differences theme. The real problem is that you refused to recognize the point I was making. I didn't miss your points; you missed mine. *Second*, from whence comes your wholly erroneous assertion that I "define *perfect* as *absolute or unwavering* in its meaning." You state, "It was you who defined *perfect*." Where are you getting this? I didn't define it that way; Webster did. Your quarrel is with him, not me, my friend. *Third*, I am well aware of cultural differences and that "In *all* civilized languages people use words to mean *whatever they choose them to mean* at that moment." And those who translated the word "perfect" are as aware of these differences as you or I. Nevertheless, they chose an English word with a definite meaning to represent a Hebrew term which they no doubt felt was comparable to the English word, "perfect." In other words, after having taken account of cultural differences in the process of translating, they still used the English word "perfect" as the best duplication of the Hebraic term. For you to say that cultural variations were not taken into account, is for you to say the translators were incompetent. At this point I would normally ask for a recitation of your qualifications to correct a group of Hebraic scholars, but since you have already acknowledged your inadequacies, we'll forego that step. *Fourth*, your dress analogy is wholly inapplicable because you are substituting a colloquial use of the term in the English language for Webster's definition of "perfect" that is also in the English language. Everyone knows that to say the dress is perfect is not to say it is totally flawless. People are well aware of the fact that you are engaged in hyperbole; they know that perfect means without imperfections and that you do not really mean to imply it's truly perfect. But when the word "perfect" is in a supposedly flawless book, accuracy is crucial. If your dress example were analogous, then the translators would have seriously erred by using a word that is so clearly defined by Webster. No, I think the problem lies with you, not Webster or a group of Hebraic scholars. *Fifth*, all of the problems I raised on several occasions with respect to Noah not being perfect would come into play if Noah were not "perfect" as Webster defines the term. *Sixth*, you say "neither you nor God can give an absolute definition to any word as long as human beings -- of any language group -- will *understand* the word to mean what they think you intended to say!" I can't speak for God but he would no doubt agree with me that you need a lesson in translating. "Cultural relativism" is taken into account by any good translator. If not, then the translator is out of his league. No one is trying to "give an absolute definition to any word" and anyone experienced with translating knows that people are going to interpret a word "to mean what they think you intended to say" or how they understand the term. But that is factored into any competent, reliable, translation. In simple terms, translators chose the word "perfect" because it best represented the corresponding Hebraic term. And if you don't think they made the best choice then you are putting your expertise above theirs, an act for which you are admittedly wholly unqualified. That's the bottom line. Incidentally, I can't help but notice that you said God can't give an absolute definition to any word. I thought your omnipotent God can do anything? *Seventh*, your reasoning often drifts off center as is

shown by your statement that, "I must assume that while God can proclaim himself to be *perfect*, you can come along and say to Him, 'But you have committed genocide so many times!' Then He will say, 'Yeah, but I did a *perfect* job of it!' thereby defending his stature." How could God be a perfectly moral being if he replied by admitting that he did a perfectly immoral act? We are talking about moral perfection not about the manner in which an act was performed. There is a big difference between God being described as a being with perfectly moral character and God committing an act that is perfectly immoral. The only perfection he could claim in the latter instance would be perfect imperfection, a quality generally reserved in Christian theology for the Devil alone. For God to be perfect every act committed by him would have to be moral. If he committed an act that was perfect but immoral, then he would no longer be perfect. You are describing the method by which the act was performed while ignoring the nature of the act itself. You are trying to make God perfect while ignoring the goodness or badness of the act performed. *Eighth*, you stated that "God has all of man's attributes." Are you serious? God is self-centered; God is greedy; God is envious and jealous, etc.? That may be in harmony with the OT presentation of God but is hardly commensurate with the Christian conception of God. Your conception of God all but destroys any reason for respecting him. *Ninth*, you refer to "all of man's fantasies, including omniscience and omnipotence, which are mutually exclusive." Why would omniscience and omnipotence have to be mutually exclusive? Indeed, I would say the opposite is true. *Tenth*, in light of your description of God, wouldn't you be in that "disjointed group of writers" who describe him with all these attributes? After all, you did say, "We must remember that God has all of man's attributes augmented by all of man's fantasies." If that isn't degradation of God I don't know what is. *Eleventh*, you say, "I do have English credentials and I'm telling you, words mean what the *listener* (or reader) believes or wants them to mean, not what the speaker intends to say -- and authority has nothing to do with it." Wrong again! How can you make so many mistakes in such a short monologue. Words mean what the dictionary says they mean. They don't mean what the listener or reader wants them to mean. If that were true, then why have dictionaries? Everyone would be free to interpret any word as it struck his fancy. Words may be interpreted by listeners and readers as desired but that may or may not be the correct meaning. If you had said "words mean *To the Listener or Reader* what the *Listener* (or Reader) believes or wants them to mean" I would have had no objection. But you turned personal opinions, whether true or not, into facts. There is an objective real world out there and the sooner you get in tune with it the better off you will be. The world is not going to change according to your whims or conceptions; it's up to you to change your conceptions so as to bring them in line with the real world. This very issue, more than any other, has divided all philosophers throughout history into two great assemblages. One group--the idealists--believes that ideas are primary and material conditions are secondary and has always made the world conform to beliefs and conceptions. The other group--the materialists--has always felt there is a real world out there to which ideas must conform. One feels that ideas are primary while material conditions are secondary, while the other feels material conditions are primary and ideas are secondary. I have never encountered any observer of the world scene, especially philosophers, who did not fall into one camp or the other. *Twelfth and finally*, the real problem lies not with my use of the fundie shuffle but with your intransigent unwillingness to nuckle or buckle.

Letter #629 Continues (Part b)

...I quite agree with you regarding Noah's moral "perfection" and his right to be on the ark, etc., but your whole argument is based on the use of the word "perfect". If you want to shoot down the story do it on the basis of God's heinous act, not some pointless syntax.

Editor's Response to Letter #629 (Part b)

First, "to shoot down the story," to use your words, on the basis of God's heinous act would hardly be realistic in light of the fact that many biblicists would no doubt say that the act was far from heinous. The world was corrupt and people got what they deserved. You are making a judgment with which many of your own compatriots would disagree. *Second*, as has been shown throughout the history of our discussion of this topic, there is nothing pointless about my syntactical attack. Gen. 6:9 is another one of those absolutist comments that play havoc with the Bible's alleged inerrancy.

Letter #629 Continues (Part c)

(After returning to his dress analogy and making some assertions that are even more vacuous than those presented earlier, HJ says--Ed.), You go on to say that the flood was useless because it failed to purify the world. Well, you're right. It was, and it did fail if that was the goal. There's your fodder for argument. I got the distinct impression that God did it as a matter of punishment because he was angered, not as a matter of purification, but I must admit not yet having dissected the story. He saved a few beans so he wouldn't have to go to the trouble to make another Adam and Eve. I'm surprised He didn't see the problem beforehand, being omniscient and all.

Editor's Response to Letter #629 (Part c)

I really wish you would stop attributing assertions to me that were made by others and which I am merely relating. I didn't say it failed to purify the world. That's the position of many Christians and I'm merely relaying their sentiments. If you feel it was done for purposes of punishment only, then you are at odds with a sizable number of Christians. Apparently not only is your dissection of the story incomplete, but your surgery is decidedly at variance with that performed by most biblicists.

Letter #629 Continues (Part d)

I took note of the fact that you didn't address my issues regarding idiomatic expressions in which I used the challenging example: I'd like to know how you can interpret *perfect in his own time* or *perfect in his own generations* to mean simply perfect without an ancient Hebrew thesaurus. I suspect that the simple word perfect would have been employed if simply perfect is what the writer meant.

Editor's Response to Letter #629 (Part d)

Like so much of your entire presentation, HJ, your point is somewhat vague, poorly conceived, and badly worded. In any event, I think I know what you are trying to say and if I'm correct, then you are merely fishing for an answer. If you think adding the phrases "in his own time" or "in his own generations" to the word "perfect" somehow modifies the entire problem, then it is incumbent on you to prove as much. You may "suspect that the simple word *perfect* would have been employed if simply *perfect* is what the writer meant" but that is about all you have to go on. According to Rom. 3:23 all men have sinned and no man can be perfect at any time, either in or out of his generations.

Letter #629 Concludes (Part e)

In your response to someone else's letter #614 you admit to being divisive in order to make your points. Frankly, I don't think you need to be divisive, and taking the quality and the intent of your work into account, I think doing so is beneath your dignity. Tacky. Self-diminishing, a.k.a. shooting yourself in the foot.

Your response #611 'part a' says, "When are you (referring to me--Ed.) and your compatriots etc. ...?" Well you are one of them! I'm no fundamentalist! I'm just trying to squeeze out the stuff that doesn't fly so they'll have one fewer rational argument (as if they had one now!).

I like your stuff. Keep it up.

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #629 (Part e)

I've reread my response to Letter #614 several times, HJ, and for the life of me I can't find any comment by me showing that I admit to being divisive in order to make my points. Where on earth are you getting this? You need to reign in your imagination. As far as unjustly including you within the fundamentalist community is concerned, I apologize for any humiliation this may have engendered. Being fully cognizant of how I would feel if the tables were turned, I can sympathize with your ire. But in light of your arguments in a couple of letters I think you can understand my conclusion. In any event, if your orientation is far closer to mine than is apparent, then I welcome you into the realm of sanity as a compatriot in our ongoing struggle against religious superstition in general and the Bible in particular.

Letter #630 from [CK of Bloomfield, New Jersey](#) (Part a)

Dear Mr. McKinsey. I am enjoying your *Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy* and find it a useful compendium that looks a lot nicer than a stack of issues of the periodical. I do note however that some topics are covered more than once, under more than one category. More important, I think some of your attention to small matters can detract from the really egregious errors in the Bible. For example, when the "Prince of Peace" who would have us "turn the other cheek" and love one's enemies, brandishes a whip and creates a riot in the temple, this is an egregious contradiction. This involves such well-known aspects of Jesus that even liberal theologians have a problem (even if they can't see the problem). On the other hand, comes the problem of the 10-cubit bowl having a circumference of 30 cubits. Your criticism is subject to criticism itself. That Lindsell agrees with your criticism should not be of comfort, as Biblicists' levels of mathematical sophistication certainly leave something to be desired. OK, my criticism of yours: You say, "the circumference of this 'molten sea' must be 31.4 feet [sic--I assume you mean cubits], not 30." I can say that it must be 31.4159265...cubits, not 31.4. We all make an agreement to round to a certain place. Remembering that the circumference was not necessarily a calculation, but an observation, probably done by using a forearm as a ruler, it would be logical to round to the nearest cubit. Any diameter from 9.5 cubits to 10.5 cubits would round to 10 cubits.... The reportage would be correct, rounded to the nearest unit.... in the days when basins were measured by forearms, the nearest cubit was as good reporting as you could get, and in the case of the above-mentioned possible "precise" measurements, can indeed be an accurate representation of what was there.

Editor's Response to Letter #630 (Part a)

Dear CK. Your explanation of this problem is very much in the tradition of most apologists and will be addressed as such.

First, the fact is that 30 cubits is not the correct answer. If you say that 31.4 is not the correct answer either, then I will allege that your 31.4159265 figure is incorrect as well. Following the stream of logic you have set in motion, there is no correct answer, because every answer involves rounding. Any answer would be automatically false.

Second, you are assuming the answer involves rounding without proving as much. The answer is wrong until you can prove it results from rounding. You can't allege it's the result of rounding until I prove it's not. As I have said so often, the burden of proof lies on him who alleges. In effect, you want me to prove it is not the result of rounding rather than you and your compatriots being required to prove it is the result of rounding. The error is blatant; it's obvious; it's staring us in the face. Biblicists must provide proof, not mere supposition, that rounding explains everything. If guesswork is going to be admissible, then many biblical contradictions could be explained away by mere conjecture and theorizing.

Nearly every numerical contradiction in the OT, for example, could be lightly dismissed by simple reference to the "rounding" defense. Apparently I'm supposed to be Mr. Niceguy by defocusing on the script and giving the Bible the benefit of the doubt every time a contradiction is clearly evident, when the Book's defenders wouldn't grant me a scintilla of slack if they saw a loophole. I'm too accommodating already. If I were really playing hardball, my arguments could become considerably more poignant. As was shown in a prior issue, I'm not as much a stickler for details as is true of strict literalists. On the other hand, I'm certainly not going to assume the Bible has it all together every time it opens its mouth, nor am I going to give it the benefit of the doubt when the proposed reconciliation is so obviously beyond the pale of what one would expect even from someone writing 2 or 3,000 years ago in a far more primitive era.

Letter #630 Continues (Part b)

Along the same lines, your criticism of 2 Sam. 24:9 versus 1 Chron. 21:5 (page 75) is that one quotes a figure of 500,000 men and the other quotes 470,000 men. You say rounding cannot account for this discrepancy. I know that my fifth grade daughter has textbooks which give rounding problems (and answers) like this all the time. How would you round 470,000 to a single significant figure? The textbook solution is 500,000.

Editor's Response to Letter #630 (Part b)

While using even weaker figures, you are repeating the numerical argument you submitted with respect to the 10-cubit bowl and my answer would be the same.

First, you are assuming without evidence that these figures are the result of rounding.

Second, by asking how I "would round 470,000 to a single significant figure," you are assuming it has not been rounded already. Four hundred and seventy thousand does not need to be rounded to a significant figure; it's already there.

Third, even if the biblical figures are the result of rounding, the roundings don't agree. There's still a difference of 30,000.

And lastly, my son does rounding problems too, but his teacher does not allege the answer is precisely correct. Everyone is well aware of the fact that the answer is not meant to be precise. That's made clear from the outset. But nowhere does the Bible imply, much less state, that the figures cited are the result of rounding or approximating.

Letter #630 Concludes (Part c)

Another subject: To your criticism on page 116 in your book of John 10:27-28 ("My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and...neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand") which also includes similar verses such as John 18:9, 17:12, 13:21, and 25-27, can be added John 6:66 ("After this, many of his disciples left him and stopped going with him").... I note John 6:66 is not in your Index of Verse Citations.

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #630 (Part c)

Your observation has merit. I probably should have included John 6:66 in my list. It's hard to get them all.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #631 from BS of Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Dear Dennis. In Issue #152, you mentioned contradictions regarding adultery in the Bible. Permit me to add another. Deut. 22:22 clearly states "god" orders that the man and the woman who commit adultery shall die. Yet in the story of King David and Bathsheba (2 Sam. 12:15) they commit adultery and are not killed. Instead, god kills their baby, after first making it suffer for seven days. Either a) god is a hypocrite, b) god gives kings special dispensation, or c) the people who wrote those Bible verses out of their imaginations were just plain stupid. I favor option 'c' myself....

Letter #632 from SB of Los Angeles, California

I would like to subscribe to *Biblical Errancy* which was mentioned in the *Skeptical Review*. I am a recent convert to freethought, having spent a lifetime (age 53) under the bondage and fear of Christian fundamentalism. My route to freedom was initially through studying astronomy and science. This started the doubts which led to serious readings on Christianity. The more I read, the more absurd Christianity became, until I finally "chucked" the whole thing. What a great day that was.

EDITOR'S NOTE: (A) Last month's issue contained an appeal for assistance in the circulation of our cablevision videotapes. I'm quite disappointed with the response. A few people volunteered but far more are needed. How is religion in general and the Bible in particular going to be countered if effort comparable to that exhibited by the other side is not forthcoming. Biblicists are working like beavers to spread their doctrines and undermine much of that which rational minds hold most dear and frankly, the only thing that has been keeping them at bay so far are the liberal wings of Christianity and Judaism represented by the World Council of Churches and Reform Judaism. Atheists, agnostics, freethinkers, and others of a decidedly rational frame of mind have been depending upon those whose reliance is unstable and dubious at best. Playing a secondary role to those who more often than not are in league with your devout opponents is hardly a sensible approach. People complain to me that fundamentalists are co-opting school boards, inserting religious observances and clubs into the schools, propagandizing unhindered and unopposed in the media, raking in vast sums of wealth without opposition or correction, controlling or influencing political decisions regarding abortion, euthanasia, corporal punishment, prayer, textbooks, unionizing, social activism, environmental concerns, etc., and successfully promoting a wide assortment of other nefarious activities. When I say, "I couldn't agree more, what do you suggest be done?," about all that is forthcoming is the writing of letters to the editor and court challenges. Hardly viable approaches! Cussing out the TV isn't going to get the job done either. I constantly receive letters complaining about church/state violations and freethought books and journals replete with examples of same, as if I wasn't aware of the fact that the constitution is ignored on a regular basis. I am well aware of numerous breaches and being told the obvious is superfluous. Every time I hear the Pledge of Allegiance or read my coins, constitutional violations and religious domination hit me in the face. The question is: What are we going to do about it. Are we going to merely complain or take action? Something tangible, of real substance, has to be done and that involves taking it to the other side. I can provide the format, the presentation, programs, research etc., but I can't put determination, dedication, motivation, and commitment into my disseminators. Only they can play programs in areas in which I don't even live. If people don't get serious about the power and threats posed by the world of biblicism, then they could very well arrive at a time when they will wish that they had done something earlier. But then, of course, it could be too late. Apparently they feel it can't happen here. Oh, yes it can! The United States is no more exempt from the vicissitudes that have plagued other nations than any other country on this planet. The mentality and philosophy generated by religion in general and the Bible in particular is regressive to mankind's advancement and inimical to his welfare. Make no mistake about that. The sooner and more vigorously it is opposed the better. It is a shame that so often people have to learn the hard way before they are willing to act.

The Editorial Note at the end of July's issue (#151) outlined some very simple procedures that could be followed by anyone. Many stations don't ask for anything more than someone who is willing to bring a tape down to the station to be played. If people with access to cablevision can't muster that much energy, especially when the other side has thousands of people who are willing to go to other nations and devote years to spreading the word, the

outcome is a foregone conclusion. I have been told by subscribers that some cablevision managers yearn for the type of information I have available in order to offset the religious saturation that currently exists in their vicinity. So, I would again ask that you become involved and check out cablevision's opportunities. To those who have already acted I say, THANK YOU. Would that you could be cloned.

(B) Several subscribers have asked me to advertise their anti-religious material and have even sent me copies of that which they wish to see advertised. The problem with this is that when I advertise something I feel obligated to read and check out everything involved and I just don't have sufficient time. By advertising material written by others I am implicitly vouching for its reliability. So rather than discourage some energetic writers, whom I have no reason to distrust, I have decided to advertise their names and addresses. By all means contact the following to see what they have available. Dave Matson, P.O. Box 61274, Pasadena, California 91116, (213) 422-5251 and Stephen Barr, 6425 Old Redwood Highway N., Santa Rosa, California, 95403 (707) 838-4238. Others who have wanted me to advertise their material in the past are invited to send me their names, addresses and phone numbers as well. I was more than willing to advertise *The Skeptical Review* because I have conversed with Farrell Till on numerous occasions, read many of his issues, seen his video tapes, been aided by his ads for *Biblical Errancy*, and feel confident he is on the right track.

(C) By now you have no doubt noticed the considerable improvement in the appearance and readability of this publication. Because of some significant financial contributions we were able to: replace our out-of-date Apple II-S Computer with a 6200CD Macintosh Performa, exchange an Apple Imagewriter II Printer for a Hewlett-Packard LaserJet 5MP, and substitute a ClarisWorks 4.0 Program for a Publish-IT 4.0. I have been spending a considerable amount of time reading the manuals and getting accustomed to how everything operates. As time goes on I hope to make even more improvements in BE's format, style, appearance, and readability. But that is going to require more study and the manuals are pretty thick. Not being a computer expert, I am happy with just what I have been able to accomplish so far.

Issue #154

Editor: Dennis McKinsey

Oct. 1995

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

COMMENTARY

This issue will continue our discussion of letters we have received in recent months.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #633 from DA of LA Puente, Cali fornia (Part a)

Dear McKinsey.

Herein is a check for \$12 for a 1 year subscription to *Biblical Errancy*. I expect I shall get enough fun out of it to make it worth the effort. Now how much fun you will get is your problem.

Presumably you have learned some of the below since you put together the sample issue, but since you still put it out, you will have to suffer being told it again. So, a few of the points you need to correct (in your sample issue are as follows--Ed.).

Resurrection just a routine event? Yawn? No, there exists a difference of at least an order of magnitude between the Resurrection and the other risings of the dead you mention. In each of the other cases, an outside force, generally a holy man, raised the dead. There was no outside force for the Resurrection. For comparison, consider your car when it won't run. The mechanic can do an impressive job of repairing it (& an even more impressive job on your wallet), but that would be nothing compared to the car simply repairing itself (& the sticker shock if you had to buy one would really be impressive. Except for very minor cases, such a self-repairing car can't be built for any sum that won't let you buy lots of cars and simply replace them every time they run out of gas.) So the Resurrection, if true, would qualify as THE event.

Editor's Response to Letter #633 (Part a)

Dear DA.

When you start out with "Dear McKinsey" it's not hard to tell what is going to follow. Your letter, along with those of other recent critics of BE, has convinced me that before biblicists send me any more of these "Johnny-Come-Lately I'll slay the dragon for Christ" letters, they should read ALL of the back issues of this publication. In other words, I'd strongly recommend they do their homework. That should more than forestall many of the repetitive criticisms coming across my desk. But alas, in your case it's too late. If there are any points that need to be corrected, it is the one you just made and many to follow. Having confronted your points on numerous occasions, I'm compelled to restrain my own yawn. *First*, Jesus did not raise himself; he was raised by another--God. You might want to read my response to RVH two months from now in the Dialogue and Debate section. This

subject has been covered many times in various issues of BE. Too bad you didn't take time to read them. *Second*, you say, "In each of the other cases, an outside force, generally a holy man, raised the dead." Would you be so kind as to name the holy man who raised the saints before the Resurrection in Matt. 27:52-53? *Third*, in light of the fact that Jesus did not raise himself, your self-repairing car analogy is all but worthless. You wasted some ink.

Letter #633 Continues (Part b)

Your attacks are very uneven in nature, from serious points to attacking for what everybody, atheist or not, believes. We have under the Flood (section--Ed.) "...are we also to believe, for example, that the tremendous variety of dogs in the world today...descended from two of the species?...tremendous evolutionary change in only a few thousand years." But that is precisely what evolution and geology say did happen. They of course differ with the Bible on when, but the dog mutated out of the wolf in a very short period of time. Wolves began following men around for food and not long afterwards dogs appear (probably despite human attempts to avoid it. Despite the common assumption that man domesticated the dog, the dog/wolf was the active partner and changed itself enough to avoid most human hostility.) Strictly speaking, there were more than 2 original dogs, likely full packs of them, but just about any 2 of those original dogs would figure in the ancestry of any living dog.

The dog, by the way, has a very plastic shape largely because a puppy doesn't look like a dog. As the dog grows up, its form changes greatly. So it is a relatively easy task to select those dogs who change at a slow rate or a fast rate, and thereby end up with a different type of adult dog. You want a big dog? Just select those that grow fast. One with short legs? The legs just grow a little slower than the rest of the body

Despite all the difference in dogs, there is actually very little genetic difference. This can be seen in feral (wild, untamed--Ed.) dogs. By the time they have been on their own for a few generations, they "revert" to general mutt, almost wolf. There just isn't much genetic difference between a great dane and a chihuahua (sic.).

Editor's Response to Letter #633 (Part b)

You are all over the waterfront, my friend. I'd suggest that you confine your musings to theology, since theoretical imaginings and concoctions are far more acceptable in theology than in science. I hardly know where to begin. Your entire presentation is very uneven in nature. *First* you say "that is precisely what evolution and geology say did happen." Are you serious? Geology and evolution teach that the tremendous variety of dogs today descended from two dogs that lived a few thousand years ago? Where on earth did you learn your science? Then you say, "They of course differ with the Bible on when" which refutes what you just stated. You said geology and evolution teach "tremendous evolutionary change in only a few thousand years," which is also the biblical position, and then you reversed yourself by saying evolution and geology "differ with the Bible on when." *Second*, where did you get the idea that "the dog mutated out of the wolf in a very short period of time"? And from whence may I ask did the wolf evolve, or was it the original ark-occupant? *Third*, I fail to see any relevance to your whole wolf-followed-man-around scenario. *Fourth*, you say, "Strictly speaking, there were more than 2 original dogs, likely full packs of them, but just about any 2 of those original dogs would figure in the ancestry of any living dog." What a mess! How could there be more than two original dogs when the Bible says TWO of each species was taken aboard the ark? If there were "full packs of them," then the ark was oversupplied with dogs, and that would contradict the biblical account. *Fifth*, I also fail to see the relevance or accuracy of your whole discussion of the rate at which dogs grow. How does the rate at which they grow cause them to change from one kind of dog into another? And your comment that if you want a big dog just select one that grows fast is quite amusing, as is your assertion that short-legged dogs have

legs that grow slower than the rest of their body. *Sixth*, despite genetic similarity between dogs, you still have not shown how all of the dogs now living could have descended from two dogs that lived a few thousand years ago. You still haven't shown how 2 dogs on a boat a few thousand years ago could have given rise to the tremendous variety of dogs that now populate the earth. *Seventh*, apparently you haven't noticed that your penchant for talking about topics extraneous to the issue is quite pronounced. *And lastly*, what do you mean by saying "a puppy doesn't look like a dog." I had two puppies as a boy that were exact images of their parents. Your knowledge of dogs resembles your knowledge of science in general.

Letter #633 Continues (Part c)

In lesser degree, we can see much the same pattern in other domesticated animals. Existing with man, whether as pest, partner, or food-source, meant greatly changed conditions, and thus a great rate of evolution. The wild cow has great big horns, and had them for millions of years. Man domesticated the cow, and within a couple of thousand of years, the horns shrank to a size men "desired" (or more likely were willing to put up with as they probably didn't even realize they were breeding for horn size) and stayed at that size to current times. However the base point is that there has been way more than enough time since the Ark to account for all the variety of domestic animals.

Editor's Response to Letter #633 (Part c)

I'm not sure your presentation of animal development is even worthy of a response. It sounds as if you are saying domestic animals stayed nearly the same for millions of years until man got into the act and then they evolved rapidly. Do you have any evidence for this, or are you just spinning a theory that strikes your fancy and tickles your funny bone? Even if man had taken over, could he have made all those changes in such a short period of time? And what about the millions of animals that had no contact with man but changed as well? I can't help but notice that your final sentence only refers to "domestic" animals. In any event, the central point is that there is no way every variety of existing animal could have evolved from two of each species in the biblical time allotted.

Letter #633 Continues (Part d)

[On page 2 in our sample issue BE lists the following biblical contradictions: (a) David took 700 (2 Sam. 8:4) vs. 7,000 (1 Chron. 18:4) horsemen from Hadadezer; (b) David slew the men of 700 chariots and 40,000 horsemen (2 Sam. 10:18 vs. David slew of the Syrians 7,000 men which fought in chariots and 40,000 footmen (1 Chron. 19:18); (c) Jehoiachin was 18 (2 Kings 24:8) vs. 8 (2 Chron. 36:9) years old when he began to reign and he reigned 3 months (2 Kings 24:8) vs. 3 months and 10 days (2 Chron. 36:9); (d) There were 800,000 (2 Sam. 24:9) vs. 1,100,000 (1 Chron. 21:5) men in Israel that drew the sword in Judah; (e) There were 2,000 baths (1 Kings 7:26) vs. 3,000 baths (2 Chron. 4:5); (f) Saul's daughter, Michal, had no sons (2 Sam. 6:23) vs. 5 sons (2 Sam. 21:8) during her lifetime; (g) Lot was Abraham's nephew (Gen. 14:12) vs. brother (Gen. 14:14); (h) And Joseph was sold into Egypt by Midianites (Gen. 37:36) vs. Ishmaelites (Gen. 39:1). DA said the following regarding these contradictions--Ed.],

In regard to contradictions in the Bible: Your own errors are less important here since you are not claiming perfection. Still, the critic is implying a certain superiority to what is criticized & so you need to correct some of your own errors. (a) 2 Sam. 8:4 says David took 1,700 (not 700) horses (or "...a thousand and 700.." according to the Revised Standard Version. (d) "...in Judah" appears to be an editing error. Did you intend to continue with the differences in the count for Judah and then decide it wasn't an error worth bothering about, only to forget to delete it completely? (e) There "were" neither 2,000 or 3,000 baths. Bath was a measure of capacity in 1 Kings 7:26 and 2 Chronicles 4:5. "Held" is a term used

in some Bibles. (f) There is a contradiction between Michal of 2 Sam. 6:23 having no sons, and Merab of 21:8 having 5, only if the 2 are the same woman. Saul surely had a substantial number of daughters as well as sons. & since ancient Hebrew didn't write vowels, different names are spelled the same way. A contradiction is still possible here, but it hardly ranks as "straight-forward" or one a serious spokesman must "grudgingly concede." (g) Gen. 14:14 says Lot is Abraham's kin. You presumably read the King James Version, or one of its descendants. However more precise works, such as the New English Bible, correct this error.

Editor's Response to Letter #633 (Part d)

Well, let's take them one at a time. (a) You say the conflict should actually be between 1,700 and 7,000, not 700 and 7,000. In other words, you aren't denying a contradiction exists; you are just saying one figure should be 1,700 rather than 700. I have no problem with that, although the King James is not the only version that says 700. If you'll read the Modern Language Version of 2 Sam. 8:4, you'll see that it agrees with the KJV by saying "700 hundred cavalry." So the KJV is not alone in its rendition of this verse. But regardless of which version you use, a contradiction exists.

(d) Thanks for noticing this editing error. The phrase "in Judah" should not have been gratuitously inserted, but nothing is changed by its admission or omission. The contradiction remains.

(e) Your criticism makes no sense. What do you mean by saying "there were neither 2,000 or 3,000 baths"? I'd suggest you reread 1 Kings 7:26 and 2 Chronicles 4:5. One says 2,000 baths and the other says 3,000 baths in the same account, and that's about all that needs to be said on that issue.

(f) The KJV is a more reliable translation of the Hebrew/Greek manuscripts of the Bible than many recent translations, because its creators were not nearly as concerned with politics, expediency, and the reconciliation of biblical contradictions as are modern biblicists. Religious domination was far more prominent 400 years ago than is true today, and for that reason translators didn't worry about critics or detractors. They knew the latter would most likely keep their mouths shut out of fear for life and limb. But that is no longer true, and translators now feel compelled to make politically expedient textual changes. And (f) provides a good example of same. "Michal" in 2 Sam. 21:8 has been changed to "Merab" in some translations to eliminate the contradiction. The translation you are using reveals only one alteration among many. Nevertheless your beloved change was more than the translators of some modern versions could stomach, so they stayed with the KJV. Note, for instance, the rendering of 2 Sam. 21:8 in the Masoretic Text, the NWT, and the ASV. The NIV has your "Merab", but with the following footnote: It is in two Hebrew manuscripts, some Septuagint manuscripts and Syriac, while *most* Hebrew and Septuagint manuscripts have "Michal." It doesn't take a rocket scientist to realize that the more opportunistic translators opted for the word "Merab" in order to escape this contradiction, even though they were fully aware of the fact that it is found in only 2 Hebrew and some Septuagint manuscripts, while all the other Hebrew and Septuagint manuscripts have "Michal." That's politics, pure and simple, my friend. Now you can see why I often call the Bible and its various versions a political book.

(g) Again you are relying upon the version you prefer--the New English Bible--and acting as if it were more reliable and up-to-date than the KJV. I beg to differ. If the KJV is so unreliable and in need of modernization, then why do the Masoretic text, certainly not a KJ descendant, and such modern versions as the NWT and the ASV, agree with the KJV? And why does the NASB, certainly no bastion of liberalism, say "relative" while conceding in a footnote that, literally translated, the word should be "brother"? No, my friend. The problem lies not with defective translations but with deceptive translators.

Letter #633 Continues (Part e)

You may wish to argue that (g) is still an error in "a" bible. But this is to set up a straw man. We need merely open 2 of the many bibles on the market to demonstrate at least one of these is in error, and we don't need a newsletter to point out such an obvious point. A Bible is not THE Bible. It is something acknowledged to have been done by mortal, and fallible, hands. Errors in a Bible no more challenge the perfection of THE Bible than a smudge of ink on your newsletter would change the meaning of what you were trying to write.

We can note here that the Bible presumably doesn't exist, and may never have existed, all versions being in some degree or other in error in "copying" it. This can be interesting for the philosopher, but of no importance to us. The same is true of any document, including your newsletter and this letter. Each step in communication is subject to error. You didn't mean exactly what you wrote, and what you wrote is not exactly what is printed, and what is printed is not read as printed.... But when I write back to you, I have to overcome those errors and write about THE newsletter, not the physical one I hold in my hand. Else we are simply talking about different things and I am wasting my postage even more obviously than normal.

Editor's Response to Letter #633 (Part e)

In your rush to appear erudite and sophisticated you have not only thrown out the baby with the bath water, but flip-flopped in the process. With an added twist you are merely submitting a variation on an apologetic defense that has been addressed repeatedly in this newsletter. Again, I wish you had done your homework by reading our back issues. Most apologists adopting your line of defense will say that although all the physical bibles in our possession have errors and contradictions, the originals do not. You, however, have gone one step further by implicitly denying the Bible ever existed, by saying "the Bible presumably doesn't exist, and may never have existed, all versions being in some degree or other in error in 'copying' it." How you can copy something that never existed to begin with is enigmatic. And if the Bible never existed to begin with, then there is no THE Bible to go to. All we have under your scenario are manuscripts claiming to be the best version of the Bible to use, while in reality being copies of nothing. But earlier you stated, "Errors in a Bible no more challenge the perfection of THE Bible than a smudge of ink on your newsletter would change the meaning of what you were trying to write," all of which strongly implies you feel there was an original THE Bible. Your position is muddled, to say the least. Do you or do you not believe there was an original, genuine, bona fide copy of THE BIBLE, or at the very least manuscripts that would have comprised THE BIBLE had they ever been assembled into one book? If you say there was an original copy, then you are in the same predicament as countless other apologists we have confronted over the years, and I would definitely recommend you read past issues of BE to see our responses to them. If you say there was no original Bible, then you couldn't have a book that was divinely inspired according to Christian theology, because it never existed and, thus, could not have been written by God. According to Christian theology only THE BIBLE was written by God. All you could have is a writing resembling hundreds of other writings to one degree or another, which you feel is more reliable than the others, and you choose to call the Bible. But it couldn't be THE BIBLE. (To Be Continued)

Letter #634 from GN of Scottsdale, Arizona (Part a)

Dear Dennis.

I requested your *Encyclopedia* for my birthday. It arrived and I've been immersed in it ever since. I LOVE it. I read somewhere that we should tell you of any errors, etc. so that the next edition will be even more accurate than this one. I found a few things that are obviously slips or typos, and then I have a few comments that you might be interested in.

(The 16th point on page 116 in *The Encyclopedia* contends that every jot and tittle of the Old Law is to be upheld until heaven and earth passed away and all was fulfilled. It notes that Jesus violated the Old Law on numerous occasions and contended he would be severely punished according to Rev. 22:18-19 (*"I warn every one who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if any one adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, and if any one takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his share in the tree of life."* GN says in response--Ed.), The book of Revelation is what is referred to at Rev. 22:18-19, not the entire bible. The bible was not yet put together into a book when Revelation was written. I think we would need Jesus deviating from the prophecy of the book of Revelation in order to make the point valid.

Editor's Response to Letter #634 (Part a)

I became aware of your observation many years ago but have always accepted the apologetic contention that Rev. 22:18-19 applies to the entire Bible. If that is how they view it, that's fine with me. If your assertion that it does not apply to the entire Bible is valid, I have no problem with that either, since I could also cite Deut. 4:2, 12:32, and Prov. 30:6.

Letter #634 Continues (Part b)

(The 13th point on page 134 in our book says, "In Matt. 21:22 Jesus seems to answer all our problems by saying, *"And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive."* John 14:14 holds out the same ephemeral promise by saying, *"If ye ask anything in my name, I will do it."* Yet, his promise is dashed by much more realistic comments found in Lam. 3:44 and Isa. 1:15 which say, respectively, *"Thou (God--Ed.) hast covered thyself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through"* and *"When ye spread forth your hands, I (God--Ed.) will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear...."* Those who think their prayers are going to be answered on a routine basis have discovered, like millions of Christians, that that is little more than a pipe dream. Millions of believers have prayed to Jesus millions of times, only to be met by disappointment and failure. His promise of the universal efficacy of prayer has proven as miserable a sham as his promise of all power to those with faith. GN says in response--Ed.), Regarding Isa. 1:15 an apologist would simply say that god would naturally not answer the prayers of those people because their hands were full of blood. The other excuse that they would likely come up with is that the O.T. verse in Isaiah was before Christ had reconciled man to God.

Editor's Response to Letter #634 (Part b)

An apologist can say anything he likes, GN. The question is whether or not it can be proven. In fact, can any evidence be offered? True! The last part of Isa. 1:15 says "your hands are full of blood" But what difference does that make? Matt. 21:22 and John 14:14 just as clearly assert you can do anything and no restrictions or limitations of this kind are involved. For understandable reasons, apologists only emphasize verses that have qualifiers. If you have one verse that says you can do anything and another that says you can do anything with provisos, which one is going to prevail? That a conflict exists is obvious. But there is no reason whatever to assume the former should be rejected or held subservient to the latter, as apologists repeatedly favor. Since the former encompasses the latter, shouldn't the former be adopted? After all, isn't that the rule of thumb followed by apologists, using the auto accident example to rationalize the different resurrection accounts? The larger number encompasses the smaller, and is therefore always to be deemed more reliable.

Letter #634 Continues (Part c)

(The 23rd point on page 136 in our book states that in Mark 8:35 Jesus said, "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it." What gospel? How on earth could Jesus have made this statement when there was no gospel during his lifetime? The gospel did not come onto the scene until years after the Crucifixion. GN says in response to this--Ed.),
Could Jesus have been using the word gospel to simply mean "good news?" If that is the case, then he could have made the statement about the gospel while still alive and it would make sense....

Editor's Response to Letter #634 (Part c)

You are altering the script, GN. It says "gospel," not "good news." Essentially your defense amounts to: That's what it says, even though that's not what's being said. If "good news" was meant, then "good news" should have been used. Are we going to go by speculation or the words lying before us in black and white? Because theories are a dime a dozen, more than guesswork is required.

Letter #634 Continues (Part d)

(On page 143 the 46th example states, "In Mark 9:50 Jesus says, 'Salt is good: but if salt have lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it.'" In response to this GN says--Ed.),
The sentence should say, "If salt has lost ITS saltiness, not HIS saltiness."

Editor's Response to Letter #634 (Part d)

I agree with you, GN, that's what it should say and some versions do, but not the King James which I was using. Rule #1 in all textual criticism is to check your sources FIRST. As I've said before, picking words is like picking apples. Be very careful, because what you pick you may have to eat. Speaking as one who knows, if you don't do your homework, you can get awfully bloated and mighty sick. (*To Be Continued*)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #635 from FA of Santa Rosa, Cali fornia

(The 18th point on one of our pamphlets is: According to the text there are 29 cities listed in Joshua 15:21-32 (RSV). But one need only count them to see that the actual total is 36. Rev. BB latched onto the verse in the NIV which says "29 towns *and their villages*" to prove that 29 of the names were towns and the other 7 were villages. In the third part of my response I showed that Joshua 15:21 clearly states all 36 names were those of towns and none applied to villages. FA says in reaction to our exchange--Ed.),

Dear Dennis.

In your response to Letter #605 cc (Issue #150), I must say that neither Rev. BB nor you carefully read Joshua 15. While you are absolutely correct and Rev. BB is completely wrong, it requires no more proof than that found in the rest of Joshua 15.

- Josh. 15:33-36 lists 14 names and says "fourteen cities and their villages."
- Josh. 15:37-41 lists 16 names and says "sixteen cities and their villages."
- Josh. 15:42-44 lists 9 names and says "nine cities and their villages."
- Josh. 15:48-51 lists 11 names and says "eleven cities and their villages."
- Josh. 15:52-54 lists 9 names and says "nine cities and their villages."
- Josh. 15:55-57 lists 10 names and says "ten cities and their villages."
- Josh. 15:58-59 lists 6 names and says "six cities and their villages."

**Josh. 15:60 lists 2 names and says "two cities and their villages."
Josh. 15:61-62 lists 6 names and says "six cities and their villages."**

Following the same sequence, Joshua 15:21-32 clearly lists 36 names but says "all the cities are twenty and nine, with their villages." The Bible is wrong! Once again the Bible proves itself wrong and is your best argument and Rev. BB's worst enemy. While you used "a text out of context," you proved your case the hard way. Now you have the context to prove your case the easy way. Congratulations on your brilliant arguments.

Editor's Response to Letter #635

Dear FA.

I decided not to use your approach because there are 15 names mentioned in Joshua 15:33-36, not 14, as you assert. You are using an inaccurate textual count. Rev. BB might have used this as additional proof that the names of villages are included in the lists of names. Then, again, perhaps you are correct and I did prove my case the hard way, since all the others clearly support your conclusion. Incidentally, you might want to correct your observation that "Josh. 15:42-46 list 9 names and says 'nine cities and their villages'." The citation should be Joshua 15:42-44, not 15:42-46.

Letter #636 from an Unidentified Writer near Rockford, Illinois

On page 150-6 of BE in Letter #622 reference is made to "a little grammar of biblical Hebrew." Do you know the name and author and where I might be able to get it or any other information on this "grammar"?

Editor's Response to Letter #636

Letter #622 was written by a subscriber in Firenze, Italy. You would have to contact him for that information.

Letter #637 from FVH of Flagstaff, Arizona

I would like to subscribe to your Biblical Errancy publication. I need sources to refute statements made by people who write letters to the editor of our paper expounding the absolute inerrancy of the Bible.

Editor's Response to Letter #637

Welcome aboard! We are only too happy to provide information to someone who is confronting biblicists on their own turf via the media. You are engaged in that which goes to the very raison d'etre of this periodical.

Letter #638 from RW of Topeka, Kansas

Please send me information on your publication. In this area of the country, we need all the information we can get to help counter the "apologists" and similar Christian reconstructors of both scripture and history.

Editor's Response to Letter #638

Again we are glad to oblige. That's what we're here for.

EDITOR'S NOTE: (a) We are still seeking people who are willing to play our cable television tapes on their local public access channel. Please call or write anytime.

(b) HEAR YE, HEAR YE! WE HAVE MOVED INTO A MUCH BIGGER HOUSE AND I NOW HAVE AN ENTIRE ROOM FOR MY OFFICE. Our new address and phone numbers are:

2500 PUNDERSON DRIVE, HILLIARD, OHIO 43026 (614) 527-1703

Issue #155 Editor: Dennis McKinsey

Nov. 1995

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

COMMENTARY

Our increased volume of mail has motivated us to continue focusing upon correspondence.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #633 from DA of La Puente, California Continues from Last Month (Part f)

[In our sample issue a critic, MJ, objected to what I said regarding the ark landing upon Mount Ararat as related in Gen. 8:4. He stated, "I wish to make a few comments on what you said about the Flood. First you quoted Gen. 8:4 ('*And the ark rested in the 7th month, on the 17th day of the month, upon the mountains of Ararat*') and then you commented, 'How could the ark have rested upon several mountains at once?'" MJ then went on to register his objection to our criticism. Commenting upon our exchange DA said--Ed.), MJ has it all over you on the ark rested "upon the mountains of Ararat" issue. Your pointing out the distinction between mountains and mountain is clever. Your thinking it means anything is stupid.

As MJ points out, the statement reads perfectly properly as a plural. "I am in the mountains of California" is wrong because I am on the plains, not because I am in a solitary mountain. & as already noted, you have not shown this is the correct text of THE Bible. Again, the New English Bible, among others, does use the singular....

You ask if a woman turning into a pillar of salt is any more or less incredible than a ship landing on several mountains at once, and the answer is that while each is presumably impossible, landing on top of several mountains is much more incredible. It immediately springs to mind that this is not what the speaker means, that he means an area of mountains (& maybe not even a mountain at all), or that we misheard the plural. The pillar of salt, we may assume is a lie, but we don't assume the writer meant she became a pillar of the community, or was actually silt.

Editor's Response to Letter #633 (Part f)

Your train of thought, assuming there is one, often eludes me DA. At times I can't help but feel your disjointed synapses are trying to communicate something. In any event, I'll proceed on the assumption that I got your drift and respond to several of your comments. *First*, you stated, "I am in the mountains of California is wrong because I am on the plains, not because I am in a solitary mountain." It's difficult to make much sense out of this comment, since we are not talking about "in" the mountains but "on" the mountains. And how do "plains" or "in" a solitary mountain contribute to your point? The word "stupid"

might be more appropriately applied elsewhere. *Second*, if "stupid" is applicable to the point I made, then why does the New English Bible buck the tide by saying "on a mountain in Ararat"? Today's English Version follows suit by saying "a mountain in the Ararat Range." Apparently some of your apologetic comrades felt the issue was of sufficient importance to warrant a change from the King James. You weakened your own argument by noting that the NEB uses the singular. *Third*, you say I "have not shown this is the correct text of THE Bible." Considering the fact that the NASB, the KJ, the NWT, Page 155-2

the BBE, the NAB, the Masoretic Text, the ASV, the NIV, and the JB all say "mountains" (plural), it would appear to be incumbent upon you to prove that "mountains" (plural) is not the correct text. Before doing so, you might also provide data to the effect that your comprehension of Hebrew exceeds that possessed by those who translated the NASB, the KJ, the NWT, the BBE, the ASV, the NIV, and the NAB. I have little doubt that you'll fail egregiously in this regard because your knowledge of Hebrew does not equal that of any committee member. *Fourth*, I fail to see why "landing on top of several mountains" is any more incredible than a woman turning into a pillar of salt. If anything, landing on several mountains simultaneously is less incredible, since a ship of horrendous size could do so. *Fifth*, you say, "It immediately springs to mind that this is not what the speaker means, that he means an area of mountains (and maybe not even a mountain at all)." Are we going to go by what the writer says or your speculations as to what you think he meant, what you feel he should have meant, or what it would be nice to believe he meant? He said "mountains" and since he is a writer of perfect Scripture (the autographs), he must have known what he meant, absent evidence to the contrary. Your employment of the "That's what it says but that's not what it means" defense is anemic at best considering your admission that maybe it's not even a mountain at all. You're trolling for a way out my friend. *Sixth*, what do you mean by saying that maybe "we misheard the plural." To whom are you referring? Who's we? Maybe you misheard something, but my hearing is excellent. I'm reading the page in front of me and it says "mountains." *Seventh*, what do you mean by saying "The pillar of salt, we may assume is a lie." From whence comes this idea? You are all over the board. One minute you sound like a fundamentalist and the next you resemble a liberal Christian. If the pillar of salt is a lie, then the Bible lied, and I don't have to tell you what the ramifications of that are. *And finally*, to add ideological chaos to confusion you say, "we don't assume the writer meant she became a pillar of the community, or was actually silt." We don't assume she became salt? Again who is we? Speak for yourself. If the word 'silt' is your substitution for the word "salt," then I most assuredly do come to that conclusion, since that's what the text says. You appear to be one of those capricious fundamentalists who don't hesitate to abandon the literal approach when the going gets rough.

Letter #633 Concludes (Part g)

Your answer to MJ gives another example of quibbling over nothing. The assertion that "all have sinned" conflicts with Gen. 6:9 and Job 1:1 (saying that Noah and Job were "perfect", or "blameless") does so only under certain definitions of the word. & under routine logic, we automatically reject those meanings that cause a conflict. "Perfect" does not always mean perfect. In fact, it probably rarely does. It's normal usage is that the errors and flaws are tiny, normally visible to the speaker or to anyone else likely to be viewing. Sports frequently speak of "perfect" performances that don't even meet this standard. They are merely extremely good. So it is quite correct to read that Gen. 6:9 and Job 1:1 in fact say only that Noah and Job were sinless by comparison to their fellow man, not by the stricter standards of God. Here too we can note that the translations vary and to establish a contradiction, you need to establish that "perfect" and not "very good" is the correct translation. (& you must prove that, not those who wish to call the Bible perfect

must prove there is no error. For them to prove it would be proving a negative, a feat bordering on the impossible.... you must not only establish that the word not only could mean "perfect", but also that that is what the writer intended to say. I know, I know. This is making you work hard. Sorry, but that is still your burden. Somebody has got to do that work in order to establish there is a flaw, and you have nominated yourself.

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #633 (Part g)

I really wish you had at least read the relevant back issues on this topic, DA, before sending such a poorly conceived monologue. *First*, quibbling has nothing to do with the issue. This clash nails the Bible to the wall for all to see and again shows that to deal in absolutes is to invite anguish. *Second*, rather than tax our readers by meticulously rehashing arguments that have been cited ad nauseum, I'll simply restate the basics. As I have said repeatedly: (a) Noah had to have been perfect or he had no more right to be on that boat than anyone else, (b) If Noah had not been perfect then the earth would have begun after the Flood with people corrupt like those who perished and the world would not have been purified. The Flood would have been for nought, and (c) The word "perfect" comes from the same Hebrew word that is used to call God perfect in Deut. 32:4. If you are going to argue that Gen. 6:9 is not asserting Noah is perfect, then I could argue with equal force that Deut. 32:4 is not arguing God is perfect. *Third*, you said, "'Perfect' does not always mean perfect. In fact, it probably rarely does." And white does not mean white and black does not mean black! That kind of defense demonstrates the lengths to which apologists will go to defend the indefensible and provides another reason why religion is intellectually bankrupt. You are confusing a word's accurate definition with how it is used in colloquial parlance. "Perfect" means without spot or blemish, undefiled. The fact that people mistakenly apply it to things which are not in fact perfect does not change the meaning of the term. You say that the word "perfect" does not always mean perfect. Oh yes it does. It's just not always used that way. And when God's perfect book uses the term, one would expect nothing less than absolute precision. After all, that's God speaking, not your average Joe on the street. The analogy you draw between sports figures being labeled perfect and Noah/Job won't stand the strain because listeners realize the word "perfect" with respect to sports performances is actually false. That's understood, but it is not understood with respect to Noah and Job for reasons already listed. You say that "perfect does not always mean perfect. In fact, it probably rarely does. It's normal usage is that the errors and flaws are tiny...." I don't care how tiny the flaws are, if they exist at all, perfection is out the window. *Fourth*, you say that Gen. 6:9 and Job 1:1 in fact say only that Noah and Job were sinless in comparison to their fellow man. Then they weren't sinless! They were sinners like everyone else. They either are or they aren't. There's no in between. *Fifth*, you say I, "need to establish that 'perfect' and not 'very good' is the correct translation." Correction! I don't need to establish anything. You need to establish that your definition of the word "perfection," which isn't even a definition but merely a description of how the word is used, is more valid than the dictionary's definition. The people who translated the King James and other versions used the word "perfect" or a comparable term. By being opposed to their choice, you are saying you could have done a better job of picking the right term. At this juncture you'll again need to establish your credentials in Hebrew. Just how well do you know this language? You fail to realize the burden of proof lies on him who alleges. I don't have to prove the word "perfect" is the right term to use; you have to prove it is the wrong one. You are the one asserting that you could have done a better job of translating than a team of Hebraic scholars. You are the one saying they chose the wrong word and should have used "very good" or something comparable. I have no problem with their translation of the relevant Hebrew term into the English word "perfect"; you do. *Sixth*, you say that, "you must not only establish that the word not only could mean 'perfect,' but also that that is what the writer intended to say." How silly! That's what he said, isn't it. I

take him at his word. No, my friend. You have to prove that's not what he meant, despite the fact that that's exactly what he said. *Seventh*, your final sentences could be more appropriately applied to yourself. You state, "I know, I know. This is making you work hard. Sorry, but that is still your burden. Somebody has got to do that work in order to establish there is a flaw, and you have nominated yourself." Apparently you're unable to realize you've described your own dilemma. *Last*, but not least, you said, "...under routine logic, we automatically reject those meanings that cause a conflict." Are you serious? That's your idea of routine logic? That's your idea of objective scholarship? No wonder it's crucial that children be kept as far from this ruinous mental blindness that masquerades under the name of religion as is possible. In truth, unencumbered, open minded, dispassionate observers don't automatically reject anything. They weigh, quantify, and analyze everything on its merits and only discard that which the evidence shows to be wanting. From your perspective anything that conflicts with the Bible should be automatically discarded regardless of its merits. That's nothing more than another variation on the time honored maxim: My mind is made up; don't confuse me with facts.

Letter #639 from NB of Tucson, Arizona (Part a)

[On page 4 in the 148th issue we noted that the Bible erred when it said the bat is a bird (Lev. 11:13, 19). Rev. BB said in response to this, "Once again, you have a translation difficulty, and all you have 'proven' is that that the KJV is generally a less reliable translation of the Bible." I responded by noting that the NASB, the NEB, the ASV and other versions have the same terminology as the KJV. Taking the side of Rev. BB, NB said in response to our dialogue--Ed.),

Dear Dennis I have a few comments regarding BE #148. First, in discussing Letter #605 you say: "the terminology of the NASB, the NEB, the ASV and 'other' versions is no different from that of the KJV." I beg to differ. You didn't mention the NIV, but I assume you read it.

Editor's Response to Letter #639 (Part a)

Dear NB. I said the NASB, the NEB, the ASV and other versions are in agreement with the KJV. I didn't say that included every version on the market.

Letter #639 Concludes (Part b)

...Now as to resurrections. On page 148-3 you say you "mentioned more than 3 resurrections and they all preceded that of Jesus." Pray tell, what were they? I know of only three in the OT, and two of them (the translations of Enoch [Gen. 5:24] and Elijah [2 Kings 2:11] were not really "resurrections", in the sense that neither Enoch nor Elijah rose from the "dead." Which brings us to the resurrection by Elijah of the son of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:22). Would you please cite at least two others in the OT?...

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #639 (Part b)

I have never referred to the translations of Enoch and Elijah as resurrections and you appear to be of like mind. So why did you even mention them, unless you're feebly trying to build a straw man. They weren't dead, so how could they have been resurrected? To answer your specific question, besides the 1 Kings 17:22 example you mentioned, I have always cited 1 Sam. 28:7, 11, 15, 2 Kings 4:32, 34, 35, and 13:21, as other examples of OT resurrections.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #634 from GN of Scottsdale, Arizona Continues from Last Month (Part e)

[The first messianic prophecy referred to on page 153 in our book *The Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy* is Gen. 3:15 which says, "I (God--Ed.) will put enmity between thee (the evil

serpent--Ed.) and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed (allegedly Jesus--Ed.); it shall bruise thy head, and thou shall bruise his heel." Christians interpret this as meaning a woman (Mary--Ed.) will give forth a seed (Jesus--Ed.) who will fight the devil's descendants.--Ed. GN says in this regard, There is no proof that Jesus bruised the head of Satan. Jesus was the one crucified (more than a heel wound), and we can surely see the works of evil manifest in the world daily. This prophecy certainly was not fulfilled in any way. Jesus is the one who died suffering the more serious of the two wounds by dying.

Editor's Response to Letter #634 (Part e)

What can I say other than your observation has merit.

Letter #634 Continues (Part f)

[Among the list of God's deeds found on page 171 in the *Encyclopedia* is the assertion that he delivered a man, Job, into Satan's hands. GN says in response--Ed.), God not only delivered "a man, Job, into Satan's hands," he delivered the INNOCENT man, Job, into Satan's hands. It's not the first time that god had little regard for the innocent. God had no qualms about demanding the murder of the innocent Isaac to test Abraham's heart (one has to wonder what kind of heart god wants in a man), nor did he anguish over the death of the innocent firstborns in Egypt. Handing innocent men, women, and children over to death is one of the great pleasures of the O.T. god. How about the murdering of David's innocent baby by God for the sins of David? Talk about abortion. At least a fetus isn't born yet.

Letter #634 Continues (Part g)

[Among the list of reprehensible deeds by the patriarchs on page 184 in the *Encyclopedia* we referred to the fact that Lot offered his virgin daughters to a mob in Gen. 19:8. GN says in response--Ed.], Lot offered his daughters to be RAPED and perhaps worse. If you could add the word RAPE, the incident would carry more weight.

Editor's Response to Letter #634 (Part g)

I didn't use the word because the text does not directly say they were raped, although that is certainly a reasonable assumption.

Letter #634 Continues (Part h)

[On page 186 in our book we listed reprehensible deeds performed by major biblical matriarchs. GN felt we omitted some good examples and stated--Ed.], Sarah also wanted Hagar and her son thrown out into the desert to be abandoned because of her jealousy, and don't forget Esther who got herself all oiled up to go to bed (before marriage) with a pagan king. Rachel was a drug addict as proven by her desire for the mandrakes that Leah's son had found. Mandrakes are a narcotic.

Letter #634 Continues (Part i)

[In the *Encyclopedia* we note that God said to Eve because of her behavior, "*I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children.*" GN says in response--Ed.], How could god "multiply" a pain that Eve supposedly had never felt before?

Editor's Response to Letter #634 (Part i)

Interesting question!

Letter #634 Continues (Part j)

[On page 234 in the *Encyclopedia* we cited Psalm 55:23 which says among other things that "bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days." GN felt we neglected to mention the fact that--Ed.],

Jesus was supposedly "righteous" and yet he "fell" and did not "live out half his days"--just like the wicked.

Editor's Response to Letter #634 (Part j)

If I'm not mistaken, I did mention Jesus in this regard.

Letter #634 Concludes (Part k)

Dallas Theological Seminary Professor Charles Ryrie claims Paul is not the accepted author of Hebrews - "author unknown".... If one doesn't even know who authored a book, how would one know if they were honorable people or not. This is one of my arguments about Moses writing the Law. Why would God choose a murderer to tell man the will of God?.... I'm very interested in all aspects of the bible and its teachings. If I am not correct in the above, please let me know so that I can correct my records. I do not want to make mistakes when talking to religious friends and foes. I want to thank you so much for publishing the *Encyclopedia* . It will be a great help to me. You really have the gift. Much affection.

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #634 (Part k)

I left out parts of your letter GN because I felt they weren't as strong as the ones included. But much of what you say has merit. Thanks for the compliments and keep up the good work.

Letter #640 from FA of Santa Rosa, California

Dear Dennis. Thank you for your correction on Joshua 15:42-44 on page 6 in the last issue. The reason I included Joshua 15:33-36 as 14 names instead of the 15 listed was that in my KJV, between Gederah and Gederothaim, the word "and" has a marginal reading of "or." I took this to mean that the two names were interchangeable names of the same city.

Letter #641 from RR of Altamonte Springs, Florida

Dear Dennis McKinsey. I certainly agree with the writer of letter #619 in the May 1995 issue of BIBLICAL ERRANCY. When I saw THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF BIBLICAL ERRANCY in the Prometheus catalog, I ordered it immediately. It took a few months for it to come, but I have been reading it for several weeks now. IT IS FANTASTIC!!!

This kind of book has been needed for years (centuries) to try to correct the misunderstanding of what the BIBLE is and what it contains. I am amazed at the people who never examine their "book" nor consider how it came to have such high regard.

People are simply brainwashed from infancy to believe all that "stuff."

Noah's ark is a very attractive story - with all the animals, etc. for even very little babies and young children. What a travesty! I liked what you said about Noah in the May 1995 BB #149. How true - if God had plans to correct his "mistakes" of creating such horrible sinners previously, then to start over with Noah would have been a good idea (??) but only if Noah had been a *perfect* example.

I was once a Seventh-day Adventist, having been taught to "love" the Bible from childhood. But after 40 years I began to question and use my brain to say WHY WOULD GOD DO THAT? WHY WOULD GOD (JESUS) SAY THAT? And after about ten years of studying philosophy, etc. I now agree with you completely.

Editor's Response to Letter #641

Dear RR. Thanks for the accolades. Many Christians fail to see that it would be ridiculous

for God to have drowned everyone but Noah in order to cleanse the world and then to have started over with someone who was corrupt like all those who drowned. This is additional proof that when the Bible said "Noah was a just man and *perfect* in his generations," it meant just that. He had to have been perfect.

Letter #642 from LC of Lufkin, Texas

I bought you book and am very happy with it. Although I have a complete set of your newsletters, I find it much more convenient to have your work all together in a single volume. Thanks so much for all that you have done, and continue to do, in exposing the negative side of the Bible.

Letter #643 from PD of Lapeer, Michigan

Dear Dennis. Two weeks ago I went to an Office...Store in Flint and as I was getting out of the car a minister approached and asked if I was saved, believed in Jesus and all the other non-sense that they believe it is their responsibility to intrude into other peoples' lives. He handed me one of his pamphlets as well. If he has the right to hand tracts to me, then I likewise have an equal right to hand him something in return. He was in for a surprise because I carry your BE tracts in my wallet.

I must have been muttering under my breath about the nerve of those people because a young woman who works in the store overheard me and came up to me and said she was in full agreement. She went on to tell me that she lived in a small four-square block housing development with four fundamentalist churches competing against each other and relentlessly trying to have her join their church. Each of them according to her is somewhat in disagreement with each other. She indicated she'd like to be able to turn the tables on them somehow or, at least, become more knowledgeable on the religious positions. I mentioned to her that I handed the preacher in the parking lot a couple of pamphlets on biblical errors and questions. She said she'd like to see one, so I gave her my last two. When I was back in the store a couple of weeks later she told me she and her friends liked what they read.

I believe she is just out of high school. She's never heard of freethought, rationalism, humanism, and doesn't know how, who, or where to go for information. The local library was of no real help to her. I agreed to help her and gave her a few issues of your publication and will help her as long as she so desires. Perhaps she will write you although she may be apprehensive not wanting her parents to know.

Now, I would like to restock my BE pamphlets. Is the price still ten cents apiece? I would like 50 of each; so let me know the cost....

Editor's Response to Letter #643

Dear PD. Our pamphlets are still 10 cents each and thank you so much for using them in the manner intended. You probably affected that woman more than you realize.

Letter #644 from KJ of Blaine, Minnesota

Dear Mr. McKinsey. I have ordered several of your publications and commentaries which have been extremely informative and beneficial to the research that I have undertaken to try to enlighten my husband (a Jehovah's Witness for 6 years) about biblical issues. I wish that I could have known about your literature much sooner, but I have only recently changed my beliefs from Christian to humanistic/agnostic.

Forrest Carroll, editor of the Family of Humanists Newsletter, sent me a suggestion from TG (Freethought Observer). TG noticed a letter (in your June, 1995, issue of BE) from RG of Brooklyn, Ohio, who was an "ex-JW who wasted the first 35 years of his life on religious nonsense." TG thought that you might be able to put me in touch with RG and that he might be able to give me some advice on the best ways to help my husband. The only information I've gotten from ex-JW's has been from people who are involved in some other

fundamentalist Christian group. I would really appreciate learning about the insights of an ex-JW who is no longer religious. Perhaps RG could send me a short letter explaining why he left the JW organization and what points or issues I should concentrate on when I have discussions with my husband about the Bible and the WT Society. Please forward my letter (or a copy of it) to RG in Brooklyn, Ohio. Thank you so much for your assistance in this matter, and thank you for all your wonderful work over the years in the struggle to inform people about biblical errancy.

Editor's Response to Letter #644

Dear KJ. We are only too happy to respond to your request and hope RG can provide you with the kind of information you so obviously desire. I sympathize with your plight and can only imagine the agony of being married to a fundamentalist Christian. I work with fundamentalists and cringe nearly every time I hear their answer to personal, societal, national or international problems. It isn't so much their description of problems and their disdain for same that alienates me as their suggested causes and proposed solutions. I am as opposed to pornography, prostitution, drug legalization, and sex/violence in the media as they are but our suggested causes and solutions for these ills differ dramatically. Teaching and preaching are far less effective than environmentally improving and enhancing. Religious people just don't realize that the ills of mankind will never be abolished by getting the garbage out of people but only by getting people out of the garbage.

Letter #645 from SM of Torrance, California

Dear Dennis. Please send me a copy of your book. I have purchased many copies of your newsletter, and used them six months ago when I debated a local pastor at UCLA on the issue of biblical errancy. He was so overwhelmed with all the examples I provided, it was almost embarrassing.

Editor's Response to Letter #645

Dear SM. Keep up your excellent work. You are using this publication in precisely the manner intended. If only you could be cloned!

EDITOR'S NOTE: (a) Some of our critics seem to be under the mistaken impression that our failure to respond to their letters in a timely fashion exposes fearfulness, apprehension, and timidity on our part. Rest assured that we are not at a loss for answers. That'll be the day! Our real dilemma lies in the fact that we are being inundated with correspondence. It's never been as voluminous, both pro and con. One stack of letters alone is half a foot high. We only ask writers to be patient and hopefully most will receive a response. (b) We still need volunteers to help circulate our cablevision public access tapes. Incidentally, we'd be very interested in not only hearing from everyone regarding their negative and positive experiences with respect to airing our programs but also their opinions of our presentations per se.

Issue #156 Editor: Dennis McKinsey

Dec. 1995

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

COMMENTARY

Having obtained permission from Dan Barker of the Freedom From Religion Foundation, we're printing the following abbreviated version of his pamphlet entitled WHY JESUS, some of which came from BE according to Dan. He is a former fundamentalist minister who is quite knowledgeable with respect to Scripture and provides chapter and verse to buttress many of his points. Because fundamentalists and evangelicals have been talking incessantly in recent years about the importance of Jesus as a role model and in the maintenance of "family values," the following is more relevant than ever. Dan states,

"Jesus has been held in high regard by Christians and non-Christians alike. Regardless of whether he existed in history, or whether he was divine, many have asserted that the NT Christ character was the highest example of moral living. Many believe his teachings, if truly understood and followed, would make this a better world. Is this true? Does Jesus merit the widespread adoration he has received? Let's look at what he said and did.

WAS JESUS PEACEABLE AND COMPASSIONATE? --The birth of Jesus was heralded with "Peace on Earth," yet Jesus said, "*Think not that I am come to send peace: I came not to send peace but a sword*" (Matt. 10:34), "*He that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one*" (Luke 22:36), "*But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me*" (Luke 19:27). In a parable, but spoken of favorably, the burning of unbelievers during the Inquisition was based on the words of Jesus: "*If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth..., and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.*"

Jesus looked at his disciples "with anger" (Mark 3:5) and attacked merchants with a whip (John 2:15). He showed his respect for life by drowning innocent animals (Matt. 8:32) and refused to heal a sick child until pressured by the mother (Matt. 15:22-28).

The most revealing aspect of his character was his promotion of eternal torment. "*The Son of man (Jesus himself) shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth*" (Matt. 13:41-42). "*And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched*" (Mark 9:43). Is this nice? Is it exemplary to make your point with threats of violence? Is hell a kind and peaceful idea?

DID JESUS PROMOTE FAMILY VALUES? --"*If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple*" (Luke 14:26). "*I am come to set man at variance against his*

father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household" (Matt. 10:35-36). When one of his disciples requested time off for his father's funeral, Jesus rebuked him by saying *"Let the dead bury their dead"* (Matt. 8:22). Jesus never used the word "family" and he never married or fathered children. To his own mother, he said, *"Woman, what have I to do with thee?"* (John 2:4).

WHAT WERE HIS VIEWS ON EQUALITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE?--Jesus encouraged the beating of slaves: *"And that servant (read: slave), which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did accor-*

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ding to his will shall be beaten with many stripes" (Luke 12:47). He never denounced servitude, but quite the contrary, incorporated the master-slave relationship into many of his parables. He did nothing to alleviate poverty. Rather than sell some expensive ointment to help the poor, Jesus wasted it on himself, saying, *"Ye have the poor with you always"* (Mark 14:3-7). No women were chosen as disciples (or apostles-Ed.) or invited to the Last Supper.

WHAT MORAL ADVICE DID JESUS GIVE? --*"There be eunuchs* (Webster defines a eunuch as 'a castrated man in charge of an Oriental harem or...any man or boy lacking normal function of the testes, as through castration or disease'--Ed.), *which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it."* (Matt. 19:12). Some believers, including church father Origen, took this verse literally and castrated themselves. Even metaphorically, this advice is in poor taste.

If you do something wrong with your eye or hand, cut/pluck it off (Matt. 5:29-30, in a sexual context). Marrying a divorced woman is adultery (Matt. 5:32). Don't plan for the future (Matt. 6:34), don't save money (Matt. 6:19-20), or become wealthy (Mark 10:21-25). Sell everything you have and give it to the poor (Luke 12:33). Don't work to obtain food (John 6:27). Don't have sexual urges (Matt. 5:28). Make people want to persecute you (Matt. 5:11). Let everyone know you are better than the rest (Matt. 5:13-16). Take money from those who have no savings and give it to rich investors (Luke 19:23-26). If someone steals from you, don't try to get it back (Luke 6:30). If someone hits you, invite them to do it again (Matt. 5:39). If you lose a lawsuit, give more than the judgment (Matt. 5:40). If someone forces you to walk a mile, walk two miles (Matt. 5:41). If someone asks you for anything, give it to them without question (Matt. 5:42).

Is any of this wise? Is this what you would teach your children?

WAS JESUS RELIABLE?--Jesus told his disciples that they would not die before his second coming: *"There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom"* (Matt. 16:28) and *"Behold I come quickly"* (Rev. 3:11). It's been 2,000 years, and believers are still waiting for his "quick" return.

He mistakenly claimed that the mustard seed is "the least of all seeds" (Matt. 13:32), and that salt could "lose its savour" (Matt. 5:13). Jesus said that whoever calls somebody a "fool" shall be in danger of hell fire (Matt. 5:22), yet he called people "fools" himself (Matt. 23:17). Regarding his own truthfulness, Jesus gave two conflicting opinions: *"If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true"* (John 5:31) and *"Though I bear record of myself, yet my record is true"* (John 8:14).

WAS JESUS A GOOD EXAMPLE?--He irrationally cursed a fig tree for being fruitless out of season (Matt. 21:18-19 and Mark 11:13-14). He broke the law by stealing corn on the Sabbath (Mark 2:23), and he encouraged his disciples to take a horse without asking permission (Matthew 21). The "humble" Jesus said that he was "greater than the temple" (Matt. 12:6), "greater than Jonah" (Matt. 12:41), and "greater than Solomon" (Matt. 12:42). He appeared to suffer from a dictator's "paranoia" when he said, "*He that is not with me is against me*" (Matt. 12:30).

WHY JESUS?--Although other verses can be cited that portray Jesus in a different light, they do not erase the disturbing side of his character. The conflicting passages only prove the NT is contradictory.

The "Golden Rule" was said many times by earlier religious leaders. [Confucius said, "Do not unto others that you would not have them do unto you"]. "Turn the other cheek" encourages victims to invite further violence. "Love thy neighbor" applied only to fellow believers. (Neither the Jews nor Jesus showed much love to foreign religions). A few of the Beatitudes ("Blessed are the peacemakers") are acceptable, but they are all conditioned on future rewards, not based on respect for human life or values. (As I have said so often, you should do the right because it is the right thing to do, not because you expect rewards or kickbacks someday-Ed.)

On the whole, Jesus said little that was worthwhile. He introduced nothing new to ethics (except hell). He instituted no social programs. Being "omniscient," he could have shared some useful science or medicine, but he appeared ignorant of such things (as if his character were merely the invention of writers stuck in the first century).

Many scholars doubt the historical existence of Jesus. No first-century writer confirms the Jesus story. The NT is internally contradictory and contains historical errors. The story is filled with miracles and other outrageous claims. Consisting mostly of material borrowed from pagan religions, the Jesus story appears to be cut from the same fabric as all other myths and fables.

WHY WOULD JESUS BE SPECIAL?--It would be more reasonable and productive to emulate real, flesh-and-blood human beings who have contributed to humanity--mothers who have given birth, scientists who have alleviated suffering, social reformers who have fought injustice--than to worship a character of such dubious qualities as Jesus."

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #646 from DA of La Puente, California (Part a)

Dear McKinsey. Got your Biblical Errancy #149, and return some comments. 2 issues in a row devoted to letters? It seems a bit excessive. You had best consider ways to reduce that. One obvious way is stop printing letters that say how great you are doing. No doubt you like to hear from such clearly perceptive writers, but we have no need to hear praise of you. We see your stuff directly and can make up our own minds. (However, the converse is not true. We do need to see the criticism of you because this may be something we have missed.) In effect, letters praising you are just advertisements, and a waste of limited space. So unless the writer is suggesting something, just take pleasure from the letter and file it. Even if a printable suggestion is made, the compliments should be edited out or down.

Editor's Response to Letter #646 (Part a)

Dear DA. I'd be more inclined to take your letter to heart if I felt confident that it didn't reek with ulterior motives. For several reasons I'm inclined to look upon it as an insidious attempt to squelch euphonious comments by your opposition masked under some objectively-disguised sophistry. *First*, complimentary letters are inserted not so much to elevate my ego or spirits as to raise those of everyone involved in our cause. Critics of the Bible receive so little support, commendation, or exaltation that it is good for everyone to be aware of the fact that our efforts are not in vain. Complimentary letters with respect to everyone aiding our cause have been included. We all feel better when one of our own is recognized for his or her contribution to the betterment of mankind. You, on the other hand, merely seek to short-circuit the process by making it appear as if I am on some kind of ego trip. Is that really your concern? I doubt it. Otherwise you'd be sending comparable letters to your Christian compatriots in the media who never tire of singing praises to the efforts of other biblicists or spouting "Praise the Lord." How many letters have you sent to Billy Graham, Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, and other emissaries of escapism? If you were really tired of hearing somebody or something praised without surcease, you'd be sending them letters incessantly. But you aren't! Why? Because you're in league with their proselytism, that's why. Some of their TV shows reek with so much mutual-adulation and euphonious encomiums that it's all I can do to retain my last repast. But you dislike hearing our efforts complimented, so you wrote your derogatory letter. If you get sick of hearing someone praised, then you must really become nauseated every time you view a Christian propaganda broadcast and hear all those interminable "Praise be to God," Hallelujah Jesus," or "Praise the Lord" accolades that closely resemble chalk scraping a blackboard. If letters in praise of me and those aiding our cause "are just advertisements and a waste of limited space," what do you call all that music, literature, and talk that appears on the Christian media with respect to Jesus and his mutually congratulating propagandists? You must think that's Madison Avenue personified. Ad agencies gone berserk!

Second, you say, "We do need to see the criticism of you because this may be something we have missed." I think a more candid reason is that you want as much negative publicity with respect to this publication as is possible. You aren't so much concerned with truth and balance as discrediting this periodical by any means possible with disingenuous rhetoric concealed under an aura of objectivity. Frankly, I think you're only trying to fake-out our readers.

And *third*, most of the complimentary letters that are published are accompanied by additional information and don't dwell merely on my ideological assets or those of others. Until recently the overwhelming majority of letters received by us have been printed, so what you see is what we get and reflects the opinions of our subscribers. People can make up their minds with respect to the validity of what I am saying, but they have little idea of how it is being received by others unless nearly every letter is published. How many letters have you written to your Christian compatriots complaining about the obvious absence of critical letters and negative comments in their publications and media presentations? I have no doubt the answer is ZERO. Don't you do all you can to discourage indoctrination, brainwashing and one-sided monologues? Of course not! You don't really care. You just play the part.

Letter #646 Concludes (Part b)

You had best try to edit your own answers. It is, granted, difficult to impossible to respond to an error within the limited space the error takes, but you should still take as a standard that your response should be no longer than the letter. One way to do that is to drop things

like: ad homin (sic) attacks "..(sic) borders on incoherent if not puerile." "(sic) possess an amazing ability to express yourself (sic) in rambling, disjointed, uncommunicative sophistic rhetoric..(sic) non sequiturs, invalid analogies, and straw men are your stock-in-trade." Really now. This is just being nasty. (& wrong, HL was in fact superior to your response.) It does nothing to settle the argument and has been identified as a basic fallacy long ago. & you can edit out reprints of routine letters to others such as GL.

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #646

My answers are edited or isn't that obvious. If our full repertoire of repartee were unleashed, some answers to letters like yours would consume an entire issue. You don't know how difficult it is to straighten out some people who are light years from reality. To really be precise, correcting some sentences would take an entire issue. *Second*, ad hominem arguments and "nasty" rhetoric are by no means endemic to my approach as any objective observer must willingly concede. Acerbic replies only come to the fore in response to even more caustic and unjustified rhetoric on the part of my detractors. The primary difference, however, is that my fusillade is considerably more accurate and potent. *Third*, anytime you think someone's response was "superior" to my analysis, don't just say so and run to the hills for cover; prove it. Assertions aren't evidence and beliefs aren't factual equivalents. I know of nothing that HL said that eclipsed my observations. *And finally*, as far *editing out* is concerned, I realize that's probably your forte but it has never been mine. The religious crowd is far more adept and experienced at editing out and censoring than I will ever be. Your suggested screening of GL's letter (#618 in the May 1995 Issue) is unwarranted in view of the fact that his comments and social activism are by no means routine. You are probably really bothered by the fact that he denounced religion in no uncertain terms and spent considerable energy seeing that our *Encyclopedia* was placed in his local school libraries beside other material on the same topic. GL was as entitled to a response as much as anyone else. You don't have to be an orator gifted in the art of grandiloquent rhetoric and original thought to receive a hearing in BE. After all you're getting a hearing aren't you.

Letter #647 from RVH of Simi Valley, California

Dear Dennis. Thanks for your reply to letter #621. I hope I haven't confused you. What I meant to refer to were resurrections where the resurrectee did it himself--without relation to some outside event, person, or power. To my knowledge, only Jesus has done this--i.e. said, "I'll be back" and done it. Personally I don't care, but my Christian friends say this is why Jesus' resurrection is so important. Can you think of any similar cases? I'm gonna battle these people on their own ground if I can. I wonder what it is that makes Christ's self-resurrecting any more miraculous than the others.

Editor's Response to Letter #647

Dear RVH. Apparently you missed the issue in which I showed that Jesus did not raise himself. He was raised by another, by God, as is clearly proven by Gal. 1:1, Acts 3:15, 4:10, 13:30, 2:32, 5:30, Rom. 10:9, and other verses. In view of the fact that Jesus never raised himself, there is nothing that makes Christ's resurrection any more miraculous than the others. With Jesus, as with other biblical figures, the resurrectee did not resurrect himself. All of the biblical resurrections have this assistance trait in common. So your Christian friends have no reason to say the resurrection of Jesus "is so important."

Letter #648 from TB of Arton, Alabama

Dear Dennis. A truly outstanding job you're doing with BE.... This note is to question something you said in BE issue #149, in response to letter #611. I agree with the writer that "perfect" necessarily includes immunity to being damaged or soiled. If not, why not? Wouldn't it be silly to suggest that a perfect being could be injured? You told the writer that it is "a repudiation of the very definition of God" to say that he, as a perfect being, could produce something that is imperfect. How's that? Wouldn't perfection include omnipotence, and if so, why couldn't he produce anything he liked, even something imperfect? To say that he could not do so implies a limitation which, even if self-imposed, is not compatible with omnipotence.

Do you agree that omnipotence is a logical impossibility, as demonstrated by the "making of a rock too heavy to lift" problem? Wouldn't omnipotence, if it existed, include omnipresence, omniscience? And wouldn't omnipotence preclude omnibenevolence, since omnipotence must include all evil as well as all good? Keep up the great work.

Editor's Response to Letter #648

Dear TB. Be careful or you'll drown in "omnis." *First*, I don't see why it would be silly under your definition of an omnipotent being to suggest that he could be injured. If you are saying God can't injure himself, then you are saying he isn't omnipotent. There is something he can't do. He can't injure himself. But you just said he was omnipotent. *Second*, yes, I said that it would be "a repudiation of the very definition of God" to say that he could produce something that is imperfect." You still haven't shown me how that which is perfect can do that which is imperfect and still be called perfect. People who believe in an omnipotent being just don't realize that they are tying themselves in knots. They think that they need only say God can do anything and that settles everything. How wrong they are! It isn't that simple. Because of how God is defined, he is plagued by two major restrictions. He can't do that which repudiates his own character. He can't lie, sin, or engage in any act that is the very antithesis of his being, because the minute he did, he would no longer be God. One of his key characteristics is perfection. By definition everything he does is perfect and for him to commit an imperfect act would be impossible as it would mean he was no longer God. How could that which is perfect do that which is imperfect and still be called perfect. The answer is simple--it can't. In addition, God can't violate the most basic law of logical thought--the law of non-contradiction. He can't create a being more powerful than himself; he can't create something too heavy for him to lift; he can't create a square circle, a two sided triangle, or an all black white horse; he can't count beyond infinity; he can't abolish himself and then bring himself back into existence or engage in other acts that are beyond the pale. This list can be extended longer than most people realize and arises from the fact that theists have not taken account of the logical implications generated by their own definition of God.

You say, "Wouldn't perfection include omnipotence, and if so, why couldn't he produce anything he liked, even something imperfect?" You also say, "To say that he could not do so implies a limitation which, even if self-imposed, is not compatible with omnipotence." Unfortunately the conclusions you draw from both points are incorrect. Omnipotence does not include the ability to violate the law of non-contradiction. You can't be perfect and imperfect simultaneously. You are either one or the other but you can't be both. The basic flaw in your line of reasoning is that you have extended "omnipotence" to include the ability to do anything whatever, even when it repudiates the very definition of God and entails committing two diametrically opposed acts simultaneously. The problems confronting theists, such as those we have already mentioned, are far more potent than biblicists care to admit. They can't be shrugged off with cute remarks and unaffected

demeanors. Religionists have always tried to sluff off these queries as nothing more than childish mind games when, in fact, they are dilemmas of the first magnitude that strike at the very core of any beliefs in an omnipotent being. The very foundation of logic itself, the law of non-contradiction, is brought into a direct clash with the ultimate in absolutist claims and hyperbole. Biblicists erroneously think the word "omnipotence" takes care of everything when, in fact, the opposite is true. It's not a screen deterring all barbs, because of the fundamental limitations associated with omnipotence itself.

Your final paragraph seems to agree with the point I'm making, so I see no reason to comment.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #649 from GN of Scottsdale, Arizona

Dear Dennis. I was going through all my notes recently and came across a few things that I thought you might be interested in. Perhaps you know all of this, but just in case you missed something I want to share some of the things I found. Someday you might want to enlarge your encyclopedia and would need more information. I doubt that a book could be big enough to hold all the inconsistencies, false prophecies, lies, distortions, mistakes, and contradictions found in the "book."

First Kings 3:12 says that God gave Solomon a wise and discerning heart so that there has been *"NO ONE like you before you nor shall one like you arise after you."* No one obviously includes Jesus himself.

Gen. 3:14 says, *"Cursed are you (the serpent) more than all cattle."* When were the cattle cursed? I thought the creation of animals was "very good." The bible says nothing about when and why cattle were cursed. Perhaps there were talking cows that got themselves in trouble before the serpent.

Ex. 7:22 How did the Egyptian priests turn the water into blood when it was already blood.

Lev. 20:10 Adultery is punishable by death. Why were David and Bathsheba spared?

Lev. 20:27 Mediums and spiritists were to be put to death. Was not Jesus communicating with the dead when Moses and Elijah appeared at the transfiguration, and wasn't Paul talking to the dead when he spoke to Jesus?

Num. 13:33*"the sons of Anak are part of the Nephilim."* The Nephilim should have been destroyed during the flood of Noah's day. How did they show up later?

Editor's Response to Letter #649

If I am not mistaken, GN, we discussed your points with reference to 1 Kings 3:12, Ex. 7:22, and Lev. 20:10 a long time ago. I know they're in my notes. As far as the Nephilim are concerned your point is well taken. They were around in Num. 13:33 which was *after* the Flood, and that conflicts with Gen. 6:4 which says there were Nephilim *before* the Flood and Gen. 7:21 which says all living creatures except Noah and his kin died in the Flood. Unless Nephilim were on the ark, biblicists have a problem.

Letter #650 from JK of Lynn, Indiana

Sir.... Thank you for having the gumption to expose all the fallacious writings of that con artists' special, the great lie book, the so-called Bible. I like the *Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy* very much. Very informative and to the point. But in my estimation there is one flaw. The book is too big. It should be the size that could be carried in the pocket of your coat or jacket. Then if you happened to meet one of those ignorant, superstitious Jesus freaks, you could then have the means to set him straight then and there. Using the same tactics, like quoting from your own source of information, and using their own material to show them their erroneous beliefs.

And now a personal request. I would like to copy BE, maybe a quote or a paragraph in some of my writings, maybe even a half page or so. Of course, the source would be acknowledged.

Editor's Response to Letter #650

Dear JK. Creating a small pocket-size edition of the *Encyclopedia* is a good idea but, instead, I'd prefer to transform my 5 large notebooks into a portable, small, indexed, data base for quick reference during on-the-spot encounters. But, as always, time and money are the limiting factors. As far as quoting our literature is concerned, that is always permissible as long as people are told the source. In fact, we would encourage you to quote our material at every opportunity.

Letter #651 from DS of Tiffin, Ohio

Dear Dennis. I have stumbled on an idea which may make even an ardent inerrantist take pause. Granted this is probably not a new idea, but one I just thought of, so it's new to me. If the "problems" in the text of the Bible are either translational or "copy errors," then the position of inerrancy is instantly destroyed. As you have stated many times, "it (the Bible) is purported to be the direct and inspired word of God. And God is a perfect, all knowing, and powerful entity." So it follows that if there is even one "copyist error" God was not in charge. If God was not correcting the poor schmuck who was making a particular copy, it proves that it is not God's word. So far, in reading your publication, every apologist has used the mistranslation or copy error argument at least once. They have unwittingly admitted that there is a mistake. The question is begged, "how can an omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent being, allow his words to be screwed up? Doesn't it care that this will misrepresent it and wouldn't it have done everything to correct this problem? Even the apologists are admitting that there are these types of errors. Are they admitting that God didn't take charge? If God can cover the world with water, bring it all about in 6 days and do all sorts of great stuff, surely he could have controlled the thoughts of those working on his word. But apparently he did not. Once any error is substantiated it eliminates the book from being the word of a perfect being, regardless of how poor the human aspect would have been. God is supposed to control everything. If he doesn't, prayer would be more pointless than it already is. The sequence of thought would be: 1) God is perfect 2) God controls his created world 3) man is part of that world 4) God controls man 5) under God's control his word would be perfect 6) mistakes are noted 7) the Bible is not God's word. Why even discuss chapter and verse if the apologists are ready to confirm such mistakes. As you have stated, a perfect being could not make an imperfect anything. Just a thought.... As always, keep up the great work.

Letter #652 from LWC of Lufkin, Texas

Dear Dennis. This letter is intended for FVH of Flagstaff, Arizona. In BE #154 he expressed a need for information useful in confronting letter-to-the-editor writing Bible thumpers. While I am sure he will discover many valuable bible bashing gems in BE, I would like to volunteer some more. You see, FVH, at one time I was in the same predicament as you now are. I began to research the problem, and over the years I have succeeded in accumulating much ammunition, some of it downright deadly, to be used in effectively confronting bible fundamentalists. It is my earnest desire to share this information with other freethinkers. So if you will write me (102 Spyglass Drive, Lufkin, Texas 75901 or call me at 409-637-1026 I will be happy to provide this information to you at no cost.

Editor's Response to Letter #652

Dear LWC. We included your letter because you appear to be eager to help those opposing religious propaganda in the print media. But readers should know that we have not seen any of what you have to offer and are in no position to provide an endorsement.

***EDITOR'S NOTE:* We are still looking for people willing to play our cable access TV tapes in their vicinity and would like to hear about the experiences of those who have already had some aired. Please keep in mind that our programs are created for, and directed to, believers in an inerrant Bible, not freethinkers. Preaching to the choir or providing confirmation and amusement to our supporters is of secondary importance. Tickling funny bones may be the outcome, but that's not the in-tent. Our objective is to inform, not perform.**

Issue #157 Editor: Dennis McKinsey

Jan. 1996

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

COMMENTARY

Many months ago someone sent us a newsletter published by the Secular Humanist Society of New York entitled "Pique." I was bothered by an article on page 2 written by someone named George Rowell entitled "Can secular humanists carry on a dialogue with religionists?" He states:

First we must ask, 'What is the purpose of a dialogue?' If it is a Socratic dialog, the object is to arrive at an agreed-on truth. Now, how do we maintain a dialogue with Christian or Jewish believers who maintain that they already have 'Revealed Truth?' They may have a house full of electronic equipment and even be scientifically literate but still deny the ultimate truth of the scientific method and world view that brought them the equipment.

As we approach the personal plane, any dialog becomes more and more impossible. There is the Christian dogma of original sin, strange archaic beliefs about mystical places called heaven and hell. All of these beliefs and other religious pathologies deny the worth of the individual, or of the bases of secular humanism.

I say that it is impossible to have a meaningful dialog with any people who already claim to have the 'Revealed Truth,' who hypocritically share the benefits of the scientific revolution but deny its ultimate validity, and deny and denigrate the worth of the individual. Who would benefit from such a dialog? Not us or them. We should forget the whole idea. A dialog is a waste of time, energy, and breath.

With whom should we have a dialog, then? The religious doubters of course. There are many we know, but they are unorganized. We should say, 'You have the right to doubt,' and show them why.'

Rowell concluded his article with the following appeal. "What do you think? There are secular humanists who believe in the idea of a dialog. We want to know what you think. We'll print as many responses as we can in this column."

In the next issue a reader wrote in response, "I am in complete agreement with George Rowell's contention that it is futile to engage in 'dialog' with religious fundamentalists. If there is one thing clear about 'God's people' it is that they are convinced that they have a monopoly on truth and virtue, and that anyone with a point of view at variance with their own is inherently depraved and debased. In other words, these folks are convinced that they have all the answers, and that a questioning mind leads directly to eternal torment. We humanists, on the other hand, revel in the uncertainty and mystery of existence and are more inclined to

seek new questions, rather than dwell on 'eternal verities'. This is in harmony with the scientific point of view, which is the mortal enemy of all religious thinking and which has pushed human horizons to the very edge of the Universe....I have learned to ignore these people and I have no interest in a 'dialogue' with any of them. Many of them would have burned us at the stake if they had the chance."

Rowell wrote another article in the Fall 1993 *Free Inquiry* magazine entitled "*The Sunday Regression Service*" and concluded it with, "...atheists and secular humanists should make a sharp shift in focus of our attacks on religion. We are wasting our time focusing on biblical contradictions and irrationalities. Most Christians have been effectively anesthetized against criticism of this nature. We should instead focus our attention on the psychological manipulations, deceptions, and sleight-of-hand that have made Christianity the longest running shell game in the West. The institutionalized regression of regular church services is a prime example of this pathology."

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This last article was sent to us by a reader who said, "*While I do not agree that focusing on biblical contradictions and irrationalities are a waste of time (I have read every issue of BE and learned much from your publication) Rowell, nevertheless, may have a good idea. Christian ideologues are masters of deceit... When time and space allow, you may wish to explore some of Rowell's suggestions....*" Based upon the contents of this newsletter for the last 13 years, it should come as no surprise to anyone that I am in profound disagreement with parts of Rowell's analysis for many reasons.

***First*, I have never been to an atheist, humanist or similar freethought gathering in my life in which a majority of the participants did not come from some sort of religious background. It seems fair to conclude that if they can work their way up and out of religion, so can others. Rowell is assuming that the opposite of a key fundamentalist belief is true. Instead of once saved always saved, it becomes, once lost always lost. Sorry! But I don't think the evidence bears that out for many people. Yes, they are lost if nothing and no one does anything to save them; they are lost if they never hear a discouraging word or data to the contrary; they are lost if the conditions which caused them to accept fundamentalism in the first place are not sufficiently altered; they are lost if they are incapable of even the most elementary critical thought, and they are lost if they have material reasons for staying where they are. But that doesn't apply to many people. Are we just going to throw all of them into one big basket and write them off as a hopeless mass of brainwashed dupes?**

***Second*, an essential element of Rowell's argument is antidemocratic. What is the alternative to argumentation, evidence, and persuasion, if not physical confrontation and force. Would Rowell advocate the same philosophy in the realm of politics. The right wing of the republican party is dominated by religious fundamentalists. Would he also say it is a waste of time to debate and argue with people like Gingrich, Gramm, and Buchanan. If so, then why have a Congress? Why meet and discuss anything with people of this caliber? After all, their minds are as firmly fixed in the political realm as those of their supporters are in the religious realm. The political right is almost an overlay of the religious right. If it is absurd to debate in the religious arena, then it is no less absurd to clash in the political arena or the economic arena, for that matter. Rowell's approach appears to be one of either leaving or ignoring the problem. Too bad it's not that simple. Or maybe he just thinks we ought to slug it out physically. Biblicists are working like beavers night and day**

with tremendous wealth and sizable numbers to get their agenda passed, and if Rowell thinks they are going to leave him alone, then he is ensconced in fantasyland.

Rowell says *"that it is impossible to have a meaningful dialog with any people who already claim to have the 'Revealed Truth'"* when I debate with fundamentalists of every stripe on a daily basis. I strongly suggest he read the *Dialogue and Debate* sections of this newsletter (over 13 years of interaction), and then tell me it is impossible to have a dialogue. He says, *"Who would benefit from such a dialog? Not us or them. We should forget the whole idea. A dialog is a waste of time, energy, and breath."* I couldn't disagree more. He's assuming: Once programmed, always programmed. Hasn't he ever heard of deprogramming? If he's repeatedly failing to dissuade people from views they have held for 30 years in 30 minutes, then I can understand his frustration and disillusionment. But that's not how it's done. Dissuasion is not only nearly always more taxing and time-consuming than the original indoctrination but almost always requires multiple encounters.

Third, Rowell says, *"What is the purpose of a dialogue? If it is a Socratic dialogue, the object is to arrive at an agreed-on truth."* If that's the object of a Socratic dialogue, then we'd better pursue a different dialogue, because that's not my purpose. My initial objective is considerably more fundamental than that. Before you can eat eggs, you must crack shells. Before any-one is going to accept what you have to offer, they must first be convinced of the error of their ways. And that entails penetrating their outer screen. Why would biblicists accept anything you have to offer unless and until they have been shown what is wrong with what they already have. So the initial thrust should not be toward reaching an "agreed-on truth" but toward shaking their resolve and lessening their adherence to what they already believe. I am not nearly as concerned with reaching an agreed upon truth as causing biblicists to loose faith in what they already have. Once their confidence in that which they hold most dear is cracked or shattered, they are far more inclined to look around for alternatives and become amenable to suggestions. Getting them to agree with me in the earliest stages is of far less importance than causing them to think, criticize, question, and reject that which they already have.

Fourth, Rowell states that, *"As we approach the personal plane, any dialog becomes more and more impossible."* He'd do well to rewrite this sentence since the word "impossible" admits of no gradations. He's becoming impaled on one of those absolutist terms that destroy so much of the Bible's credibility. Wisdom would suggest that the word "impossible" be replaced by the word "difficult."

Fifth, Rowell states, *"Who would benefit from such a dialog? A dialog is a waste of time, energy, and breath."* Again I must disagree. Everyone involved in discussions of this sort is effected to one degree or another. Be it ever so slight, modifications in outlook are all but impossible to avoid.

Sixth, Rowell continues, *"With whom should we have a dialog, then? The religious doubters of course. There are many we know, but they are unorganized. We should say, 'You have the right to doubt, and show them why.'"* So, he only wants to debate those who already have doubts. That's like telling people I am not going to teach you biology, French, algebra, or history unless you are already inclined to accept those disciplines. I'm not going to teach you to play tennis or swim, unless you're already interested in activities of that nature. After all, unless you have already shown yourself to be inclined in those directions, there is no sense in me wasting my time. There is no value to be gained by me trying to channel you along those lines.

Seventh, the reader who wrote in sympathy with Rowell says, "I have learned to ignore these people and I have no interest in a 'dialogue' with any of them." Now who's being narrow-minded? I've heard that same comment on several occasions from fundamentalists denouncing freethinkers.

Eighth, in his Fall 1993 article Rowell stated, "We are wasting our time focusing on biblical contradictions and irrationalities." What does he suggest as a substitute: Glittering generalities, nebulous theological debates, extensive listings of biblical atrocities and immoralities, disputed historical contentions, or vague philosophizing on the nature of man's condition and the existence of some sort of divine being concerned with our welfare? Perhaps he prefers arguments based on opinions and imprecise theorizing which unfortunately are not only easy to restructure as conditions dictate but nearly impossible to pin down. Any freethinker who can't devise arguments that are simple, concrete, demonstrable, and important, can all but forget about influencing even the most unsophisticated of biblicists. If Rowell thinks apologists are going to concede points he takes for granted out of the goodness of their hearts, then he's only exposing his degree of detachment from reality. They aren't going to grant him anything and unless he can come up with something that is so obvious, so demonstrable, so clear-cut, so undeniable that even a child can follow the discussion, he has embarked upon a journey to nowhere. Fortunately freethinkers have a tremendous ally in this regard--one of the Bible's greatest weaknesses--it's tangibility, it's condition of being written. In many ways it's set in concrete--an incredibly vulnerable position from the freethinker's point of view. Any lawyer worth his degree will tell you: Get it in writing. When the other guy commits himself to print, he has really stuck his neck out. And just as lawyers go over contracts with a fine tooth comb, freethinkers should peruse the Bible with equal concentration. No other document or stream of argumentation in the United States puts more religious people in a straight-jacket than the Bible.

Ninth, Rowell says, "Most Christians have been effectively anesthetized against criticism of this nature. We should instead focus our attention on the psychological manipulations, deceptions, and sleight-of-hand that have made Christianity the longest running shell game in the West." As a practical matter, what does that mean. In real terms what is he saying? I'd be interested in seeing some of these manipulations, deceptions, and sleight-of-hand tricks that readily lend themselves to rebuttals and exposure with such overpowering impact that thousands of people will be influenced.

The problem is not that people "have been effectively anesthetized against criticism of this nature" but that they have been hearing almost nothing about all of the problems associated with Scripture. Freethinkers have been doing very little in regard to studying the Bible or exposing the flaws contained therein. The American people have been continually subjected to uncorrected and unhindered religious domination of the media and unbridled religious propaganda of this nature can only inure to their detriment. Sunday schools are another element of society that are notoriously one-sided. There has been almost no countervailing voice or contradictory data. And anything to which people aren't exposed, they aren't going to get. If Rowell thinks people who have no access to countervailing views are going to change, then he is even more naive than I thought.

And lastly, Rowell concluded his Pique article with the following appeal. "...There are secular humanists who believe in the idea of a dialog. We want to know what you think." In light of what he has already stated, the implication underlying this comment is that he believes in dialogue only with those who already doubt. If that's humanism then, perhaps, I should reassess my position vis a vis humanism or view the word "humanism" in a

different light. There is an element of close-mindedness on his part that I find just as revolting as that which is so endemic to religious fundamentalism. One is as bad as the other. Unfortunately, one of the saddest discoveries I have made over the years is that fundamentalists do not have a corner on the market when it comes to crackpotism. Some of those who have left religion in general and the Bible in particular have adopted philosophies that are almost as preposterous as that which they jettisoned. My philosophy, on the other hand, is quite simple. I'll converse or debate with anyone having sufficient courage or foolishness to show up. I don't prejudge the outcome, assume that which is yet to be proven, insist on unreasonable ground rules, or decline interaction without prior assurances. My biggest problem is just getting people to appear or return to the fray on a repeated basis. I am certainly not going to avoid anyone who is so naive as to try to defend religion in general or the Bible and Jesus in particular. As I have said several times. When those with revealed truth appear at my door they are invited in and the entry is sealed. As far as I am concerned they are not only poor lost souls who have been brought to my home for salvation from mythology, folklore, and superstition but benighted sojourners who may never again have another opportunity to hear the Word exposed for the fraud that it is.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #653 from JB of Ft. Lauderdale Florida (Part a)

Dear Dennis. I wanted to respond to some of the things in your commentary about the Resurrection of Christ. You've probably had many responses from people like myself, so if I am repetitious, just ignore it. While the scriptures do record several "resurrections," none of them have the importance and significance to that of Christ's. You correctly noted Paul's statement that if He be not raised, his preaching is in vain, as is our faith, and we are dead in our sins. I don't think we can say that about the others who were resurrected. Jesus, as God the Son, had the unique qualifications to do what no other mortal could. Also, most of those raised from the dead, died again. Only Enoch and Elijah did not die a natural death. Neither will those believers who are alive when the "rapture" happens (1 Thess. 4:16, 17; 1 Cor. 15: 51-53). While it isn't always clear, it seems that these resurrections were for the glory of God who was behind all of them.

Editor's Response to Letter #653 (Part a)

Dear JB. Unfortunately, you are being repetitious. I really wish you had read the relevant back issues of BE on this topic. *First*, you say that none of the prior resurrections "*have the importance and significance*" of Christ's. All you have done is make a statement while providing no proof. How is his resurrection more significant or more important than those of others? *Second*, you say you "*don't think we can say that about the others who were resurrected.*" Why not? Again no evidence is provided. All you have done is express an opinion based upon Paul's opinion. But even more importantly, you have subtly shifted our focus. My original question was why the resurrection of Jesus would be of any consequence when others rose from the dead before him. I said it should have been met by a resounding yawn followed by "So what else can you do?" Instead of focusing on the resurrection itself you have chosen to emphasize the supposed results that emanated from that event. But that's not the issue. I asked why it was so different as to merit special consideration. What did Jesus do that was different? All you are saying is that it was different and that's why it merits special consideration. But again I ask: Why was it so different as to be important? Your strategy is very analogous to the technique employed by apologists when they are asked how God can be just when he punishes mankind for what Adam did. Instead of answering the question they enter into a lengthy discussion of how God's justice is

demonstrated by the fact that he allowed Jesus to provide us with an avenue by which to escape this dilemma. But that's not the issue. If God were really just, he would never have punished us for Adam's misdeed to begin with. We should never have been in the predicament from the beginning. With respect to the resurrection of Jesus, the question is how his was different from those that preceded it, not that it is important because it was different. Apologists are notorious for assuming the very point at issue and then proceeding from there. *Third* you say Jesus "*had the unique qualifications to do what no other mortal could.*" What qualifications? What are you talking about? And what is it he did that no other mortal could do or did? Stop making statements without proving anything. You are not preaching to the choir and I have no intention of blindly accepting anything you say without evidence and corroboration. *Fourth*, you have also repeated that worn out defense that "*most of those raised from the dead, died again.*" Where is that stated in scripture? How do you know they died again? How do you know that they did not go straight to heaven like Elijah in his chariot? And, even more importantly, as I have also stated before, that's not the issue. Paul said it's the Resurrection that counts, not the fact that Jesus never died again. Where are you getting this in scripture. Instead of twisting the Bible into whatever strikes your fancy, perhaps you need to write your own version and send me a copy which we could then discuss. *Fifth*, you state, "*Only Enoch and Elijah did not die a natural death.*" Where does scripture say they died at all? You are making an assumption for which I see no biblical support. All scripture says is that "*Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven*" (2 Kings 2:11) and "*Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him*" (Gen. 5:24). Where does it say they died, naturally or otherwise? *Sixth*, you dragged in a reference to the alleged Rapture for reasons I am yet to discern. Not only is it immaterial to the point you are trying to make, but, if anything, it proves the opposite by citing examples of people who, like Jesus, never died again. In fact, they never will die to start with, if your rapture theory has any merit. I think you are so enwrapped by the Rapture that you all but wrapped up any validity to your argument. This topic was so juicy from your perspective that you couldn't resist bringing it into the discussion, even at personal cost. *And finally*, you say, "*While it isn't always clear, it seems that these resurrections were for the glory of God who was behind all of them.*" "It isn't always clear!" is an understatement if there ever was one. How true! It's not clear. So why bring it up? Even if it were clear, what difference would that make and how does it bear on the topic at hand?

Letter #653 Concludes (Part b)

I can promise you one thing. If I had a child who met with a tragic or untimely death, I would be grieved like never before. I don't think I would "yawn" if that child were restored to life. And it is clear that nobody "yawned" when Jesus was resurrected. A little unbelief, yes, but no yawning. While the scriptures do record several resurrections, they were minuscule in comparison to those who were not raised back to life. So I don't think you can say that this sort of thing was "commonplace."

Imagine this. If Christ is not raised from the dead, the greatest hoax of all time has been played on untold "billions" of people. I say billions because the resurrection was taught as a doctrine in the OT as well as the New (Gen. 22:5; Job 14:14; 19:25-26; Psalm 49:15; Isaiah 26:19; Hosea 13:14; Daniel 12:2). OT believers in the Messiah had faith that they would be raised from the dead to live in the presence of God forever.

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #653 (Part b)

Let's don't try to play the emotional card, JB. We are comparing resurrections, and as far as the difference between the resurrection of Jesus and those of others is concerned, it should be met with a yawn. We are not discussing deaths but their opposites, resurrections from death. Obviously, on a personal level the death and resurrection of a close relative, like a child, would almost never be met with a yawn. But who said anything about deaths? The issue is resurrections from death, not deaths themselves or to whom they occur. *Second*, how do you know that "it is clear that nobody yawned when Jesus was resurrected." Were you there or is that in scripture somewhere? Where are you getting all these conclusions, summations, and conjectures you periodically throw around with thoughtless abandon. *Third*, you say, "While the scriptures do record several resurrections, they were minuscule in comparison to those who were not raised back to life." This is more than repetitious and non substantive; it's incoherent. It sounds as if you are comparing resurrections to other resurrections in which people are not raised to life. If they weren't raised back to life, how could they experienced resurrections? What are you talking about?. *Fourth*, you state, "So I don't think you can say that this sort of thing was 'commonplace'." To what is "this sort of thing" referring? Resurrections? But we have proved that they were sufficiently common in biblical times to warrant asking how the resurrection of Jesus was different from all those that preceded it, and, thus, why it could not be considered commonplace. *And lastly*, except for the words "in Messiah" I have no particular objection to the contents of your last paragraph but its contribution to your argument eludes me. You seem to have great difficulty staying focused on the topic at hand and are possessed by a pronounced tendency to tour "tangent trail."

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #654 from DJ of Standard, California

Dear Scholar. Your Bible Errancy Commentary which we saw on a local public access to cable TV here in Sonora was great. Please send me information.

Editor's Response to Letter #654

Dear DJ. We would not only like to thank you for your compliment but especially thank those responsible for the program being aired in California. If only more people were willing to assist our cause! It's nice to know that we are now being seen on the West coast.

Letter #655 from DH of Lebanon, Oregon

Dear Mr. McKinsey. Thank you for sending, at my request, the sample issue of your fine publication. You are doing a great service. Count me as a subscriber.... I am a longtime freethinker who, in my early youth, had sights set upon the ministry. Fortunately, I came to my senses before I'd gone too far down that road. You would be interested to learn, however, what the dean of an Episcopal cathedral said to me when I was in college. I told the dean that I was thinking of not pursuing a clerical career because I honestly didn't believe the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. How could I do the liturgy, say all the things the priest had to say and simultaneously know in my mind that I didn't believe a word of it. His response was, "You shouldn't worry about that; most of us (other clergy) don't believe it either!" Despite my freethinking point of view, I have always maintained a strong interest in the Bible and have been looking for years for publications like those you produce....

Letter #656 from KH of Greenacres, Washington

Dear Mr. McKinsey. I read and very much enjoyed my daughter's copy of *The Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy*. My memory is fuzzy on your mention of Nazareth but I was surprised that you didn't point out that there wasn't even a town called Nazareth during Jesus' lifetime (though apparently there was a village that was later renamed Nazareth). Perhaps you haven't been exposed to that possibility. In the second paragraph, on page 260 of William Harwood's *Mythology's Last Gods* he says it was renamed in the 5th century C.E. On page 191 in the 3rd paragraph of *Losing Faith in Faith* Dan Barker mentions that there's no confirmation of a city named Nazareth before the second century C.E. A third mention (for which I cannot find the reference) was to the effect that the mother of the Roman Emperor Constantine was greatly embarrassed by the non-existence of a town called Nazareth, so she convinced her son to create one. Keep up the good work.

Letter #657 from HK of Randolph, Mass.

Dear Mr. McKinsey. I've been subscribing to BE for the past year, and it's an always interesting, stimulating publication. Thank you. I think you and other BE readers might find the following info of some interest:

The "Christian" "Research" Institute of California does a daily radio broadcast, "The Bible Answer Man", answering questions from callers. (I need hardly add, I suppose, that most callers are quite naive and obviously crave the authoritative assurance the host, Hank Hennagraaff, provides.). One of CRI's arguments "proving" the "truth" of the bible is the claim that "the bible does not contradict itself, and the odds of that happening by chance, with 66 separate books, are so small as to be impossible." I thought it would be interesting to try to learn the source of that calculation, so I wrote CRI a (very sympathetic) letter, specifically asking for the source of the calculation and the name of the publication or article where I could read more about this. Naturally, all I got back was a repetition of the claim--no reference at all to the source of the calculation. That's no surprise.

Another argument these folks use is that the fact that some incidents and places mentioned in the Bible are real "proves" the truth of the bible. By this logic, there are obviously a lot of novels which are "true", since they mention real places, events, and people. Sheesh!!! Don't these people use their brains for anything?? Thanks. Keep up the good work.

Letter #658 from EB of Corpus Christi, Texas

Dear Dennis. At last I got Biblical Errancy Commentary scheduled on the local public access channel. I think I told you each program would be on four times a week. That is no longer the case because so many more programs are playing now than was true several years ago. The program will be on Friday at 2 p.m. and Sunday at 8 p.m. I will leave each program on for two weeks so that more people will have an opportunity to see it. I'm hoping you will get correspondence as a result of these programs.

Editor's Response to Letter #658

Dear EB. Sounds like a viable plan to me and keep up the good work. If you get an opportunity to switch the Friday afternoon program to any evening after seven, I would recommend doing so. By that time most people are home from work and have finished supper. But an afternoon time is certainly better than nothing. When you begin a new program, you sometimes have to go to the end of the line and accept time slots that are less than desirable. We have been fortunate enough to have had the 7 P.M. time slot in our area from the very beginning.

Letter #659 from BC of Seattle, Washington

Hello. Saw your name in *The Book the Church Does Not Want You to Read*. After 15 years in a cult (Armstrongism) I finally saw through a lot of religion and now have begun to question the King James itself. I never could buy the idea in the Ten Commandments to not make graven images and the same God telling Moses to set up a golden serpent for healing the Israelites. Something's wrong.

Letter #660 from BS of Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Dear Dennis.... I look forward to receiving your back issues, even though it will mean staying up very late at night for the pleasure of finishing them and probably falling asleep at work the next day.

***EDITOR'S NOTE:* We're always in need of more people willing to play our cable access TV tapes in their vicinity and we would again like to renew our gratitude to all those who have already had some aired. If you're already involved, by all means write and let us know how events are proceeding.**

Although the tapes were primarily created for use on public access cablevision, we are more than glad to send them to those who are merely buying them for their own use and dissemination.

Issue #158 Editor: Dennis McKinsey

Feb. 1996

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

COMMENTARY

This month's issue will continue our on-going program of devoting an entire issue to letters from readers.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #661 from JB of Ft. Lauderdale, Florida

Dear Dennis. Thanks for sending the sample issue of BE. I have read it carefully and am challenged by your tough questions and sharp analysis of "thorny" matters. I'm sure that you have received all kinds of responses concerning your commentary about the resurrection but I'll throw in my two cents worth anyway....

I will concede that there are many difficulties that may never be explained. And I will agree that there have been numerous transcription errors between the primary versions (KJV, NASB, NIV). The compositors of the KJV acknowledged the enormous task at hand and even recognized there would be some problems. However, I question how upset God might be if the author of Samuel and the author of Chronicles recorded different numbers for the horsemen that David captured. Does this mean the Bible can't be trusted? Well, there are millions of people all around the world whose faith is not shaken over such "inconsistencies." Does this mean the Bible is not Inspired? I don't think so. When we all die, I think the truth will be known.

Anyway, I would like to ask you two questions: (1) Can you estimate how much of the Bible you accept as truth or fact. (2) If every "contradiction, inconsistency, error, etc." could be reconciled to your satisfaction, would you consider accepting Christ as your personal Savior? Again, thanks for sending the information.

Editor's Response to Letter #661

Dear JB. *To begin with*, I'm not sure what you mean by saying "*there have been numerous transcription errors between the primary versions (KJV, NASB, NIV).*" Are you saying all of these versions disagree with one another? Or are you saying all of them disagree with the so-called autographs? If the former, then we agree; if the latter, then how do you know. When you ask if God would be upset "*if the author of Samuel and the author of Chronicles recorded different numbers for the horsemen that David captured,*" I must take issue with both the premise and conclusion of that ill-conceived comment. We aren't concerned with how god would view a problem of this nature. We are concerned with what this says about

the book in which it appears. It proves the book is not only errant and, thus, fallible, but could in no way be the perfect word of a divine being.

In addition, like so many apologists who realize the existence of biblical contradictions can no longer be denied rationally, you opt for the secondary expedient of belittling their importance and dismissing their impact. In truth, anyone with even a modicum of information regarding BE knows that we have presented hundreds, even thousands, of contradictions of this nature and have never been so foolish as to assume a few mathematical conflicts are sufficient to bring down the Bible. We have chosen the far more rational and potent strategy of simply drowning the book's proponents in an avalanche, a tidal wave, of facts, figures, names,

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dates, places, conflicts, and contradictions on virtually every conceivable subject discussed by the the Bible. The massive weight of our evidence, its sheer volume, is more than sufficient to awaken all but the most intransigent ideologue to his deluded ways. We would never be so naive as to put all our bombs into one small category. You ask "*Does this mean the Bible can't be trusted?*" You bet it does. I don't know of any method that could prove it better. Do you? What are you looking for?

Second, you ask "*If every contradiction, inconsistency, error, etc. could be reconciled to your satisfaction, would you consider accepting Christ as your personal Savior?*" Since there is no chance, whatever, of that happening, let me ask you a far more realistic and practical question. How many contradictions, inconsistencies, inaccuracies, errors and fallacies would I have to present in order to convince you that the Bible is light years from being the perfect word of a divine being? At what point would you be willing to concede that the book does not live up to its billing and is duping its adherents?

Third, as far as how much of the Bible I accept as truth is concerned, so much is fallacious and contradictory, that I have never felt any need for such a fruitless analysis and that isn't even the issue. The question is not how much I think is true but how much is so obviously untrue as to prove it couldn't possibly be divinely inspired.

Fourth, you say "*there are millions of people all around the world whose faith is not shaken over such 'inconsistencies'.*" My friend, whether or not their faith is shaken is irrelevant to the central question of whether or not the Bible is inerrant. We are not conducting a popularity contest, nor are we judging the truth of something on the basis of its following. Millions of people believed in Hitler, but that certainly doesn't mean his teachings were valid. Millions of muslims are devoted to the Koran, but that hardly proves it's God's word.

Fifth, you say "*Does this mean the Bible is not Inspired?*" You mean does the existence of contradictions and similar problems prove the Bible is not inspired? Well, it's about as good a proof as I know of. Do you know of anything better? What are you looking for? What do you want? When something in Deuteronomy says something in Exodus is false; when something in Chronicles says something in Samuel or Kings is inaccurate; when something in Matthew says something in Luke is erroneous; when Paul disputes Jesus, that's as conclusive a demonstration as you can find. Again I ask, what do you want? Having dealt with this problem for many years, I'm close to concluding that if Jesus, himself, appeared and said it was all a charade, a monumental fraud, created because he

just felt people ought to have something to believe in, many of his followers would accuse him of being mistaken and succumbing to some kind of sinister force.

And finally you state "when we all die, I think the truth will be known." That statement is based on the assumption that you are going to continue existing somehow in order to receive the answer--which is itself a belief restricted to faith alone, because certainly no proof is available. If your assumption is as invalid as it is unprovable and you were prescient, you could very well be the one in line for a shock.

Letter #662 from MT of Anaheim, California

Dear Mr. McKinsey. In your book page 343 says that Luke was in error by saying Jesus was born when Quirinius was governor of Syria. I have heard that a Sir Fredrick (sic) Kenya (sic) found evidence that Quirinius was governor of Syria twice, once around 6 BC, the other 4 A.D. Is the true? ("Sic" means the word was misspelled and was left that way--Ed.)

Also, on page 338, you said that Darius the Mede is not mentioned in any ancient document, yet the Ryrie study Bible says the "Nabonidus Chronicle" identified Darius the Mede with a governor named Gubaru (page 1305). I'd like to know what you think about this....

You said on page 336 that history knew nothing of an Assyrian king named Pul. Page 578 of the Ryrie bible says that Pul was "tiger-Pileser III (sic) mentioned in 1 Chron. 5:26. Do you think this is just speculation?....

I also heard a "scholar" say that the walls of Jericho, when escavated (sic), fell down just as Joshua describes. Could you comment on that?

Ryrie says on page 9 of his study Bible that the word in Gen. 1:28 translated "replenish" should actually be translated as "fill," and cannot be used to support a pre-Adamic race. Yet, in your book you said the word was "replenish" and in this particular passage implied a repopulation of the earth. Could you comment on that?

If you could answer any of these, that would be great. I have been subscribing to your newsletter for (I believe) half a year now. I was a Jehovah's Witness, then a fundamentalist Christian. Any information would be helpful.

Editor's Response to Letter #662

Dear MT. Scholars can say anything they like and often do. That, along with the fact that none of us were there and we're forced to rely upon the historian we prefer, is why I have never put much stock in the historical approach to biblical refutation. As far as your individual points are concerned, let's take them one at a time.

First, you say that you heard "that a Sir Fredrick (sic) Kenya (sic) found evidence that Quirinius was governor of Syria twice, once around 6 BC, the other 4 A.D." "You have heard" is rather vague. Whom did you hear it from and did this source provide some evidence? People can say he was governor as many times as they want, but the question is whether or not they can prove it. Virtually no one denies he was governor once. But your source is obligated to prove additional mandates.

Second, you say the "Ryrie Study Bible says the 'Nabonidus Chronicle' identified Darius the Mede with a governor named Gubaru." Have you seen this Chronicle or are you just taking the word of an avowed apologist. Biblicists are notorious for playing the switch-or-duplicate name game and this could very well be a good example of same. The burden of proof is on Ryrie because he is asserting that two completely different names are of the same person. This also applies to the Assyrian king named Pul being the "tiger-Pileser III (sic) mentioned in Chronicles.

Third, for thousands of years some scholars have been saying the walls of Jericho fell down as the Bible relates. That's not surprising, but keep in mind that they are obligated to provide tangible evidence of same. Until archeology or a related discipline furnishes something of real substance, you are under no obligation to accept their account. Have you seen their excavation data? Was it subjected to independent verification and analysis? Have you had access to and studied the records and documentation of those who refute this story? Or are you just taking the apologists' word for it?

Fourth and lastly, you say that "the word in Gen. 1:28 translated 'replenish' should actually be translated as 'fill,' and cannot be used to support a pre-Adamic race" according to Ryrie. Then Ryrie is saying he knows Hebrew better than the groups of scholars that translated the King James and the American Standard versions, both of which say "replenish." Also, Ryrie is tied in a knot by the same statement in Gen. 9:1 which says "replenish" or "repopulate" not only in the KJV and the ASV but the Jewish Masoretic Text and the Living Bible as well. There's a big difference between "replenish" and "fill." The apologetic argument that the KJV is out-of-date simply won't stand the strain in light of the fact that relatively recent translations such as The Living Bible and the American Standard Version say the same.

Remember above all else that the Bible is a political book that is changed, increased, diminished and rewritten as conditions dictate. Anytime you open any version of the Bible, first notice how key words are translated. Does it use "young woman" or "virgin" in Isaiah 7:14? Is the Hebrew word translated as "kill" or "murder" in the 6th commandment (Ex. 20:13)? How extravagant is the number in 1 Sam. 6:19? Is "without a cause" inserted into Matt. 5:22 and the word "yet" into John 7:8? Has the word "openly" been removed from Matt. 6:6? Does Matt. 19:9 omit "whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery?" Does 2 Tim 3:16 say "all scripture is inspired" or does it say "all scripture that is inspired?" Does 2 Peter 1:1 say "of God and our Savior Jesus Christ" or does it say "of our God and Savior Jesus Christ"? And how does 1 Tim 6:10 handle money as a source of evil? These may seem like lesser matters to some, but they are of critical importance to those who really study scripture. You can nearly always tell a book's liberal or conservative slant by observing these key junctures. More often than not you can even tell the degree of conservatism or liberalism in the book's authors. They all have an agenda and it's just a matter of finding where they are trying to lead you. If you think versions of the Bible are put together by objective, dispassionate, neutral, unbiased scholars, I strongly recommend reconsideration of your position. If you have a version that you deem to be neutral, by all means send me a copy. I await its arrival with bated breath. But be prepared to hear about the error of your ways.

Letter #663 from NB of Tucson, Arizona (Part a)

(On page 4 in the 148th issue we noted that the Bible erred when it said the bat is a bird in Lev. 11:13, 19. Rev. BB attacked this as a translation difficulty caused by the KJV, but we noted that the NASB, the NB, the ASV and other versions have the same words. In

agreeing with Rev. BB, NB says, "I have a few comments regarding BE #148. First, in discussing Letter #605 you say: "the terminology of the NASB, the NEB, the ASV and 'other' versions is no different from that of the KJV." I beg to differ. You didn't mention the NIV, but I assume you read it.

In response to NB I said, "Dear NB. I said the NASB, the NEB, the ASV and other versions are in agreement with the KJV. I didn't say that included every version on the market. Exhibiting a noticeable degree of imprudence, NB now wishes to resume the encounter.-- ED.)

Dear Dennis. I see that after ignoring several of my previous letters and a delay of several months, you finally got around to commenting on one of my letters (#639 in the Nov. 1995 issue which is 155). It isn't clear from your reply whether or not you read the NIV regarding Lev. 11:13-20, or you might have noted the succinct footnote to Lev. 11:19 in the NIV which says, "*The precise identification of some of the birds, insects, and animals in this chapter is uncertain.*"

Editor's Response to Letter #663 (Part a)

Dear NB. *First*, you appear to be obsessed with the NIV. Apparently you want me to accept an admittedly imprecise NIV footnote while ignoring the actual text of the NASB, the NEB, and the ASV.

Second and even more importantly, you didn't even read your own footnote very carefully. As you noted it says, "*The precise identification of some of the birds, insects, and animals in this chapter is uncertain.*" But that doesn't mean the identification of every one is uncertain or that the bat, the last animal listed and the one with which we are primarily concerned, has been incorrectly identified. It says the precise identification of *some* is uncertain. How do you know your footnote applies specifically to the bat in verse 19 and if it doesn't your footnote is immaterial.

Third, what really makes your explanation lamentable is that your own beloved NIV says "bat" in the 19th verse. The version you cite the most undermines your own position. It says "*These are the birds you are to detest....*" and then lists 19 birds followed by the 20th which is a bat. Why not be more rational and stop trying to defend an obviously indefensible scientific error in the Bible. In the long run you'll feel better and look less silly. You said, "*It isn't clear from your re-ply whether or not you read the NIV regarding Lev. 11:13-20, or you might have noted the succinct footnote to Lev. 11:19 in the NIV.*" I read it years ago. The problem lies not with my failure to read closely or critically but with your failure to read and comprehend. If you had been more observant and less defensive, you would never have walked into this tar baby.

And finally, I never ignored your letters and take exception to the underlying implication. As I said in my November issue, our failure to respond to letters is attributable to the sheer volume of mail we receive rather than any reticence on our part. Delayed responses can only be eliminated by adding pages, costs, and/or time, all of which are unacceptable options.

Letter #663 Continues (Part b)

(In the second part of Letter #639 NB continued to assert that the resurrection of Jesus was unique because there were no OT resurrections prior to his other than possibly that of

Elijah raising the son of the widow of Zarephath in 1 Kings 17:22. Yet, I cited 1 Sam. 28:7, 11, 15, 2 Kings 4:32, 34, 35, and 13:21, as other examples of OT resurrections. Continuing his assault NB says--Ed.),

Regarding the OT resurrections, at the time I wrote that letter I had not done enough research, but several months ago I noted the resurrection of the Shunamite by Elisha (2 Kings 4:34-35) and the "miracle at the tomb of Elisha" when a dead man was tossed into the grave of Elisha, and was revived when he touched the bones of Elisha (2 Kings 13:21), but WHO raised him?...

OK. Along with the resurrection of the son of the Widow of Zarephath, that makes three. As to 1 Sam. 28:7-19 that looks for all the world as if the Witch of Endor had conjured up a "vision" for Saul's benefit, and I find it very hard to accept that as a genuine "resurrection."

So that makes 3 (or maybe 4) OT "resurrections" if you don't accept the translations of Enoch and Elijah as "resurrections" (Yes, they never "rose from the dead", but neither did they "taste of death"). So do your "more than 3 resurrections" consist of a grand total of one?

Editor's Response to Letter #663 (Part b)

You started inaccurate NB, proceeded downhill, and concluded incoherent. Following your thought processes puts a strain on mine.

First, I certainly believe your admission that "*at the time I wrote that letter I had not done enough research.*" Unfortunately you still haven't.

Second, you ask "*but WHO raised him?*" when that isn't even the issue. My original question eons ago was: Why was the resurrection of Jesus so spectacular, when so many people rose from the dead before him. Who raised who isn't even material to my original question, especially in the light of the fact, as I have stated repeatedly, Jesus was raised by someone else, like everyone else.

Third, you admit that the Shunamite, the dead man who touched Elisha, and the widow's son were raised. You dismiss the Witch of Endor as conjuring up nothing more than a "vision" and then say, "*So that makes 3 (or maybe four) OT 'resurrections' if you don't accept the translations of Enoch and Elijah as 'resurrections' (Yes, they never 'rose from the dead', but neither did they 'taste of death').*" Where on earth are you going with this? You keep admitting more and more resurrections while simultaneously claiming the resurrection of Jesus was sui generis.

Fourth, as I said earlier, you don't read very closely. If you had read my original question with a more discerning eye, you would have noticed that I referred to the numerous resurrections occurring prior to the resurrection of Jesus. I never said they were confined to the OT alone. I mentioned the saints arising in Matt. 27:52-53, Jairus' daughter in Matt. 9:18-25, the widow at Nain's son in Luke 7:11-15, and Lazarus in John 11:43-44. To be perfectly candid. How many resurrections do you want? What are you looking for? Millions?

Fifth, you are back on this Enoch/Elijah thing again with a comment that is not only irrelevant and immaterial but inane. You say, "*Yes, they never 'rose from the dead', but*

neither did they "taste of death". What does that have to do with anything? I have never mentioned them with respect to the resurrection. You, however, seem infatuated with their ascensions.

And lastly, your final comment is jewel of vacuity. After stating what you said in my third point, you say, *"So do your 'more than 3 resurrections' consist of a grand total of one?"* What on earth does that mean? I would only hope that in the dark cavernous recesses of your deluded mind there is at least a faint glimmer of light associated with this comment because I'm certainly aware of none in mine.

Letter #663 Concludes (Part c)

[The 9th question on our pamphlet entitled **THE BIBLE IS GOD'S WORD?** asks if Solomon's house contained 2,000 baths (1 Kings 7:26) or 3,000 (2 Chron. 4:4). NB says in response--Ed.],

And the last time I looked, you still hadn't learned that a "bath" (1 Kings 7:26; 2 Chron. 45:5) was an old Hebrew unit of capacity (about 10 gallons), not a "room" as we might think of a "bath." And yes, I'm aware of the fact that 2 Kings says there were "2,000 baths" and 2 Chron. says 3,000. It would take at least a full issue of BE to discuss the vagaries of the Hebrew' crude method (and the many possibilities for error) of writing numbers (using modified letters of the Hebrew alphabet).

Editor's Response to Letter #663 (Part c)

I'm well aware of the fact that a bath is a unit of capacity and not a room, but that is immaterial to the central question. What a bath is or isn't is of far less importance than how many of them are involved. Whether it is a room or a unit of capacity doesn't matter as far as the contradiction is concerned. If it's a room, then you would have contradictory figures with respect to how many rooms there were. If it's a unit of capacity then you have contradictory figures with respect to how many units of capacity there were. Either way defenders of the Bible, such as yourself, are in a quicksand bog. You may be aware of the conflict between 2 Kings and 2 Chron. but you are incapable of understanding its significance.

Secondly, your comment that *"It would take at least a full issue of BE to discuss the vagaries of the Hebrew' crude method (and the many possibilities for error) of writing numbers (using modified letters of the Hebrew alphabet)"* is nothing more than a ruse, absent evidence to the contrary. Mere utterance doesn't make it so. You're facing two comments that clash and the contradiction stands until you can reconcile the irreconcilable. Apparently I'm supposed to assume that no contradiction exists simply because you allegedly have evidence to the contrary. That's a backhanded way of telling me: Are you going to believe me or your lying eyes. The contradiction is obvious, it's blatant, it's clear, and it's going to stand in the mind of sane men until you come up with something far better than your transparent sophistry. If you really had a plausible reconciliation, I have little doubt that you would reveal some of it. I wish I had recorded every apologist who has told me he has an ideological super bomb lying beneath the table which is only held in check by his sympathy for others and respect for intellectual discourse. The only real bomb involved is your response.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #664 from KB of Los Angeles, California

Dear Dennis. Congratulations on the move for the better! I'll post your new address in the Atheist, Humanist, and Christian sectors of America Online. Also, the new typography is a great improvement.

Some time ago I volunteered my help in getting your programs on Los Angeles area cable TV stations, but I have not heard back. I need to have information as to what format (half - inch VHS, three quarter inch professional type or equivalent) in which you have your programs. If you have them only in the VHS format, then there are very few stations that can broadcast them. Enclosed is a copy of the requirements for American Cablevision that covers the cities of South Pasadena and San Marino, indicating technical requirements.

American Cablevision has an additional requirement not mentioned on the sheet, and that is that there must be a resident of their area that requests that the program be shown. *If you have anyone on your mailing list with an address in either South Pasadena or San Marino, please have that person write a letter to the station requesting the program....*

Editor's Response to Letter #664

Dear KB. We certainly appreciate any assistance you can render and apologize if we did not reply to your letter in due course. I have become incredibly busy in recent years because of the added burden associated with creating and producing TV shows. Technically speaking, all of our programs are recorded on Professional Quality Super VHS 1/2 inch tapes and then copies are made on regular Professional Quality VHS tapes and sent out. You are correct when you say that some stations require tapes be sponsored by someone living in the cable station's audience. Perhaps someone can help us in this regard. It might be better, however, if the people you are seeking contacted me first and I will forward their names and addresses to you for further instructions. As I mentioned in a prior issue, we can send our tapes to you for viewing, but you will have to tailor them for the specific requirements of your area. Cable stations vary too widely in what they want.

Letter #665 from DS of Davenport, Iowa (Part a)

As a long-time subscriber to BE I was delighted that you put much of it together in your book. I sent to Prometheus for it as soon as it was announced and after waiting forever it finally came. One disappointment is that it did not have a dust cover. Dust covers usually have a thumbnail sketch of the author. I would like very much to have a short biography on you Dennis, not long and involved, but similar in nature to what would be on a book jacket. In short what do you do for a living, what is your education, why did you tackle this specific mission and so on.

My own quick bio is that I am a retired skilled worker...and I am devoting my retirement to the promotion of civil liberties. I am a veteran of WW-2 and Korea. One often told pulpit lie is that there are no atheists in foxholes. I submit that a submarine is a reasonable equivalent and I was an atheist when I was riding the boats and still am a half-century later.

Editor's Response to Letter #665 (Part a)

I sent biographical information and a picture of myself to Prometheus but they chose not to include either. I am not sure why, but it was their call to make. In essence, a bio would have

stated that I'm 55 years old and have a bachelor's degree in philosophy and master's degree in the social sciences from Indiana University. I attended law school in the 1960's and was in the MBA program for a brief period, neither of which retained my interest. I taught secondary social studies for 9 years and was a secondary guidance counselor for 12 years. During the 1970's and 1980's I was a sociology instructor at a community college, a civil rights investigator and a governmental researcher. I've been married to my only wife for nearly 20 years and my oldest of 3 children is 11.

Having not been reared in a religious environment, let alone a fundamentalist one, I have no ax to grind in that regard. Despite the assumptions of some, "getting it off my chest" in reprisal for a strict fundamentalist upbringing plays no part whatever in my considerations. I have just always had an interest in philosophy and religion. Chess, tennis, non-fiction reading, and writing are my favorite pastimes, although writing has been all-consuming lately.

Letter #665 Continues (Part b)

I was reared as a Christian Scientist and my mother died when I was fourteen, a victim of cancer and Christian Science. Her only treatment for cancer of the uterus was Miss Perkins, a CS practitioner, "working for her."

This caused me to seriously study religion, CS in particular and Christianity in general. My first attempt to study the bible was to start with Genesis and try to read it through. As you've probably guessed I bogged down in the middle of Leviticus and said to hell with it. Later when I was in the navy I got hold of the University of Chicago's American Bible Translation. I used it for study and went through the NT first.... Although I found contradictions by myself, I stumbled on to Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason* and was really off and running. I debate local ministers on bible inerrancy and the existence of god on occasion and find your encyclopedia very useful. I have found it most practical to stay away from the subject of atheism and concentrate on the bible.

Editor's Response to Letter #665 (Part b)

You are probably already aware of the fact that the Christian Science denomination is an exceptionally jeopardous outfit that is responsible for the deaths of many through prayer overdose. It may be Christian but it's reliance upon metaphysical mutterings instead of responsible and qualified medical care creates a canyon between it and science. I can't help but recall the recent Twitchell case in which two indoctrinated parents rejected medical assistance for their baby and caused it to die from an easily remedied bowel obstruction. By not being able to evacuate, can you imagine the sheer agony, the torture, that child must have gone through--all because its parents succumbed to absurd biblical teachings and medieval nonsense.

Your evolution away from religious superstition resembles that of many, and I am glad to see that you are using our material in the manner intended. Keep up the good work.

EDITOR'S NOTE: WE HAVE FINALLY REACHED THE LEADING EDGE, BECAUSE YOU CAN NOW CONTACT US ON THE INTERNET AT: KLO_MCKINSEY@MEC.Ohio.Gov. We welcome your E-Mail, but at this stage of the game I certainly can't guarantee a response.

Issue #159 Editor: Dennis McKinsey

Mar. 1996

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

COMMENTARY

On page 5 in the May, 1995 Issue (#149) we made a comparison between Christianity and Islam that could very well merit reconsideration. In response to a letter from Maryland I said, *"Islam is an exceptionally dangerous religion because the Koran actually advocates the eradication of its opponents. With all their faults, New Testament writers never went quite that far."* Having reconsidered this issue, it could very well be that NT writers did go that far, depending on how Luke 19:27 and the surrounding verses are interpreted. Specifically, in Luke, Jesus related a parable about a nobleman who went on a trip and left three servants with some money that they were to increase by trading. The first increased his ten pounds and the second increased his five pounds, but the third did not increase his at all. This upset the nobleman after he returned and the following conversation occurs beginning with the third servant speaking at verse (21). *"For I feared thee, because thou art an austere man; thou takest up that thou layest not down, and reapest that thou didst not sow. (22) And he (the nobleman--Ed.) saith unto him, Out of thine own mouth I will judge thee, thou wicked ser-vant. Thou knewest that I was an austere man, taking up that I laid not down, and reaping that I did not sow: (23) Wherefore then gavest not thou my money into the bank, that at my coming I might have required mine own with usury? (24) And he said unto them that stood by, Take from him the pound, and give it to him that hath ten pounds. (25) (And they said unto him, Lord, he hath ten pounds.) (26) For I say unto you, That unto every one which hath shall be given; and from him that hath not, even that he hath shall be taken away from him. (27) But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring thither, and slay them before me . (28) And when he (Jesus--Ed.) had thus spoken, he went before, ascending up to Jerusalem."* The crucial question is: Where do the words of the nobleman end. At what verse does he stop speaking. It is extremely important whether or not the last thing he says is verse 24, 26, or 27 because if Jesus is speaking for himself in verse 27 then he is one of the most intolerant and ruthless figures to have ever emerged from the pages of literature. On the other hand, if these two verses are merely a summation of the situation by the nobleman, the Christian dilemma is lessened dramatically.

Although we have been aware of this problem for many years, it's never been directly discussed because the text has always been viewed as too ambiguous. Is Jesus saying verse 27 or is he merely relating the words of a nobleman in a parable? That's the issue.

Another one of our subscribers GK, wrote an article in the FFRF's Newsletter, *Freethought Today*, the gist of which was that, *"The quote is directly attributable to and about Jesus. Although apologists contend that this is merely a 'quotation within a quotation'... Biblical scholarship demonstrates otherwise."* To prove these comments express the attitude of Jesus, he cites several commentaries from Christian sources. GK states that all these commentaries *"substantiate my conclusions regarding the muddled verses that clearly portray*

Jesus insisting 'slay mine enemies at my feet'...." The commentaries he cites to prove verse 27 is not part of the pounds parable are as follows: (1) Dummelow Bible Commentary, N.Y., 1922, page 765, notes that verse 27 has nothing to do with the servants who managed money, but 'describes the final punishment of those who reject Christ.' (2) The International Critical Commentary, 1902, Vol. 27, 5th edition, on page 443, notes. 'St. Augustine more than once points to verse 27 in answer to the objection that the severe God of the OT cannot be identical with the God of Love in the NT. In the Gospels, as in the Law, the severity of God's judgments against willful disobedience is plainly

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taught....' (3) Cook Commentary of the Holy Bible, 1878, Vol. 1, London, page 440, specifically attributes verse 27 to '...(Jesus) literal coming of the end of the world...,' and is not applicable to the parable's servants' management of their master's pounds. (4) Elliott Bible Commentary, Vol. VI, London, page 338, notes that verse 27 is distinct from the parable of the pounds and 'Spiritually it represents, in bold figures drawn from the acts of tyrant kings, the ultimate victory of JC over the unbelieving and rebellious.' GK concludes by saying, "The above references should adequately demonstrate on which side 'scholarship' comes down on this particular issue." GK's interpretation of verse 27 is certainly in keeping with JC's belligerent comment in Matt. 10:34 ('I come not to bring peace, but to bring a sword').

In the interest of balance, however, it should be noted that some people disagree with GK and their views are aptly stated by the following letter to the *Humanist News* of Minneapolis-St. Paul. A woman stated, "In the interests of accuracy I would point out that GK has quoted very carelessly. Jesus is telling a story, a parable, and in the parable the king says, 'But as for these enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, bring them here and slay them before me.' Yes, Jesus did say the words, but I believe they must be taken in context. It is very different, to my mind, to say that Jesus wanted his enemies brought before him and slain, or that in a story, which made a particular point, a character in the story said it."

One of our subscribers from Seminole, Florida agrees with her and states, "I think I have found a minor error in your book *The Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy*, though it is undoubtedly more the fault of your quoted source than yourself. On page 160, Gerald Sigal's *The Jew and the Christian Missionary* is quoted and uses Luke 19:27 as evidence that JC advocated killing enemies. Unfortunately that's not quite accurate, at least to my knowledge. In Luke 19:11-12, it identifies these words of JC as part of a parable concerning 'a certain noble man.'...although it was JC speaking, he was quoting Herod's attempt to reclaim his throne and quash rebellious peasants after he had made his journey, which can hardly be held against him."

In any event, we included this major issue because of its potential impact on the alleged perfection of Jesus Christ. If, in fact, Jesus told people to bring his enemies before him and slay them, his decency and humaneness, indeed his credibility itself, is dealt a staggering blow. On the other hand, we have refrained from focusing on this critical comment because of the ambiguity of the text. Although definitely in keeping with some comments by Jesus, it's at variance with others. For now we are content with having made our readers aware of the controversy and, perhaps, motivating them to do some independent research. Anyone who can definitively prove Jesus was referring to himself in Luke 19:27 will have all but decimated any Christian claims to tolerance, open-mindedness, and civil discourse. In effect, Jesus would be saying: Believe my way or die. Judging by the number of religious

executions that occurred during the Middle Ages, that could very well be how many Christians interpreted it.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #666 from [CK of Bloomfield, New Jersey](#) (Part a)

(CK wrote letter #630 in the September issue and now seeks to again claim that the bowl with a diameter of 10 and a circumference of 30 in 1 Kings 7:23 can be explained by using the rounding defense, as can the difference between 470,000 and 500,000 in 1 Chron. 21:5 and 2 Sam. 24:9, respectively--Ed.).

Dear Mr. McKinsey. Returning to the subject of my letter #630 I have looked through your *Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy* and found many Biblical discrepancies of number that, indeed, cannot be explained away by rounding. (However, he does not think that allowing the rounding defense in the 10-cubit-versus-30-cubit case and the 500,000-versus-470,000 case would automatically allow biblicists to explain away the other contradictions. Apparently he feels these are exceptions and quotes a letter from a college professor who agrees with him--Ed.).

In establishing the larger point (of the Bible's complete unreliability), let's not use spurious arguments that only make the case less compelling. Even a completely unreliable book does not *always* err. This is not a game to score personal points, but a means of convincing people of the truth.

(Another letter by CK dwells on the same point--Ed.) I appreciate your new printer--it makes everything easier to read. I am frustrated, however, at my inability to get across my mathematical points. If two reporters cover a meeting at which, say, a precise tally of attenders showed 2133 persons in attendance, and one reporter chose to say it was attended by 2100 persons and another reported 2000, both would be correct. Also, they are independent. The second reporter didn't take the first reporter's already rounded 2100 and round it again to 2000--each used a different level of rounding right from the get-go. There is not a set of 100 missing people. Likewise 470,000 and 500,000 are two independently rounded versions of the same number, which for sake of argument, might very well be 469,254 for all we know. To say the burden of proof lies on the alleger would be onerous for the newspaper reporters mentioned above--what can they do, provide an affidavit from the ticket sellers?--but then how can you trust them?....You state that the Bible does not imply, much less state, that the figures are the result of rounding or approximating. In any real-world measurement there always is rounding....

Editor's Response to Letter #666 (Part a)

Your comment with respect to the reporters is just about the whole ball game my friend. The attendance at a ball game was 2133 and you say that if "*one reporter chose to say it was attended by 2100 persons and another reported 2000, both would be correct.*" One misses it by 33 and another by 133 and you're telling me they are both correct. Too bad I didn't have you as my math teacher when I took calculus in college and got a C. Defenders of the Bible just can't seem to realize that we are dealing with God's inerrant word, not some reporter's guesstimate. We are dealing with a flawless book and yet I'm supposed to believe that erroneous figures are somehow accurate.

All this emphasis on rounding is quite secondary to the central issue which is that the figures don't agree. I am well aware of the fact that rounding occurs in the real world and I repeat my assertion that the burden of proving these are roundings lies on the allegor. What really counts, however, is that 470,000 is not 500,000, period. Whether either is a product of rounding doesn't really matter. Either the figures agree or they don't. And the fact is they don't. And that's about all that needs to be said on that matter. All of the letters I have received over the years with their highly abstruse and convoluted mathematical calculations intended to resolve these contradictions are nothing more than apologetic smoke and mirrors seeking to prove black is white. The only spurious aspect regarding this issue is that emanating from defenses thrown up by those desperate for an out.

As far as a bowl having a circumference of 30 with a diameter of 10 is concerned the same principle applies. Anyone who thinks this is an accurate biblical calculation should make some ball bearings that are 10 centimeters in diameter and 30 centimeters in circumference (quite a trick!) and put them into an aircraft in which they intend to take the next flight. The unwillingness of apologists to accept this challenge should reveal the extent to which they really have confidence in their own contentions. They know as well as I how long that aircraft would stay in the air. They expound this nonsense but that doesn't mean they are willing to put their lives in jeopardy or die for it.

Letter #666 Concludes (Part b)

Please note that it is my love of mathematical truth, as well as criticisms I have received from even non-believers that some of your criticism is too picky, that persuade me to write this. But it really bothers me that persons on the same side of the Bible issue have to be at cross purposes like this.

I will be making inquiries this week with my cable provider concerning the community access channels. Do you have any listing of the topics that each episode on your tapes covers? When you say that we must make the necessary arrangements, does that mean also converting 1/2" tapes to 3/4" if that is what the cable company needs? That certainly sounds more daunting than merely delivering the tape to the cable company.

Editor's Response to Letter #666 (Part b)

From the perspective of many biblicists, CK, any criticism of the Bible is too picky. Despite many allegations to the contrary, no criticism of the Bible found in this publication has ever been "too picky." I have never inserted a criticism without having first taken account of this potential response. If they think I am going to exclude salient points merely because "they" think they're too trivial or they've been told as much, then they had best reconsider. I have no intention of judging the value of a contradiction or forestalling its inclusion on the basis of evaluations by apologists.

I realize you are basically a supporter of our cause but I feel compelled to respond in a manner commensurate with the temper of the letter received. Unfortunately all of your mathematical arguments boil down to one simple contention--two different numbers are the same number--and that's just not going to fly.

In any event, I would like to thank you for trying to get our cable access tapes aired in your area. Our tapes are in 1/2 inch format so if your station requires 3/4 inch tapes then you will need to make the conversion. That can't be avoided I am sorry to say.

We don't have a table of contents for the programs, although they closely follow the sequence of chapters in my book. Again, thanks for the assistance and I hope my response didn't sound too ascerbic.

Letter #667 from DA of La Puente, California (Part a)

(DA makes no attempt to introduce our readers to the topic he is debating so I am repeatedly left with the task of orienting our subscribers to what is being discussed. Apparently he thinks I am the only one who will read his letters (that's understandable) and I have memorized all of my back issues which is virtually impossible. In this issue he says--Ed.),

Dear McKinsey. Meant to write a letter an issue. Well, you will have to be "satisfied" with several issues in one letter.

#150. (He means issue #150--Ed.) At least you are not entirely letters to the editor this time. (How I could be a letter eludes me. DA needs to polish his writing skills--Ed.). Your claimed conflict between 2 Tim. 3:12 ("*All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution*") and Prov. 16:7 ("*When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him*") is a trivial version of a more serious question (How to reconcile a good god with evil events.) At that trivial level, the believer in a perfect bible can easily wiggle free of your arguments.

To start with, there is no logical conflict between the 2 statements. Tim. refers to "*all that will live godly...*" while Prov. refers to "*when a man's ways please the Lord..*" The 2 can be said to be the same, but there is no logical necessity of that, and thus no necessity for a conflict here. The same applies to the other half of the statements. "suffer him" are not mutually exclusive. (It is not unusual for example to at least claim peace and friendship for the victim you are about to execute. This practice may be a tad devious since they don't try to let the victim go, but it does show that you can be persecuted by those at peace with you.)

& your asserting at considerable length that these are universals does not make them so. Prov. in particular does not say that none can be persecuted, nor at any time. It would seem on the face of it to be a generalist statement.

Editor's Response to Letter #667 (Part a)

You are at it again, DA, so let's take them by the numbers.

First, in typical apologetic style you changed the problem by saying, "*Your claimed conflict...is a trivial version of a more serious question (How to reconcile a good god with evil events.)*." You are actually talking about an internal clash raised within 2 Tim. 3:12 itself. We aren't talking about the problem of evil in general but of persecution by enemies in particular. The issue is narrowly focused and specific.

Second, I am glad you are willing to admit that believers must wiggle free rather than confront head-on.

Third, and even more important, you say, "*To start with, there is no logical conflict between the 2 statements. Tim. refers to 'all that will live godly...' while Prov. refers to 'when a man's ways please the Lord..' the 2 can be said to be the same, but there is no logical necessity of that, and thus no necessity for a conflict here.*" Yet, you provide no evidence of same.

Apparently we are supposed to take your word for it. When Prov. says "*a man's ways please the Lord*" it is referring to all those who live godly. How, then, does that differ from Tim referring to all those that live godly?

Fourth, your comment that, "*It is not unusual for example to at least claim peace and friendship for the victim you are about to execute. This practice may be a tad devious since they don't try to let the victim go, but it does show that you can be persecuted by those at peace with you*" makes no sense. What kind of an answer is this? Your obsession with defending the Bible at all costs is a sight to behold, DA. It is an exercise in mental gymnastics to even follow your "train of thought." Who cares what people claim or who is faked out? Are we talking about assertions or reality? What does the verse say? Prov. 16 says that if your ways please the Lord, your enemies will not harm you. If the man killed you, obviously he was your enemy, regardless of what he claimed or you thought.

Fifth, you say, "*it does show that you can be persecuted by those at peace with you.*" How can you be persecuted by somebody who is at peace with you? The very act of persecuting you shows that he is not at peace with you. And you have all but ignored Prov. 16 which says, "*When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him*"

Sixth, you say, "*& your asserting at considerable length that these are universals does not make them so. Prov. in particular does not say that none can be persecuted, nor at any time. It would seem on the face of it to be a generalist statement.*" What are you talking about? Prov. 16 clearly states that any man whose ways please the Lord will be at peace with his enemies, i.e., will not be persecuted by them. In other words, as far as a man whose ways please the Lord is concerned, Scripture is making an absolutist statement and creating another tar-baby for the Bible and its defenders, such as yourself.

And lastly, you say, "*It would seem on the face of it to be a generalist statement.*" Are you or are you not saying it is an a general statement? If you are, then we are in agreement and you have contradicted your comment that "*your asserting at considerable length that these are universals does not make them so.*" If you are saying this is not a general statement, then we have already shown the error of your ways.

Letter #667 Continues (Part b)

Your comments on Isa. 26:19 ("*The dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise*") and 1 Cor. 15:52 ("*The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible*") versus Job 7:9 ("*He that goeth down to the grave, they shall come up no more*") and Isa. 26:14 ("*They are dead, they shall not live; they are deceased, they shall not rise*") also shows more of the lawyer than the logician. Job 7:9 is Job speaking, not the author of Job. His statement thus has no more standing than would a character in a story who statement that $2+2=5$ hardly means the author made an error.

Isa. 26:14 refers to certain enemies of the ancient Jews while 26:19 refers to the Jews. No conflict there either. Your making it sound like one reflects poorly on your credibility.

Editor's Response to Letter #667 (Part b)

Your "reconciliation" of this problem is not some-thing one would expect from either a lawyer or a logi-cian. If that transparent defense were allowed, every erroneous statement in the Bible could be attributed to the character who made it rather than the author of Scripture who is supposedly God. If Moses, David, Solomon, Paul or Peter made one of

their usual absurd remarks, you could just say, "Well that's just them speaking, not God." In that event, the inerrancy of Scripture would be all but decimated and every reader would be unrestrained with respect to which parts can be attributed to characters within the Bible as opposed to the alleged author of Scripture itself. In trying to save the Bible you have all but destroyed its credibility. You say, "*Job 7:9 is Job speaking, not the author of Job.*" How do you know it's not God speaking through Job? After all God is allegedly the author. What is your criterion for determining when God is speaking as opposed to one of the characters in a book written by God who is merely speaking for himself? I have heard this defense on several occasions and it's no more valid now than when first proposed. Chaos will reign supreme if you stick with this argument. You have not only thrown out the baby with the bathwater but the tub as well. Everyone, pro and anti Bible, will be free to pick and choose what he or she wishes to attribute to God directly, as opposed to the biblical figure who is speaking. This ruse has already been surreptitiously adopted by a sizable portion of the Christian community and that is a major reason why more than 1,500 separate Christian denominations currently glut the market. If Job 7:9 can not definitely be attributed to God then what part of Scripture can? For all practical purposes, virtually the entire book is up for grabs.

You say, "*Isa. 26:14 refers to certain enemies of the ancient Jews while 26:19 refers to the Jews.*" It's interesting how you ducked the real issue in true apologetic style. What difference does the composition of the groups make in this instance. First Cor. 15:52 ("*The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible*") says the dead shall be raised while Isa. 26:14 ("*They are dead, they shall not live; they are deceased, they shall not rise*") says they won't. Either they will rise or they won't. Either way, one of these verses is false. You say Isa. 26:14 only refers to certain enemies of the Jews, as if this altered the central issue. All you are saying is that a certain group of people will not rise from the dead which directly contradicts 1 Cor. 15:52. Your attempt to focus on the conflict between Isa. 26:14 and 19 has no weight because even if Isa. 26:19 refers to the Jews, as you are assuming, it does not say ONLY the Jews will arise. First Cor. 15:52 incorporates Isa. 26:19 and is all inclusive. That's why the main clash is between 1 Cor. 15:52 and Isa. 26:14, not Isa. 26:19 and Isa. 26:14. Apologists are always yelling about the importance of interpreting Scripture by Scripture, yet they conveniently jettison this poignant maxim when the outcome is unacceptable. Instead of interpreting Isa. 26:19 in light of 1 Cor. 15:52 and seeing that the former was referring to a part of humanity that would rise, while the latter says all will, you preferred to dwell only on the former as if they were the only ones who would arise, which they aren't. It's a neat trick if you can pull it off, but you didn't make it.

Letter #667 Continues (Part c)

(Regarding the Psalm 78:69/Eccle. 1:4 versus Luke 21:33/2Peter 3:10 clash and my comment that "if it has an end, then it can't be forever" DA says--Ed.),

In English , and then only in general. Even in English we often use 'forever' to refer to very long periods of time, and sometimes to periods of time that are merely indefinite and may be quite short.... The Bible is a translation. Errors by the translators are not errors in the Bible, merely errors in the translation. So you must show that 'olam' means precisely 'without any end at all.' The meaning of 'forever' is not important here.

Editor's Response to Letter #667 (Part c)

Unfortunately there comes a time in an ongoing publication like this that we should draw a line for the sake of our readership and say: If you had read our back issues you would have seen the error of your ways and not written such imprudence. I have demolished this defense on numerous occasions and there is no need to tax our readers' patience any longer, although I probably will, because I can't resist the temptation. What I said on the 2nd page of the 150th issue, which you have apparently chosen to ignore, encompasses not only this issue but many contradictions and defenses that are quite similar. I said, "*Stripped to its bare essentials, all Haley is saying is that 'forever' doesn't mean forever. It has an end which happens to be hidden. But if it has an 'end,' then it can't be forever. He's hoping his readers will swallow this doubletalk. All three verses in the first group say 'forever.' What would the authors have had to say in order to convince Haley that when they said 'forever' they meant 'forever,' not merely an indefinite period with a hidden end. It is often hard to imagine how the Bible's authors could have written something to make the Book's defenders admit it means exactly what the words state. One can't help but feel the Book's defenders are telling its authors: You don't really mean that; to which the authors would no doubt reply: Oh yes we do. In this instance, there is no word or series of words the authors could have used that apologists would not have perverted in such a manner as to make them mean something less than 'eternal' or 'forever.'*"

You say, "*Even in English we often use 'forever' to refer to very long periods of time, and sometimes to periods of time that are merely indefinite and may be quite short.*" Then the statement is false. Why is that so hard to understand? We aren't dealing with everyday parlance in which people understand you mean something less than forever when you tell someone you will love them forever. We are dealing with God's perfect book. And that's in a very different realm. The Bible is a kind of contract. What do you think an opposing attorney would say to you if your client signed a contract in which the final clause said it was to be permanent and you said your client only meant a couple of years? You and I both know he would have a field day. That's what would happen. If your kind of textual alteration were permitted, you'd all but destroy the Bible's believability. How would you know what is to be taken at face value and what is to be interpreted according to the expediency you're proposing? And who makes that determination? As I have said before, if your premise prevails, you will have as many Bibles as you have readers. Essentially your argument is nothing more than a variation on the overdone apologetic defense of: That's what it says but that's not what it means. If that's not what it means, then it shouldn't have said it. It also has elements of: "You are being too literal"--another hackneyed defense. I always work on the assumption that the Bible means what it says and says what it means, a principle you ignore regularly.

You say, "*The Bible is a translation. Errors by the translators are not errors in the Bible, merely errors in the translation.*" How do you know we are dealing with errors in translation? How do you know it was not translated correctly? What are your Greek/Hebrew qualifications and do they exceed those of people on the translating committees. I know almost nothing about you, but I would seriously doubt they even come close. Translators chose the word "forever" on several occasions and unless they are utterly incompetent, they are fully aware of its implications and Webster's definition.

Then you say, "*So you must show that 'olam' means precisely 'without any end at all.'*" No my friend. You must prove it's not eternal. The burden rests on your shoulders. You must prove that several committees of experts translating several versions don't have their acts together and you know how to translate better than they--you could have chosen a better word than they. If the word "olam" (forever) in Psalm 104:5 and Eccle. 1:4 means what you say, then any first year college student in Greek/Hebrew could have done a better job

of translating. More accurate words and phrases would have been: a long time, quite a while, a long period, or something comparable.

And then you say, "*The meaning of 'forever' is not important here.*" I beg to differ. The meaning of every biblical term is "important here." What you really mean is that you don't want it to be important here. That way, you can alter its meaning and escape through the back door. I know how you apologists detest absolutist terms being interpreted absolutely, but that's the bind you enter when you unwisely choose to defend the indefensible. As I have said before, people prone to your kind of defense need to write their own version of the bible and send me a copy which I would be glad to critique.

I also know how you don't like reading our back issues and recoil at the prospect of buying any more than the minimum. But that's the price you have to pay for progress and enlightenment. (*To Be Continued*)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #668 from CK of Bloomfield, New Jersey

Dear Mr. McKinsey. Yesterday I called up my local cable company to inquire about having your tapes played on the community access channels. The person in charge of this programming said that as her cable company covers 30 towns in northern New Jersey, they cannot accept programming that is not produced locally. Perhaps as a concession to me as a customer they would run one tape once. I don't know what would happen if subscribers from more than one of the communities (as many as possible) were to request the same tapes be played, and I don't know if you have other subscribers to team up in the Northern New Jersey territory of ComCast Cable .

Editor's Response to Letter #668

Dear CK. We appreciate your help and know that obstacles of this kind occur regularly. Who will or will not accept locally produced programming appears to be more an intuitive reaction on the part of a station's management than any decision by the FCC or elsewhere. I think they respond more to public pressure and determination than anything else. Just keep pushing; don't lessen your resolve; watch the station continually, and look for programs that are not locally produced. If they appear, spring into action by asking the station's management: "If them, why not me?"

Issue #160 Editor: Dennis McKinsey

April 1996

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

COMMENTARY

Probably the most prominent apologetic organization in the United States is the Christian Research Institute in Irvin, California. Founded years ago by the Bible Answer Man of radio, the late Dr. Walter Martin, it publishes a periodical entitled *The Christian Research Journal*. On pages 47 and 48 of the 1996 Winter issue is a critique of my book entitled: *A Summary Critique: The Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy*. The article is written by Gleason Archer, professor Emeritus of Old Testament and Semitic languages at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois and author of the *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*. Although billed as a critique, his narrative more closely resembles nothing more than some proofreading, since over 99% of *The Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy* wasn't even touched. Apparently I can assume that he found nothing worth criticizing, especially in light of the fact that the final column out of the six columns used is devoted almost exclusively to an indirect approval of my critique of the *Koran* and *The Book of Mormon*. Archer's primary concern seems to be focused not so much on the accuracy of my observations relative to the Bible's validity as the hopelessness and moral depravity into which mankind will allegedly plunge if the Bible is destroyed and my anti-supernaturalistic attack upon the God of the Bible is successful. Only later does he provide specific criticisms.

In order to adequately and comprehensively cover his article, this entire issue will be devoted to an analysis of his major points and overall approach.

First, Archer begins by accusing me of going out of my way to revile God when all I did was quote scripture. Among other things I provided a long list of reprehensible deeds committed by the biblical god and for that reason Archer alleges I am engaged in "*blasphemy and vituperation directed at God himself*," "*weighing the Almighty in the balance and finding Him wanting*," and "*bringing God to task*." In truth, I am not bringing the biblical God anywhere, Scripture is; the evidence is. All I did was quote the Book. I didn't say it, the Bible did. It's not my idea; it's Scripture's. How is quoting the Bible "*deploring God as a despicable character*" and engaging in "*blasphemy*"? How is that a "*diatribe*"? "*Vituperation*" implies I raised my voice or became emotional. Would Archer be so kind as to provide examples of same? On the other hand, if Archer really believes in the God of the Bible, he had better hope that God is willing to forgive him for supporting a book that portrays the Almighty in such a "God-awful" manner, pardon the pun.

Second, he accuses me of attacking "*God Himself*." Correction! It is the biblical presentation of God that is under the microscope, not what many perceive to be the real god. Thomas Paine, for one, was a strong believer in god, but he detested the biblical description of god and its attribution of atrocious acts to him. To Archer many would say: Don't try to equate the god of the Bible with the real God. The Bible's description of god is appalling and the

real god in no way resembles the god of the Bible. Thomas Paine would no doubt strongly object to the propensity of Archer to write as if it were a proven fact that the god described in the Bible is the real God.

Third, near the beginning of the first column Archer states, "*the author refuses to seriously consider the elements in the Bible that cannot be explained as human authorship.*" Instead of providing some examples, however, he merely makes this statement and moves on.

Fourth, at the beginning of the second paragraph he states, "*He is no atheist, however, for he often goes out of his way to revile God.*" Try as I may, I can't make any sense out of that comment.

Fifth, Archer accuses me of depriving "*human life*

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of any ultimate meaning." He claims that if God "*is basically malevolent, then there is no foundation for any hope or goodness*" and he quotes MacBeth to the effect that "*Life...is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.*" Why belief in God is necessary for meaning in life is something the religious community has never been able to explain. Indeed, more often than not the opposite is true. Feeling this world is all we have and we had better make the most of it, non-religious people are the most motivated to improve society and everything in it. They are the most involved, the most energetic, the most compassionate, the most progressive, the most innovative, and the most concerned with putting meaning into life.

The religious element, on the other hand, especially those closest to fundamentalism and a literal interpretation of the Bible, believe, without proof, that a better world is coming, so there is no need to become very concerned with conditions in this one. After all they reason, if you only live 80 or 90 years in this world why get involved. You aren't going to be here very long or get out of it alive anyway. Those who follow the Bible the closest are the least likely to put meaning into life and the ones most likely to rely upon the unproven, untested nebulous promise of a blissful afterlife. In place of achievable meaning in this world, they substitute unsubstantiated, wishful yearning for an alleged paradisaical next.

Seventh, Archer says, "*Without a good and holy God in heaven above, however, there is no solution to be found in freethinking or any other kind of thinking.*" Again no proof or justification is provided. Just another assertion that is supposed to be sufficient unto itself. Too bad I didn't think of that approach! Instead of devoting so much time and effort to reading and research, I could have just forgotten about all my studies, thrown away my notes, discarded my citations, and told it like it is. That certainly would have been easier.

Eighth, the first five paragraphs out of the 20 submitted are nothing but an argument that the Bible is needed and whether it is true or not is of secondary importance. Archer is more concerned about losing the Book than proving it. He just can't conceive of a world without Scripture, even though millions of people have come and gone, while surviving quite nicely without its presence.

Ninth, not until the sixth paragraph do we exit the world of generalities and enter the realm of specifics. Archer notes my observation that according to Gen. 5:5 Adam did not die until he was 930 years old, even though he was supposed to die, according to God's curse, on the day he ate the forbidden fruit (Gen. 2:17). Archer says, "*McKinsey ignores the fact that*

Adam and Eve did on that very day lose their life of blessed communion with God. Moreover, they came under a divine curse, suffered expulsion from the Garden of Eden, and entered into a state of spiritual death.' The term 'death' has more than one dimension, as McKinsey ought to have known had he studied the biblical use of this word. In fact, Paul (whom McKinsey thoroughly detests) stated that 'the mind set on the flesh is death' (Rom. 8:6). A student of the text should pay attention to the various nuances in which a term may be used rather than oversimplifying it."

This, of course, is the standard apologetic defense that is trotted out to escape a clear-cut comment, as we have noted several times in our publication. If Archer had bothered to read our back issues relative to this issue he would have seen the error of his ways. (a) Nothing is said about a "spiritual" death. It says *"thou shalt surely die."* Where does it imply, much less state, anything about a spiritual death. Archer says, *"Adam and Eve did on that very day lose their life of blessed communion with God."* Where does the text say that? He is reading more between the lines than is on them. (b) The word "die" in Gen. 2:17 comes from the Hebrew word "mûwth" (transliterated) which is used approximately 250 times in the OT. Apologists would be hard pressed to find one instance where it does not mean die in the sense that the average person understands the word. Yet, we are supposed to believe that Gen. 2:17 is somehow an exception. We are supposed to believe that 249 have it one way, while only 1 means something else. (c) David sinned against God and in 2 Sam. 12:14 Nathan says to David, "the child also that is born unto thee shall surely die" because of your sin. And the child died according to the 18th verse which says, "And it came to pass on the seventh day, that the child died." If the curse in 2 Sam. 12:14 is an actual physical condemnation, then why isn't the one in Gen. 2:17? (d) If Gen. 2:17 is to be interpreted spiritually, then what criterion are we to follow in order to determine if a verse is to be taken physically or spiritually, literally or figuratively, other than political expediency? Fundamentalists constantly harp upon the importance of interpreting the Bible literally but don't hesitate to abandon this approach when the going gets rough. Why should the literal approach be discarded with respect to Gen. 2:17 but not with respect to all the other references to the word "die" in the OT, such as 2 Sam. 12:14?

Incidentally, why would I *"thoroughly detest"* Paul in light of the fact that I have never met the man. I have no quarrel with him on a personal basis; it is his ideas and logic I find so reprehensible and contradictory.

Tenth, Archer raises another objection at the bottom of the second column where he says, *"McKinsey raises a similar objection against Peter, who quoted Moses: 'Moses truly said unto the fathers. A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me' (Acts 3:22. KJV). On page 437 McKinsey reasons that Jesus could not be God incarnate, since Moses was not God incarnate, nor did Jesus ever claim to be God. Yet how could any of Peter's hearers ever suppose that he was affirming Moses as the Son of God? It was perfectly evident that Moses served as a type of the Messiah as indicated in Hebrews 3:2 ('Jesus was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was in all his house')."*

To begin with, where did I say Jesus never claimed to be God. If Archer had focused more on what I said and less on refuting me at all costs, he would have easily seen that my exact words were: *"...Moses was not God incarnate nor did he ever claim to be such."* It was Moses, not Jesus, who made the denial. Apparently Archer is having trouble reading the simplest of grammar. Secondly, Peter's hearers did not have to assume that Peter *"was affirming Moses as the Son of God."* Archer has it backwards. Peter's hearers would naturally assume that he was referring to a prophet who was not the Son of God because Moses was not the Son of God. And since Jesus allegedly is the Son of God, in his OT

predictions Moses could not be referring to Jesus. Archer's entire approach to this problem is far from what is being said.

How does Heb. 3:2 make Moses a type of Jesus? Does Archer mean to say that every time two people are compared to one another in the Bible, one is a type or antitype of the other? Heb. 3:2 is comparing two men to each other on a particular aspect; it is not equating them generally. The text says that both are faithful and that is all. That hardly warrants making one the precursor of the other.

Eleventh, in the 3rd column Archer states, "*McKinsey actually joins with those who taunted the crucified Savior on the cross, saying, 'He saved others; He cannot save Himself' (Matt. 27:42). On page 36, where the author quotes Matthew 27:46: 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?' McKinsey asks incredulously, 'How can Jesus be our Savior when he couldn't even save himself' The crucifixion accounts, of course, make it quite clear that Jesus was perfectly able to save Himself had He so wished. In fact, Jesus stated that He could easily have summoned 12 legions of angels to rescue Him from the cross (Matt. 26:53).*" Archer tends to interpret comments in a manner that coincides with his predilections Where did I ever say "He saved others." He deliberately attributed to me a comment made by those denouncing Jesus.

But even more importantly, Archer has a pronounced propensity to accentuate one side of a contradiction while ignoring, minimizing, or discounting the other. He quotes Matt. 26:53 ("Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than 12 legions of angels?") to prove that Jesus could have saved himself had he so chosen, as if this destroyed the impact of Matt. 27:46. Hardly! Matt. 26:53 may say that he can save himself had he so chosen but Matt. 27:46 shows he could not. Archer also conveniently failed to mention my quote from Gerald Sigal who poignantly denied that Jesus came into the world to willingly die for mankind on the cross. Sigal stated, "*If that was true, why did he hesitate and pray for the reversal of the fate prescribed for him. Matt. 26:39 says, 'going a little way forward, he fell upon his face praying and saying, My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me. Yet, not as I will, but as you will.'* Jesus' exclamation: 'Yet, not as I will, but as you will,' *undoubtedly indicates that had it been his choice, he would not have undergone execution. And why did Jesus, the god-man, need an angel to strengthen him in Luke 22:43?*" In other words, instead of recognizing this problem for what it is--a contradiction--Archer chose to just ignore one side and stress the other. He acts as if Jesus never made the comments found in Matt. 27:46, 26:39 and Luke 22:43. It's a neat feat if you can pull it off and no doubt many have succumbed over the centuries.

Twelfth, at the end of the 3rd column Archer states, "*McKinsey's inadequacy in Hebrew and Greek appears in his naive treatment of the Sixth Commandment. He asserts that more recent English translations have altered the King James 'Thou shalt not kill' to 'You shall not murder' in order to excuse capital punishment (p. 84. Both the Hebrew tirsah and the Septuagint Greek phoneuo, however, specifically refer to first-degree murder.*"

(A) If Archer had read our back issues he would be aware of the fact that this criticism has been addressed on several occasions. What he is saying, in effect, is that he knows Hebrew better, or could have done a better job of translating, than those who composed the King James Version. According to him implicitly, modern scholarship has supposedly updated the more archaic King James translation. Of course, he neglects to mention the fact that many relatively recent translations such as the RSV, the NAB, the ASV, the JB, and the Lamsa Version used 'kill' as well. All say "kill" rather than "murder" in Exodus 20:13. There is a big difference between killing and murdering If every killing is murder, then

soldiers, police, executioners, and those killing in self-defense are nothing more than criminals. The word "murder" is encompassed within the word "kill" because, although every murder is a killing, not every killing is a murder. The two are not identical and it is very important to note that the translators of these modern versions chose "kill" over "murder." In so doing, they chose a very definite concept. By saying "murder" should have been used rather than "kill" Archer is accusing these translators of being incompetent, and I seriously doubt that his years of teaching Hebrew exceed that of many scholars who have combined to produce several of the most prominent versions on the market.

(B) Archer says, *"Both the Hebrew tirsah and the Septuagint Greek phoneuo, however, specifically refer to first-degree murder."* He might want to discuss this matter with James Strong whose *Exhaustive Concordance* says the word "kill" in Ex. 20:13 comes from the word "râtsach," not "tirsah" and it means *"to dash in pieces, i.e., kill (a human being), especially to murder:--put to death, kill, manslay, murder."* Not only is Archer disagreeing with Strong over the Hebrew source but in no sense is Strong saying it refers to first degree murder *only*. So Archer finds himself not only at odds with the translators of several major versions but with the creator of probably the most famous concordance in the United States. A little more research would no doubt expose additional scholars at odds with Archer's interpretation.

Thirteenth, Archer continues by saying, *"McKinsey also blunders with regard to the name of the hill where Christ was crucified (p. 96), for he imagines a discrepancy between Golgotha and Calvary. Apparently he is unaware that Golgotha means "skull" in Aramaic and that Calvarium means exactly the same thing in Latin. He overlooks the fact that Latin was the language of the Roman government in Christ's time."* I was well aware of the fact that this criticism would be made when I inserted this conflict into the text, but I felt readers ought to be aware of this discrepancy. If Archer had been more concerned with honesty and less with refutation, he would have noted that I specifically stated, *"Some apologists disputably allege Golgotha is the Hebrew rendering while Calvary is Latin."* But Archer conveniently chose to omit any reference to my qualification.

Fourteenth, Archer continues by switching from a critique of my book to a one-sided monologue extolling the Bible's alleged prophetic accuracy and degrading the predictive capability of mankind, all the while totally oblivious to all the problems associated with Bible prophecy so clearly outlined in my book. He states, *"McKinsey also dabbles with prophecies that he construes to be unfulfilled, but his judgment is mistaken in every case. Beginning with the promise of the Satan-crushing seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15), a plan unfolds. God announced to Abraham that the Egyptian sojourn of his descendants would last four hundred years before they return as a nation and take possession of Canaan (Gen. 15:13-14). After the Israelites conquest, God's prophets continued with messages of assurance in times of national crisis. Such was the promise of a son of Isaiah, who would be born of a virgin, and within whose lifetime Judah would be saved from Assyrian forces (Isa. 7:14-16). After the Battle of El Tekah, 185,000 of the Assyrian troops suddenly died by a plague, forcing Sennacherib to abandon his siege of Jerusalem (cf. Isa. 36)."*

Archer completely ignored: what I said on pages 153 and 191 in the Encyclopedia with respect to Gen. 3:15, what I said on page 174 about Ex. 12:40 refuting Gen. 15:13, and what I said in regard to why Isa. 7:14 was not referring to a virgin or Jesus. In the latter instance, for example, Archer is saying a son of Isaiah would be born of a virgin and within his lifetime Judah would be saved from the Assyrians. The son was to be a sign to Ahaz

and, among other things, I asked how the birth of Jesus, who is allegedly this son, could be a sign to Ahaz who lived 600 years before Jesus. This, too, Archer chose to ignore.

Actually Archer isn't even interpreting this verse precisely from a fundamentalist perspective because he failed to correlate it with the birth of Jesus by leaving the entire event back in the time it occurred. That is probably, in part, because Isaiah refers to "*a virgin, ...within whose lifetime Judah would be saved from Assyrian forces*" and since the Assyrian Empire disappeared over 600 years before Jesus was even born Archer deemed it more expedient to remain with the Ahaz era.

Fifteenth, continuing with his prophetic parade of preferred predictions he says, "*An even more remarkable prediction is found in the ninth chapter of the Book of Daniel, which foretells a period of 483 years between the issuance of a decree 'to restore and build Jerusalem' (later granted by Artaxerxes I in 458 B.C.) 'until Messiah the Prince.' Four hundred eighty-three years after 457 B.C. comes out to A. D. 26, when Jesus began His teaching ministry in Israel. For this fulfillment there is no possibility of a pious fraud, since the Book of Daniel was composed centuries earlier than the date of fulfillment.*" Talk about playing fast and loose with the facts! This is a prime example of the sophistry so often associated with apologetic rationalizations.

(A) Archer rigged the time at which the clock was supposed to start running. The decree was issued by Cyrus according to Isa. 44:28 ("That saith of Cyrus. He is my shepherd, and shall perform all my pleasure: *even saying to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built; and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid*") and that occurred in 536 B.C., not 458 B.C.

(B) He slipped in a rather neat little deception that you would have missed had you blinked. He stated "*a period of 483 years between the issuance of a decree 'to restore and build Jerusalem' (later granted by Artaxerxes I in 458 B.C.) 'until Messiah the Prince.'*" Notice! He started the clock running when Artaxerxes "granted the decree" not when it was issued much earlier by Cyrus. The prophecy is not referring to when the decree was actually executed but when it was issued. And that occurred long before Artaxerxes came on the scene. Archer is desperately trying to alter the beginning date so as to make it coincide with the arrival of Jesus.

(C) What does the prophecy say? It says 483 years from the decree "until Messiah the Prince." And when did Jesus come on the scene. When he was born, naturally, not 26 years later when he allegedly began his ministry. Archer just arbitrarily picked the age of 26 in order to, again, make the prophecy look cogent, when he has no more idea when Jesus began his ministry than I do. Where does Scripture say Jesus began preaching at age 26 or at any age for that matter? Except for a brief reference to a temple encounter around age 12, almost nothing is known about the life of Jesus until he was around age 30, although this, too, is somewhat nebulous. Other prophetic difficulties with the Book of Daniel are covered in the *Encyclopedia* but Archer chose to ignore them.

In fact, Archer's entire strategy with respect to the prophetic problems enumerated in my *Encyclopedia* was to avoid them and concentrate, instead, on those that he felt were most convincing, as if a few alleged hits nullified a mountain of duds. Instead of focusing on all the problems enumerated in the *Encyclopedia*, he chose, instead, to scramble over to those deemed most secure. Unfortunately, they aren't very strong either.

Sixteenth, continuing his prophetic journey, Archer says, "*Another prediction (allegedly accurate--Ed.), found in Deuteronomy 28:68 ('And the Lord shall bring thee into Egypt*

again with ships, by the way whereof I spake unto thee, Thou shalt see it no more again: and there ye shall be sold unto your enemies for bondmen and bondwomen, and no man shall buy you') *foretells the mass transportation of the Jewish survivors of the capture of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 by Titus, who (according to Josephus) shipped 97,000 to the slave market in Alexandria, Egypt. Instead of recognizing this as proof of divine foreknowledge, McKinsey complains that it violated God's earlier promise to Moses that His people would never return to Egypt. Deuteronomy 28:68, however, acknowledges that this compelled return would be an exception. The fact remains that here is a promise that dates back to 1445 B.C. (if it is genuinely Mosaic) and extends to A.D., a total of 1,515 years!"*

Three major deceptions plague this analysis. (a) Nowhere in the text does the word "Titus" appear. Archer arbitrarily assumed that since the events surrounding 70 A.D. fit rather well into what he is trying to sell, why not use them. (b) If he had bothered to read what occurred earlier, he would have seen that the text is not referring to the transportation of Jews to Egypt by Titus but the return of the Jews from nations "from the one end of the earth even unto the other." Four verses earlier, Deut. 28:64 says, "And the Lord shall scatter thee among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other; and there thou shalt serve other gods.... And among these nations shalt thou find no ease, neither shall the sole of thy foot have rest.... " followed later by verse 68 which begins "And the Lord shall bring thee into Egypt again with ships...." And (c) Archer tries to lightly sluff off a major contradiction between Deut. 17:15-16 ("One from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not put a foreigner over you, who is not your brother. Only he must not multiply horses for himself, or cause the people to return to Egypt in order to multiply horses, since the Lord has said to you, ' *You shall never return that way again*") and Deut. 28 :68 (which was quoted earlier) by saying, "*McKinsey complains that it violated God's earlier promise to Moses that His people would never return to Egypt.*" Why would I complain? Quite the contrary, I'm rather amused by the fact that a biblical contradiction is so clearly evident. If anyone should be complaining it should be apologists trapped in a cul de sac with no escape.

In addition, Archer alleges that Deut. 28:68 "*acknowledges that this compelled return would be an exception.*" No it doesn't! It doesn't somehow permit itself to be an exception to the absolute laid down in Deut. 17:15-16. It just relates an exception which thereby creates the contradiction. Archer is acting as if Deut. 28:68 has permission to overrule Deut. 17:15-16.

Seventeenth, near the bottom of the 5th out of 6th columns Archer continues his prophetic journey by referring to a couple of passages in Isaiah. He states, "*Two other remarkable prophecies are found in Isaiah. The first passage (13:19-22) foretells the utter destruction and desertion of Babylon, which was the largest and wealthiest city in the world at the time. The entire area around Babylon absorbed so much salt from millennia of irrigation that it became impractical to do any farming there. No farming; no inhabitants in the city. The fulfillment of this prediction defies any naturalistic explanation.*" For some reason Archer failed to actually quote Isaiah 13:19-22 which says, "And Babylon, the glory of kingdoms, the beauty of the Chaldees' excellency, shall be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. It shall never be inhabited, neither shall it be dwelt in from generation to generation: neither shall the Arabian pitch tent there; neither shall the shepherds make their fold there. But the wild beast of the desert shall lie there, and their houses shall be full of doleful creatures; and owls shall dwell there, and satyrs shall dance there. And the wild beasts of the islands shall cry in their desolate houses, and dragons in their pleasant palaces; and her time is near to come, and her days shall not be prolonged." As we noted in an earlier issue of our publication, these prophecies have never occurred. (a) Babylon has never gotten the Sodom and Gomorrah treatment; (b) there has never been any time since Isaiah that

Babylon was uninhabited; (c) Arabians still visit there; (d) Shepherds still make their folds there; (e) it has never been known for its dancing satyrs and dragons in the palaces and (f) apparently its days have been prolonged, since Babylon still exists, although significantly changed.

And lastly, Archer concludes his prophetic odyssey to nowhere by giving me the impression that I don't think he really read all of the book to begin with. Apparently, although I may be wrong, he read about as much as he could take and then adopted a hit-or-miss approach. I say this because, among other things, he alleges Isaiah 52:13 to 53:12 "*clearly explained the passion week of our Lord Christ and the substitutionary nature of His death.*" Then he says, "*Both John 12:38 and Romans 10:16 refer to the fulfillment of this prophecy. It is untenable to say these fulfillments are human inventions or forgeries.*" He seems to be entirely unaware of all the problems we enumerated with respect to these verses. It is hard to believe that he would have made such a grandiose faux pas after having read the *Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy*.

The most appropriate summation of Archer's approach to the prophetic dilemmas cited in my book is that rather than assaulting the incredible number of dead-ends that have no honest reconciliation, Archer chose, instead, to dwell on those that struck his fancy. But ironically, even his own choices fall flat by failing to exhibit the perspicacity they allegedly possess.

The 6th and final column is little more than a cheering section for my treatment of the *Koran* and *The Book of Mormon*. After relating many points made with respect to both, Archer concludes by referring to my "*often-valid criticisms of Mormon and Muslim scriptures....*"

Archer summarized his entire excursion by saying, "*McKinsey's Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy mainly reflects the author's obsession with twisting the Word of God and ridiculing its supposed discrepancies. I find the book a waste of time. Suffice it to say that most of the passages he works on have been satisfactorily handled in my book, An Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties.*"

Leaving aside the fact that my book proves the Bible is anything but the word of a perfect being, and Archer's *Encyclopedia* doesn't address the overwhelming majority of its criticisms, the only twisting involved is that exhibited by Archer's sophistry. A real waste of time consists in reading clearly contrived explanations concocted by someone who has devoted most of his life to defending at all costs a belief system the refutation of which would devastate its possessor.

The most glaring disclosure to be drawn from Archer's article, aside from the fact that the first column irrelevantly decries what would become of mankind were the Bible to be proved a fraud and the last column applauds our analysis of two extra-biblical books, is that most of the remaining material doesn't even discuss what is covered in our Book. After having discovered the anemic nature of Archer's exposition, I can understand why. As was noted earlier, his commentary more closely resembles some proof-reading than any kind of real critique. In view of the fact that over 99% of our book isn't even discussed, his alleged "critique" actually amounts to little more than a backhanded endorsement. If you're not inclined to touch it, that's an indirect attestation to its potency.

LETTER TO THE CHRISTIAN RESEARCH INSTITUTE

CRI did not send me a copy of the Journal in which Archer's article appeared nor did they bother to tell me my work had been criticized by Archer. If it had not been for a couple of my subscribers sending me a photocopy of the article I might not have ever known of its existence. Only after I contacted CRI and asked for an opportunity to reply did they volunteer to send me a copy. I was told my response would have to be restricted to approximately 200 words which is little short of ridiculous in light of the fact that Archer's analysis utilized 10 times as many words. I was also told that my reply could only appear in the *Letters to the Editor* section. Their spokeswoman suggested that I write a much more extensive response in my own periodical, so I agreed, despite the injustice involved. What follows is the *verbatim* response I sent to CRI for inclusion in the next edition of their Journal:

The most glaring disclosure emanating from Archer's review of my book is that over 99% of the volume isn't even addressed. The first column irrelevantly decries what would become of mankind if the Bible were proved to be fraudulent; the sixth and final column does little more than applaud my treatment of the Koran and The Book of Mormon, and most of that which remains focuses on a few prophecies, nearly all of which aren't discussed in my book but struck Archer's fancy. The April 1996 Issue (160th) of our monthly publication entitled BIBLICAL ERRANCY will show that not only the prophecies which Archer himself presented, but the few specific contradictions he does attempt to rationalize can't stand the strain of critical analysis. Virtually the entire issue will be devoted to an itemized refutation of nearly every point in his litany. Although he says reading the book "is a waste of time," I have little doubt that he doesn't even believe that himself. But he's hoping you will. Billed as a "summary critique," Archer's presentation could more accurately be described as some minor proof-reading in what amounts to little more than a backhanded endorsement. If you're not inclined to touch it, that's an indirect attestation to its potency. For those who really desire to know the facts by reading the most comprehensive refutation of the Bible available, I strongly recommend that they not only obtain a copy of The ENCYCLOPEDIA OF BIBLICAL ERRANCY from either myself or Prometheus Press but a copy of the April issue of our periodical as well. We can be reached at 2500 Punderson Drive, Hilliard, Ohio 43026 (614) 527-1703.

Issue #161 Editor: Dennis McKinsey

May 1996

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

COMMENTARY

This month's issue will resume our on-going program of devoting an entire issue of BE to letters from readers.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #667 from DA of La Puente, California Continues from the March Issue (Part d)

[On the second page of the 150th issue we stated, Haley's "reconciliation" of John 3:13 ("And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven") with 2 Kings 2:11 ("Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven") is exceptionally weak. He states, "In the first text Jesus, setting forth his own superior authority, says substantially, 'No human being can speak from personal knowledge, as I do, who came down from heaven. No man hath ascended up to heaven to bring back tidings'." But the text says nothing of the kind. Where does Jesus say anything about speaking from personal knowledge or bringing back tidings? DA leaps to Haley's defense by saying--Ed.],

Your treatment of John 3:13 is another case where you seem to be thinking "I hope the reader won't bother to check up on me." because you just ignore the context that makes it quite clear Jesus is doing as Haley says, asserting his eye-witness knowledge, not saying Hea-ven is empty.

Editor's Response to Letter #667 (Part d)

You are really out of the ball-park on this one, DA. You'd be wise to hope people don't read your defense. *First*, who said anything about Heaven being empty? What does that have to do with the issue? We are talking about who has "ascended" to heaven and who hasn't. Whether or not someone is there is both irrelevant and immaterial. *Second*, where does Jesus imply, much less state, that "No human being can speak from personal knowledge, as I do, who came down from heaven." Your defense is beyond taking things out of context. You just blindly followed Haley who created one of his own. He is reading more between the lines than is on them. Where does Jesus say no one else can speak from personal knowledge regarding this matter? I see nothing in either verse having anything to do with someone having more knowledge than someone else. *And third*, Haley states that this means "No man hath ascended up to heaven to bring back tidings." Would you kindly show me where the word tidings or something comparable appears? You would have done well to have steered clear of this jewel, but you couldn't resist slugging the tar baby.

Letter #667 Continues (Part e)

Nor is there a conflict between Matt. 21:31 (*"The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you"*) with 1 Cor. 6:9-10 (*"Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God"*). Really amazing here. You casually print the obvious explanation and then somehow think you are refuting it. Perhaps what you are refusing to see is that Matthew is merely comparative. It does not say any sinners will or won't get into heaven. Rather it ranks their chances. Harlots are

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more likely to make it than chief priests.

Editor's Response to Letter #667 (Part e)

The only aspect that is really amazing DA is your apparent belief that your amateurish rationalization is going to somehow carry the day. You state, *"what you are refusing to see is that Matthew is merely comparative. It does not say any sinners will or won't get into heaven. Rather it ranks their chances. Harlots are more likely to make it than chief priests."* Matt. 21:31 is comparative and does say that both the harlot and the priests will get into heaven in sequence. But the conflict is not between one part of Matthew 21:31 and another. It's between Matt. 21:31 and 1 Cor. 6:9-10. The latter says sinners, specifically harlots in our case, will not get into heaven, period, and there is no sequence. You created a bogus conflict and then destroyed its viability, only to expose your own duplicity.

Letter #667 Continues (Part f)

A problem you have is you tend to read any 2 statements so that if there is a possible conflict, there is a conflict. This is, of course, the reverse of how one reads a text, Bible, contract, studybook, whatever. If there is any way to read the text that avoids the conflict, that reading is adopted. Finding a possible conflict is only the first step in showing there is a real conflict, and the burden of proof is on you to a large extent.

Editor's Response to Letter #667 (Part f)

Oh my goodness! Are you serious? Now the crux of your problem really comes to the fore. Your thought processes are not only out for all to see but out of kil-ter, as well. I certainly wouldn't want to have you as an attorney. My friend, anyone who doesn't read everything with a critical eye is opening himself up to agony galore. I read everything like a lawyer reading a contract and I am especially attune to contradictions, inconsistencies, conflicts with known facts, and statements that just don't fit in. That goes to the very essence of an FBI investigation. They cross check data, separate witnesses during interrogation to see if their stories conflict and make every attempt to interview more than one source or witness (as many as is feasible in fact) in order to compare as many views as is possible. You made the utterly ludicrous comment that, *"If there is any way to read the text that avoids the conflict, that reading is adopted."* That's no problem; that's easy. Just read one source or interrogate one person. That will certainly eliminate all conflicts between sources. All you have to do is hear or read what one source has to say while ignoring or avoiding areas or subjects of potential conflict. in his or her story.

Second, you say I *"tend to read any 2 statements so that if there is a possible conflict, there is a conflict."* You got that wrong too. I tend to read any 2 statements that conflict and say there is a conflict until it's resolved. I see the conflict and ask for a reconciliation; you see the conflict and say there must be a reconciliation. That is a fundamental disagreement on how to reason. Do you follow this philosophy with respect to everything in life or only when it comes to the Bible. If the former, then I fear for your prognosis. Frankly, I don't think you do. You are like so many religious people with whom I work with on a daily basis. They reason rather well regarding everyday activities but seem wholly unable to think critically when Scripture comes on the scene. You are probably like the computer programmer, aeronautical engineer, and thousands of other employees who can think logically with respect to occupational activities but are completely unable to transfer these same critical thinking skills, skills that seek out conflicts and contradictions and are so crucial to good job performance, into Scriptural analysis. It's as if you and they have a mind block, a wall, erected by the Bible in general and Jesus in particular.

Third, you accuse me of contending that, *"...if there is a possible conflict, there is a conflict."* and then you assert that, *"This is, of course, the reverse of how one reads a text, Bible, contract, studybook, what-ever."* It is? If I were unscrupulous, I'd like to sell you some insurance policies. Unethical telemarketers ought to have a field day with your number. You have left yourself open to every fraudulent activity or concept imaginable. You are going to make no attempt to detect any contradictions, conflicts, or discrepancies in what you are told until they are practically shoved down your throat. After all didn't you say, *"If there is any way to read the text that avoids the conflict, that reading is adopted."* Your prescription for thought scares the holy scripture out of me. I can't think of any train of reasoning that could be worse.

Fourth, you say, *"Finding a possible conflict is only the first step in showing there is a real conflict"* when I would be seeing little or no conflicts at all if I relied upon that approach. The chances of me finding a possible conflict are slim to none under your scenario. Most conflicts would only be discovered by happenstance rather than design, study, or critical analysis.

And finally, you add insult to injury by saying, *"...the burden of proof is on you to a large extent."* In other words, instead of you who are making the claim or submitting the clash proving no contradiction exists, you want me to prove it does. Talk about backward reasoning. That's like the religious fanatic who demands that I prove he is not followed by a green man whom he can plainly see. You submit two statements or accounts that are contradictory on their face and you want me to prove they are contradictory rather than you being required to provide a reconciliation. How many times do I have to say: **THE BURDEN OF PROOF IS ON HE WHO ALLEGES. THAT IS THE ACHILLES HEELHEEL FOR ALL RELIGIOUS/SUPERSTITIOUS THOUGHT.** In fact, it is the death knell for all unsubstantiated thought, religious or otherwise. You might just as well say that conflicts between mythology, Alice In Wonderland, Santa Claus, and The Easter Bunny on the one hand and everyday life on the other are to be accepted as reconcilable until proven otherwise. If I read two statements that are contradictory on their face, the contradiction stands until you provide a reconciliation. It does not mean there is no contradiction until I prove one exists. *(To Be Continued)*

Letter #669 from DMP of Bellingham, Washington

Dear Dennis. As you know, although I am a longtime B.E. subscriber, I have seldom written. (The reason I mention this is so that you will know that this is a special occasion of sorts.)

With regard to your commentary in the January, 1996 issue, there are many, many things with which I agree. I certainly agree that people can (and many do) work their way out of a religion. I agree that dialogue with religionists is not always a waste of time. I agree that before a religionist will accept what we have to offer, he must be shown the error of his ways. And I agree that presenting biblical contradictions, problems, and errors can be an effective tool.

On the other hand, you seem to place your efforts on a higher plane than that of others whose focus is different. In answer to Rowell's criticism that focusing on biblical contradictions is a waste of time, you say, "*What does he suggest as a substitute: Glittering generalities, nebulous theological debates, extensive listings of biblical atrocities and immoralities, disputed historical contentions, or vague philosophizing on the nature of man's condition and the existence of some sort of divine being concerned with our welfare?*" I have compiled fairly extensive lists of biblical inconsistencies, atrocities, vulgarities, absurdities, and unlikely precepts. I distribute them free, via the Internet. Why do I do this? Because these things were effective with me in helping me to become nonreligious.

I have a good friend who is very active in promoting debates and preparing nontheists for debates with theists. Why does he do this? Because this sort of thing was influential in his atheism.

Farrell Till is a friend of mine. Dan Barker is an acquaintance. As you know, both are former ministers. Their deconversion stories are somewhat different in terms of the influential factors.

The point is that there are many effective techniques for reaching religionists.

Editor's Response to Letter #669

Dear DMP. I have no quarrel with your comments. You are certainly correct. In fact, I know of people who have lost their confidence in the Bible and Christianity because of one lone verse. Not long ago I read a book in which the author said he left because Jesus claimed the mustard seed was the least of all seeds and he knew that was definitely false. There are, indeed, many roads to Rome. The real question becomes one of determining which will more likely be taken. If you can dissuade people by the approach you suggest, then by all means proceed full steam ahead. I'm certainly not going to stand in your way. In fact, I would be more than glad to help widen your path. As I told one of my atheist subscribers who travels the nation debating the existence of a god, if he finds that to be effective and influential don't quit by any means. I just don't believe that that method will reach the largest audience or pin down religionists in a manner that forestalls escape.

In addition, I don't believe you are destroying the Bible's credibility as much as you are merely highlighting its excesses. All of the topics you referred to have been discussed in BE at one time or another. But I don't see atrocities, absurdities, and vulgarities as the core about which the best strategy should revolve. Judging from what I have read in his newsletter and several phone conversations we have had over the years, I think Farrell would concur in my analysis.

An assault upon the Bible should rely upon a strategy that is far broader than what you suggest. My book, for example, covers almost the entire spectrum of biblical topics and the whole gamut of biblical dead-ends.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #670 from JS of Grosse Pointe Farms, Michigan

Dear Dennis. I have the following comment about [letter #666](#) from [CK](#) (Issue #159). CK dredges up all kinds of arguments for why 1 Kings 7:23 and 2 Chron. 4:2 do not "prove" that pi is exactly 3.0000, when we know today that pi is approximately equal to 3.14159265358979323846264338327950. The problem with all of CK's arguments is that they only "convince" in retrospect. CK should remember that as late as 1897 (yes, 1897, only 99 years ago), the state of Indiana almost adopted House Bill 246, which would have required every textbook in the schools of that state to teach an incorrect value for pi! (Apparently JS means 3.0 in order to comply with biblical teachings--Ed.) The House of Representatives passed it unanimously 67 to 0. In the Senate, the committee on temperance (which got the bill instead of the committee on education; this because its supporters were fundamentalist Christians, of course) voted unanimously to pass it onto the full Senate.

It was only at this point that a mathematics professor raised enough stink to bury the bill; it never passed and never got to the governor's desk. Thus, as you say Dennis, thankfully, *airplanes do not fall out of the sky in Indiana, nor do bridges tumble!*

People like CK should be ashamed of themselves for forgetting the price paid by scientists on behalf of science. It was Holy Writ that induced Virgilius to be burned at the stake for the crime of claiming that the earth was round; it was the Bible that induced Giordano Bruno to be burned at the stake for insisting that the stars are not stationary.

And now, after-the-fact, puny brains like that of CK come along and claim that: the Bible was never wrong in the first place, if only read properly, it would be discerned that none of these passages means what it says, and that none means what they have been interpreted to mean for centuries. I'm sure all the martyrs for science are now comforted by this fact. Thank you CK. Presumably the day will come when the Bible believers will insist that the Bible does not "really" say Jesus was resurrected and Dennis McKinsey is being nit-picky when he ridicules those portions of the Good Book that claim he was!.... Keep up the good work.

Letter #671 from YW of Aspen, Colorado (Part a)

Dear Mr. McKinsey. I have been receiving Biblical Errancy since November and I really enjoy it.... I don't know Greek (I wish I did) but I know Hebrew fluently. If used to teach Hebrew to new immigrants in Israel, and, while living there, I met and befriended many missionaries, as well as Israeli and Palestinian converts to "Born Again" Christianity. I was a a teen-ager at that time, just out of high school, and I almost fell into their trap. They really seemed nice and loving at first. They wanted me to accept their view, but they hated my questions. When they realized that I was not going to be one of them, and that I had questions they just could not logically answer, they turned quite vicious. They said that I was a 'scoffer' (quoting Psalm 1 with a pasted-on smile) but all I wanted from these self-styled pillars of virtue were some good answers to the valid questions I had, instead of the pat answers they are used to giving. Even though I tried to remain friends with them, this ended-up being impossible, due to their insisting that I had become possessed by the devil. I

had initially thought that they were sincere about seeking truth and hating lies, but I guess not.

One thing I noticed, which is sort-of funny, sort-of sad, and rather pathetic, is that Israeli Christians, even though they knew Hebrew fluently, often carried English Bibles as well. When discussing the key mistranslated Old Testament verses which they say prophecy about Jesus, ("*The virgin shall conceive...*", "*They have pierced my hands and feet....*" etc.), I always tried to keep them debating from the actual Hebrew Bible. Nevertheless, even though they were fluent in the original language of the book in question, whenever those verses would come up, they would pull out their KJV or NIV or some other translation. When questioned about why they did this, the "company line" that they had been programmed to say went something like "*I prefer the KJV because in it the Lord brings out the true meaning of this passage so clearly.*" This evasion of the obvious facts in deference to proscribed dogma and doctrine, in addition to their rejection and fear of logical criticism, leads me to believe that they had no interest whatever in the truth.

Most Christians accept the Bible as the "Word of God" without ever having read it. At any Bill Graham crusade or the like, a thousand John and Jane Does will come down to the pulpit, 'accept the Lord,' and will then start reading the Bible, accepting it as all-encompassing, universal truth, without ever having previously read a word, and without bothering to verify its claims. What secular book is ever granted this honor?

Well, here are a couple of comments I wanted to make regarding the Hebrew of some passages discussed in the current issue of BE.

On page 158-5, NB tries to defend the contradiction between the 2000 baths in 1 Kings and the 3000 baths in 2 Chron., claiming that the ancient Hebrew numbering system is illogical. Although he is somewhat correct in regards to the inefficiency of the Hebrew "letters for numbers" system, when it comes to mathematics, these letter-numbers are as efficient as any other system for denoting numerical values. Either way, it is irrelevant, since in 1 Kings, in the Hebrew text, (at this point a Hebrew word which my computer can't type is inserted--Ed.)--the actual WORD "*two thousand*" is used, and NOT (another Hebrew word--Ed.) the number "2000". In 2 Chronicles the word three thousand is used and not the number 3000.

If NB had been as knowledgeable as he made himself out to be, he would have known that the Hebrew numbering system is only used in the Bible to mark out chapters, verses, etc. and that these markings were added much later than the actual text, in order to help readers find their place. The Bible itself spells out all numbers in words.

Regarding the word translated into "replenish" in many English translations, I would like to point out the following: The prefix "re-" implying "to (do) again" (refill, rewrite, remodel, rebuild, etc.) comes from Latin, and is a feature in all Latin languages, as well as in English, which has been greatly influenced by Latin. The Hebrew language has never had such a feature, so MT is correct when he says that the word (another Hebrew term--Ed.) means "*and fill*". The "-plenish" half of the word comes from the French *plein*, which means "full.". Since there is no equivalent to "re-" in Hebrew, and there is no such single word as "*replenish*," you would have to say "fill again" in Hebrew.

Editor's Response to Letter #671 (Part a)

Your observations are well taken, especially the one regarding writing out numbers with words instead of with actual numbers in Hebrew. Good point! It would be rather difficult to confuse words rather than the actual numbers.

Regarding the "replenish" issue, I have no problem with your correction. But if what you say is true then a sizable number of Hebraic translators made a major mistake. If they translated as "replenish" what you feel should have been translated as "and fill," then they erred grievously because the two are by no means equivalent. "And fill" in no way denotes a repetitive act. If the original author of the script would have said "fill again" if "replenish" were intended, then the translators of this verse blundered.

But I think you are going to have a hard time selling this to some of your compatriots because *The Holy Scriptures according to the Masoretic Text* published by the Jewish Publication Society of America uses the word "replenish" in both Gen. 1:28 and 9:1. And the translators of the 1901 ASV, which is considerably less political than most recent translations, uses "replenish."

Letter #671 Concludes (Part b)

Although the KJV is not copyrighted, the NIV and all those new translations are. There's big money in religion in general, and in bibles in particular, and I tend to doubt that profit-driven Bible translators who have their own agenda (and know it's all a load of crap, anyway) have really bothered to go back to the original text word-for-word. The KJV is held in very high esteem among Protestants and I'll just bet my right eyeball that an open KJV has been on the table during very recent translations. And so this mistake (and others) in the KJV have passed into subsequent translations.

Regarding "replenish," I think part of the original mistranslation in the KJV is due to the fact that in everyday speech, "filling" means the replenishing of common items, (glasses, plates, containers, etc.). When you think of it, how often does one say "Fill the world!" or "Fill something that has never been filled before!" Most items that we fill have been filled before, unless they are brand new. I guess the most common usage of the word "to fill" where it does not mean "to replenish" is in "filling a hole," and then only if the hole was there from the start. If you yourself or someone else dug the hole, you are, in fact, replenishing it.

The disturbing thing concerning the above mentioned mistranslation is this: There are Christians who have taken this mistranslation (as well as the 2 versions of creation seemingly mentioned in Genesis) and extrapolated it to mean that before our present world-order (which according to them began 5700 years ago with Adam and creation) there existed an entirely different order of being which we know nothing about. These Christians then use this very convenient contrivance to sweep under the carpet any geological discoveries that may conflict with their world-view. Thus, if the world seems to be older than 6000 or so years...it is! Dinosaurs are "dragons" that existed in this former creation. It all happened in that nebulous "pre-Adamic" world! Wow! And all this from a mistranslation of one little word!

I hope you don't mind me pointing out the above. I am somewhat of an amateur linguist, and I speak, read and write a number of languages. I hate seeing an argument not carried out to its entirety because of a simple Bible mistranslation or linguistic error. Wishing you the best, Atheistically yours.

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #671 (Part b)

The issue appears to be one of deciding who is the better translator. Although you are proficient in Hebrew, YW, I'm still inclined to accept "replenish" as the more reliable translation. If I have to pick between the KJV, the ASV and the Jewish Masoretic Text on the one hand and most modern translations on the other, I'm inclined to go with the former, knowing the politics of it all. The KJV and the ASV were written when religion ruled the roost and translators didn't have to worry about critics such as myself. Nowadays things are different. This whole problem highlights a comment I made many years ago; namely, you could be the world's greatest Greek/Hebrew scholar and you'll still find experts disagreeing with your translation.

Letter #672 from JC of Corpus Christi, Texas

Dear Sir. I saw what appeared to be a good program on T.V. today, and decided to write and request more info and some literature. I did not realize that there were so many Bible errors until I tuned into your first time program.

Editor's Response to Letter #672

Dear JC. I am glad you tune in. One of our subscribers in your area is doing an excellent job of getting our tapes played on your local public access channel. We have received several requests for information from your region showing you are by no means alone. I'd mention our supporter's name, but I'm not sure he wants the publicity. He's proving very nicely that all it takes is determination and sticktuitiveness.

Letter #673 from CH of Honolulu, Hawaii

Dennis. There are several cable access stations (channels?) here that have 1/2 & 1 hour periods blank. They just show announcements or repeat the same old shows over and over.

The only Atheist program is American Atheists and it is irregular and unpredictable or repetitive. Do you provide different types regularly? I'd be glad to be a local sponsor. They actually want a local producer here, but I'm sure we can work on it!

We need something to counter the numerous and increasing "christian" programs that are filling up the cable stations. Having been brainwashed into a "christian" cult since being a teenager, it took me years to get rid of all this mental garbage!

We need to start young to prevent young people from getting involved with all this christian religious nonsense!

Editor's Response to letter #673

I couldn't agree with you more. You are singing my tune. I have been urging people since last summer to help our cause by playing our tapes in their areas. Playing tapes is effective because I receive requests for materials from people who would not go around the corner to hear any atheist, agnostic, or humanist who ever lived. As I have said so often: You have to take the message to them. They are not going to come knocking at our door, especially when they are convinced they already have the truth and nobody has shown them the error of their ways. I certainly appreciate your willingness to assist. It takes effort and is

certainly not going to fall into our basket like acorns from a tree. As of now we have 46 one-half hour tapes arranged sequentially and ready for distribution.

Letter #674 from JS of Grosse Pointe Farms, Michigan

Hi Dennis.... As usual, the publication is looking better all the time. I liked your response to the nut who wanted you to print less letters of praise! In the past you did not seem to ever attack peoples' motivation, only the merits of their arguments. Now I'm glad you're adding this extra and important dimension....

Letter #675 from JS of Shoemakersville, Penn.

Thank you for your prompt reply to my inquiry regarding your publication. In the free issue you sent me you included a brief bio. You said that you weren't raised in a religious or fundamentalist environment, so you "have no ax to grind." I, unfortunately, was raised in a "Pentecostal" church, and I *do* have an ax to grind. I'm 36 now and the "mid-life crises" regrets of my youth are magnified even further due to the many places, people, and activities I could have experienced, but didn't, because they were "sinful" or "worldly" or "of the flesh" etc. I hope you are successful in getting your voice heard in this nation in as big a way as those speculation-dealing TV preachers. I plan to do all that I can to spread the "gospel" (good news) of self-determination (in regard to planning and pursuing one's life, instead of "seeking God's will" or "waiting on the Lord and his leading"--which in reality are all imagination-based ways of "thinking", fueled by hunches, feelings, associations, teachings, preconceived notions, prejudices and subjective/relativistic "reasonings"). I don't want to see anyone else waste their youth like I did.

I am buying your book and it will probably be my main weapon while I "fight the good fight" for truth, no matter how unpleasant it may seem when it's found.

EDITOR'S NOTE: (A) We'd like to request that all letters to the editor discussing the contents of prior letters to the editor begin with a short recapitulation of what was discussed in the prior letter. We receive too many letters in which I must spend time reintroducing our readers to prior material. Writers who start discussing something that was analyzed 1, 2, or 3 months earlier often forget that they are addressing an audience that has slept since then. Some writers are jumping into what concerns them so quickly that I don't even know what they're referring to.

(B) We would again like to ask everyone to help us by playing our video tapes on any public access stations to which they may have access. This is *very important* and we need as much assistance as is possible. Those who do not live in an area with public access cablevision can still get our tapes played by finding a friend or relative who does live in a public access area and then asking that person to request his or her station to play our tapes. In many instances, just getting a tape into a cable access area is sufficient. Some stations welcome them because they counterbalance all the religious propaganda that is currently flooding cable access. Where there's a will there's a way. More often than not persistence will carry the day.

Issue #162 Editor: Dennis McKinsey

June 1996

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

COMMENTARY

This issue will conclude our analysis of Haley's well known apologetic work that was last addressed in the August 1995 issue.

REVIEWS

Haley's *AN EXAMINATION OF THE ALLEGED DISCREPANCIES OF THE BIBLE* (Part VII)--On page 280 Haley attempts to reconcile the clash between Matt. 6:19, 25, 34 ("*Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth... Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink: nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. ...Take therefore no thought for the morrow...*"), Luke 12:33 ("*Sell that ye have, and give alms*"), and Rom. 13:14 ("*Make not provision for the flesh, to fulfill the lusts thereof*") on the one hand and Prov. 13:22 ("*A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children*") and 1 Tim. 5:8 ("*But if any provide not for his own, and specifically for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel*") on the other. Haley states,

"...The first text simply forbids our making earthly possessions our 'treasure,' our chief good. We must not set our hearts upon them."

The first text says nothing of the sort and nothing with respect to gradations. It says you are not to accumulate wealth; it doesn't say you can do so as long as you don't make it your "chief good."

Haley continues,

"The word 'thought' in the two texts, as in our early English literature, means solicitude, anxious care.... Hence the precept is: 'Be not unduly anxious concerning your life,' etc."

In effect, Haley has changed the meaning of the word "thought" and significantly altered the message conveyed. If it has the meaning he implies, then the translators of these verses erred grievously.

Haley then states,

"The first two texts from Luke inculcate concretely the abstract principle of benevolence, but do not sanction improvidence."

Although it would no doubt be nice from an apologetic perspective if that were true, unfortunately, *"Sell that ye have, and give alms"* is much too absolutist to allow that escape.

And finally Haley states,

"The text from Luke 12 has, according to Meyer, a specific application, being 'addressed only to the apostles and then existing disciples'."

This, of course, is one of the oldest of all apologetic defenses. When the Bible commands people to do something that is patently offensive or unacceptable, biblicists will allege that the instruction only applies to the people being addressed at that particular time. When the command meets their approval, it is allegedly applicable to all. Apologists have a long history of trying to apply biblical maxims they like to everyone who ever lived, while restricting those they don't like to those people being addressed way back when. It's a neat little ploy and, unfortunately, many of the unwary have succumbed to its wiles.

On page 293 Haley reads between the lines in order to blend Matt. 18:15 (*"Moreover, if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone...."*) with 1 Tim. 5:19-20 (*"Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear"*). In essence, are offenders to be reprimanded in public or in private? Haley says,

"The first text refers to private, personal wrongs, the second, to open, public offenses against peace and good order."

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Where he got this idea is anybody's guess, since there certainly isn't anything in the text that would substantiate a wholly arbitrary distinction of this nature. The second says nothing about "peace and good order." All it refers to is "Them that sin" which could refer to thousands of acts having nothing to do with "peace and good order."

Haley continues by quoting the apologist Alford who says of the first text,

"This direction is only in case of personal offence against ourselves, and then the injured person is to seek private explanation, and that by going to his injurer, not waiting till he comes to apologize."

This doesn't resolve the problem because "Them that sin rebuke before all" in 1 Timothy would include those brothers who trespass against you personally and are to be rebuked privately. Moreover, there is nothing in the text that would substantiate Haley's assertion that the injured party is to seek out the injurer. Just more adding between the lines.

And finally Haley states,

"This commentator (meaning himself--Ed.), with Huther and most others, applies the second quotation to sinning presbyters or 'elders,' who are to be openly rebuked, that the whole church may fear on seeing the public disgrace consequent on sin."

This ruse would only have validity if "elders" were not "brothers." But since "elders" are included within the larger category of "brothers," then the first verse (Matt. 18:15) is referring to elders as well. When the first verse says your brother is to be rebuked in private, it means all of your brothers and that would include the elders. Yet, the second verse says elders, who are also your brothers, are to be rebuked in public, not in private.

On page 333 Haley's reconciliation of 2 Sam. 24:1 (*"The anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah"*) with 1 Chron. 21:1 (*"And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel"*) is a new low in pathetic proposals. Haley states,

"It is consistent with Hebrew modes of thought that whatever occurs in the world, under the overruling providence of God,--whatever he suffers to take place,--should be attributed to his agency. In not preventing, as he might have done, its occurrence, he is viewed as in some sense bringing about the event. Hence the act of Satan might be, in this indirect way, referred back to God, as the Governor of the universe."

I am tempted to ask myself: Does this "solution" really merit a response? If this kind of explanation were viable, then the entire infamous career of every reprobate in world history, let alone biblical figures, could be blamed on God. After all didn't Haley say,

"whatever he (God--Ed.) suffers to take place,--should be attributed to his agency. In not preventing, as he might have done, its occurrence, he is viewed as in some sense bringing about the event."

We go from blaming God for nothing to blaming him for everything. Talk about getting a bum rap!

On page 434 Haley refers to the famous biblical scene that is portrayed so vividly in the movie known as The Ten Commandments. After citing Ex. 7:20-21 (*"And Moses and Aaron did so, as the Lord commanded; and he lifted up the rod, and smote the waters that were in the river...and all the waters that were in the river turned to blood. And the fish that was in the river died; and the river stank, and the Egyptians could not drink of the water of the river; and there was blood throughout all the land of Egypt."*) he immediately grappled with the perplexing problem presented by verses 22 and 24 (*"And the magicians of Egypt did so with their enchantments: and Pharaoh's heart was hardened, neither did he hearken unto them; as the Lord had said.... And all the Egyptians digged round about the river for water to drink; for they could not drink of the water of the river"*). Cecil B. DeMille conveniently skirted the latter text because of the obvious dilemma created by the whole scene, namely: If Moses changed all the river water into blood, how could the Pharaoh's magicians have immediately followed suit by doing the same? The water was already blood, so how could it have been changed into blood by the magicians, unless it had first been restored to water. Haley would have done better if he had followed Cecil B and dodged the issue entirely instead of saying,

"We may take the word 'all,' in the 19th and 20th verses, in the loose popular sense, as implying far the greater part: the exceptions being so few and insignificant that the author overlooks them entirely. Some water remained unchanged, upon which the magicians operated, and which the Egyptians drank during the interval."

All this "explanation" amounts to is a denial by Haley that "all" means all. He would have us believe it means "nearly all." And all white horses are not white either!

Haley continues by saying,

"Kurtz thinks that only Nile water, whether in the river or in vessels, was changed, the water in the wells being unaffected."

That's true. The text does say that only the waters of the river were affected. But that doesn't solve the problem because the magicians did likewise with the same water--the Nile

water. Water in the wells or other vessels is irrelevant. We are only talking about the water in the river.

And finally, Haley concludes his anemic defense by relating arguments used by two apologists. He states,

"Mr. R.S. Poole suggests that only the water that was seen was smitten, that the nation might not perish. Mr. Alexander thinks that 'the water when filtered through the earth on the bank of the river, was restored to its salubrity'. This agrees with the statement that 'all the Egyptians digged round about the river for water to drink' in verse 24."

It's a good thing that Haley says Poole "suggests" and Alexander "thinks," because that's about all their defenses amount to. Poole may "suggest" that "only the water that was seen was smitten," but that is not textually supportable. Verse 20 says *"all the waters that were in the river turned to blood,"* not just most of it. And as far as Alexander's ploy is concerned not only is it not sustainable biblically but the entire river would have had to have been filtered almost instantaneously, since the ma-

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gicians followed with their trick in quick succession.

Why doesn't Haley just skip all this "scientific" falderal and say God turned the river back into water miraculously and instantaneously. After all, since we are playing fast and loose with the preposterous anyway, why not go all out. There is no sense in trying to appear rational when the Bible is at stake.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #667 from DA Continues from Last Month (Part g)

(On page 2 of the 151st issue I quoted Eccle. 1:9 (RSV) which says, *"What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun."* Then I wanted to know how many cities had an atomic bomb dropped on them prior to 1945 and how many people walked on the moon before 1969. Rev. BB provided a weak response and DA now provides even weaker support of Rev. BB by saying),

The Rev. has it all over you. Eccle. (sic) 1:9 is essentially correct in saying *"There is nothing new under the sun."* Your counterexamples only work on the technical level.

Walking on the Moon is a particularly lame example. We haven't been back for 20 years now. May not be back for another 20. It got a lot of press, but what changed? Our heroic endeavors were in fact just ostentatious spending, little different from the Pyramids of Ancient Egypt. Nothing new here but the trappings.

The Atomic bomb is better, but what is unique about it? Never been used before...? True of any weapon for some date or another. A new way to fight a war? True of all sorts of weapons. (The stirrup did wonders for calvery (sic). Gunpowder crunched it, as well as castles. & the airplane did quite a bit too.) Uniqueness lies in how it did it? Also true of all these other weapons....

Editor's Response to Letter #667 (Part g)

You have an amazing facility for focusing on the irrelevant, DA. Eccle. 1:9 doesn't just have it all over you; it's walking on you as well. What does the technical aspect have to do with anything?. Did anyone ever walk on the moon prior to 1969? Yes or no? They either did or they did not. There is no in-between. If they did, then my example is worthless. If they did not, then your explanation is worthless. The lengths to which you apologists will go to defend the indefensible are truly awesome. It is disconcerting to think that we even have to share the same general geographical area with people whose thinking processes are so completely divorced from reality and utterly tendentious.

And who cares how many times we have been back since 1969? That's irrelevant and immaterial also. You say, *"It got a lot of press, but what changed?"* I just told you what changed. Don't you even try to listen? There is none so deaf as he who won't hear! For the first time in history man set foot on the moon. That's what's new! That's what changed!

Then you say, *"Our heroic endeavors were in fact just ostentatious spending little different from the Pyramids of Ancient Egypt."* With all due respect, we are again being showered with more of your irrelevant drivel. What do motives have to do with the issue? I don't care why they went to the moon; the fact is they went, and that's what counts.

As far as your atom bomb explanation is concerned, you appear to have switched sides and joined sanity. What position are you trumpeting? Instead of proving the atomic bomb was not unique, you merely allege that uniqueness is initially applicable to every weapon that has been devised. You say that is *"True of any weapon for some date or another."* Specifically you refer to gun powder, castles, airplanes and stirrups. Precisely! At some time or other they were all new; so I rest my case. Thanks for making it for me. I'm glad you saw the light.

(At this point DA submitted 3 paragraphs that are so rambling, incoherent, and immaterial that it is simply not worth putting our readers through the agony of trying to decipher the mess.)

Letter #667 Continues (Part h)

(On page 4 in the 151st Issue I responded to Rev. BB by saying, "Whether or not God created evil bears directly on his character which, in turn, impacts on the validity and reliability of everything contained in what is supposedly his book. Stated differently, how could a book be perfect, if it arose from an imperfect, evil-creating author?" DA responded by saying--Ed.),

How could a book be perfect, if it arose from an imperfect, evil-creating author? Several ways. You are assuming that evil-creating is an imperfection, which it often is from our biased view. That it is from a perfect view is by no means clear. A painting can easily depict evil without that being deemed a flaw, just as the painting can be flawed without depicting evil....

Editor's Response to Letter #667 (Part h)

Your comparison is not analogous because the painting is a result; not a cause. The painting did not create anything. It did not create the evil depicted in it any more than the evil depicted in it created the painting. The painting and the evil within were created together, unlike God and evil which are supposed to be completely independent. You say, *"A painting can easily depict evil without that being deemed a flaw...."* That's just it. The

painting is *depicting* evil; it is not creating it, as God allegedly is. And the painting is not alleged to be perfect as God is alleged to be.

One of the most serious mistakes made by all religionists, and you are a prime example of same, is that they try to act logical to prove the illogical. Many, especially those in the ultra fundamentalist camp, occasionally go so far as to try to sound logical in order to prove that reason is a nearly worthless medium to rely upon when it comes to analyzing the crucial issues of life. This really came home to me when I read Peter Ruckman's book entitled *Science and Philosophy*. I have never read a book before or since that is so thoroughly anti-intellectual and worthy of the fires of Gehenna. Putting its philosophy into the minds of our youth would be like deadening their cranial nerves to all extra-sensory data--a kind of bloodless lobotomy. Using reason to disprove reason is about as feasible as using water to wash away wetness.

Letter #667 Continues (Part i)

(In the same response I stated Biblical Errancy has never propounded any kind of theology, since the very phrase "logical theology" is an oxymoron. Our philosophy is based on logic and proof; whereas, theology is based on hope and theory. DA responded by saying--Ed.),

In point of fact, BE has (propounded a theology--Ed.), at great length and with more vigor than logic. You can't help it when you propound (sic) on religious topics. A negative theology is still a theology. The distinction ("our philosophy" "theology") is flawed. Theology is a subpart of philosophy, not something in opposition to it.

Editor's Response to Letter #667 (Part i)

Your poor reasoning skills and non sequiturs never cease to amaze me, DA. That makes about as much sense as saying to me, after I have spent a solid hour denouncing fascism in every way imaginable, "Oh, then obviously you must believe in fascism." Apparently you are unable to distinguish a "negative theology" from a negative view of theology. It is not a matter of me having a theology that is essentially negative; it is a matter of me rejecting theology, period. Are you so religiously imbibed that you can't see a major distinction?

And because I said "*Our philosophy is based on logic and proof; whereas, theology is based on hope and theory*" you try to suck me into your religious swamp by saying "*The distinction ("our philosophy" "theology") is flawed. Theology is a subpart of philosophy, not something in opposition to it.*"

We are not talking about philosophy in general because many philosophies are as illogical as theology. We are discussing BE's philosophy in particular, and it is based on logic and proof. In so far as the latter are concerned, theology is a subpart of that wing of philosophy which has little to do with either logic or proof.

Letter #667 Continues (Part j)

(While asking for assistance in playing our tapes, I said, "I have never received any negative feedback, except for some textual comments." In his on-going insidious attempt to undermine this publication and promote its discontinuation DA says--Ed.),

In that case, why bother? The rule of thumb is that if you are not criticized for what you say, you didn't say much. You are arguing here how useful these tapes will be, but your argument in fact suggests they are worthless.

Editor's Response to Letter #667 (Part j)

As usual you got out of my comments whatever suited your purposes and discarded the remainder. What did I say? I said I received negative textual comments and that's more than enough to justify our programs and refute your accusation.

Even more importantly, you say, "The rule of thumb is...." Where did you get that rule? No doubt it's your own creation, since a paucity of criticisms could very well be attributable to the accuracy and invulnerability of the points presented.

And most importantly of all, if you had read the article with greater concern for precision and less for revision, you would have noticed that the entire context of my observations had reference to serious threats and reprisals, not textual, scriptural, or inerrancy matters. But, of course, in true apologetic style you chose to distort as you deemed fit. After all, why be concerned about truth when the credibility of the Bible and Jesus are at stake. Cause supersedes candor.

Letter #667 Continues (Part k)

(On page 3 in the 152nd Issue I noted the conflict between Jesus' comment in Matt. 28:19 ("Go ye therefore and teach all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost") and Paul's assertion in 1 Cor. 1:14, 17 ("I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius. ...For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel"). DA seeks to reconcile this contradiction by saying--Ed.)

There's a conflict? Paul was not present at Matt. 28 and thus you are under the burden of showing that Paul was in fact ordered to baptize. & context also argues against any conflict here. Paul did baptize a little, but he insists he has other duties. & he is thankful he did not baptize more because he fears that might have caused a division in the church.

Editor's Response to Letter #667 (Part k)

It was all I could do to keep from laughing at this reply, DA. So Paul was not present at Matt. 28? Well, I, along with millions of others, wasn't with Moses on Mt. Sinai or with Jesus when he delivered the Sermon on the Mount, so I guess that relieves us of those responsibilities. Don't you think any further ahead than the next sentence?

Then you compounded this nonsense by saying I am under "the burden of showing that Paul was in fact ordered to baptize." What did Jesus say? He told his followers to go and baptize. And who was a more prominent follower of Jesus than Paul?

Context does not abolish the problem by any means. If anything it compounds your dilemma. You contend "Paul did baptize a little" when Paul says in the very verse you are trying to reconcile that Jesus sent him not to baptize. All you are doing is proving that Paul directly defied a specific command of Jesus. And you only bury Paul further by saying Paul "is thankful he did not baptize more" which clearly violates what Jesus ordered. With friends like you Paul need not seek opponents.

As far as having other duties or causing division in the church is concerned, Jesus did not allow for baptismal exceptions in those instances. Where are they delineated in the script? And how do you know Paul was afraid he would divide the church by baptizing? Would you be so kind as to cite chapter and verse for that observation as well?

Letter #667 Concludes (Part I)

(On page 3 of the 152nd Issue I said, "For justice to exist, punishment must fit the crime. No matter how many bad deeds one commits in this world, there is a limit. Yet, hell's punishment is infinitely greater. There is nothing someone could do in the short space of 80 or 90 years that could possibly warrant eternal punishment." DA replies by saying--Ed.),

Quite wrong. One can argue that being stir-fried for the entire period is excessive for winking at a pretty girl, but the mere fact the "crime" happens in a finite period while the punishment is eternal is fully consistent with justice. The simple example is putting money in the bank, or loaning it. The interest on it goes on forever (at least in theory), so you eventually pay or receive an infinite amount of money for a merely finite sum....

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #667 (Part I)

You ought to be in comedy because this is another chuckle-generating reply. I enjoy some of your rationalizations because of the unintended sense of humor attached.

Since when does a crime earn interest? The punishment is to fit the crime, not infinitely exceed it. There is no analogy here whatever. In fact, precisely the opposite is true. For punishment to match the crime, it must be tailored to, and be as specific as, the crime. In no sense can the punishment surpass the crime if justice is to prevail.

As far as your reference to money is concerned, punishment is not administered by signing a blank check in which the amount is to be filled in later. I can only pity any defendant who comes into court and sees you on the bench. He might as well forget about justice. With biblicism presiding, the only thumb involved will be the one under which the defendant is placed.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #676 from JW of Hialeah, Florida

Dear Dennis. In your debate about the parable (or not) of Luke 19:27, you wrote, "*If, in fact, Jesus told people to bring his enemies before him and slay them, his decency and humanity, indeed his credibility itself, is dealt a staggering blow.*"

I do not understand your conjecture. It appears demonstrably clear that if we take it as a parable, Jesus becomes far more atrocious, his decency even more questionable in view of a parable lesson. The credibility of his morals yields a far more staggering blow to Christendom's ethic.

The intent of a NT parable aims at teaching a lesson that its beholders should take seriously. If not, what should we make of the parable about the Good Samaritan where Jesus ends by saying "Go, and do thou likewise" (Lk. 10:37)? Or the parable about the lost coin in Lk. 15:8-10)? Should we chalk up any of Jesus' parables to, "Oh, it's just a parable, we shouldn't take it seriously"? The Parable of the Ten Pounds aims to teach a lesson

about disobeying your "Nobleman" (obviously Jesus meant to put himself as nobleman). Believers can replace "servants" with themselves or someone else, but what could they possibly replace for the conclusion of the lesson: "slay them before me"?

"Slay" means to kill by violent means. Representing "slay" with "kill," "slaughter," "exterminate," "put-down," etc., certainly does not lessen the end result to the enemy.

One could not use milder concepts like "punish" because "punish" and "slay" mean entirely different things. It would also damage Jesus' credibility to suggest that he did not choose the proper parable idea to convey his intent. If he meant "punish" he could have chosen "chastise" or "discipline." etc. But he did not.

If, instead, we take Luke 19:27 as literal instead of parable, then the slaying would have to occur in front of Jesus during his limited physical life. After he died on the cross, an apologist could claim the slayings should have ended at his death. But, as parable, it transcends the physical. It becomes transcendent to Jesus who no longer lives in the physical realm. His presence resides in heaven and in the hearts and souls of all believers. The Bible has a clear message as to where "before me" occurs. For followers to accept the lesson of their Jesus, they would have to slay their enemies before Jesus where He resides in their soul or in heaven! No wonder the Inquisitions and the Crusades occurred.

"Kill them all. God will recognize his own."--said by Arnald-Amalric, 1208 (when asked by the Crusaders what to do with the citizens of Beziers who were a mixture of Catholics and Cathars)....

If we take the entire Bible in context, Jesus' parable certainly agrees with the ordering of slayings by God in the OT. If you add the concept of the Trinity, then you connect Jesus directly with all the slayings of men, women, and children by God-Jesus Almighty. Furthermore, the NT, unmistakably, has Jesus admitting to willful slaying: "I will strike her children dead." (Jesus in Rev. 2:23 NRSV). Certainly Christians should not doubt the will of Jesus, should they?

If an apologist wishes to back out of this problem by saying that Jesus did not intend to put himself as the target of the Nobleman, then the parable becomes even more atrocious. We can then put any "Noblemen" in this context. Imagine dragging the unlawful up to President Clinton and slaying them at his feet; or putting yourself in place of the nobleman and ordering your followers to slay your enemies. No matter which way a believer tries to extricate himself from this difficulty, parable or not, it leads to problems. The only out comes from (asserting--Ed.) that Jesus did not say those words and, indeed, the Bible errs, or perhaps the Christian religion bases itself on unsupported conjectures and deceptions and relies on faith instead of reason and evidence.

Letter #677 from GN of Washington D.C.

Dear Dennis.... I admire you as a person who uses logic and analysis rather than myths and fairy tales to prove his points.... If I am trying to discount the Bible as a book of lies, how would I go about doing so if the Christian I am debating agrees that the Bible is not perfect? Could you give me more verses that show the Bible to be the *inerrant* word of God? Some claim that the Bible is merely man's work, *inspired* by God. Thank you again for your kindness and help.

Editor's Response to Letter #677

Dear GN. Good question! Essentially you are asking me how one should debate liberal Christians or those who do not look upon the Bible as inerrant. As I mentioned long ago, once people leave biblical inerrancy, they can journey down many paths. Before you can expose all of the problems associated with their new approach, you must first determine where they are. Find out if they believe in the Resurrection, Original Sin, the Atonement, the Trinity, miracles, etc. You have to get a feel for their theological and biblical philosophy before you can reveal their new problems. Liberals are all over the place ideologically. So I would be foolish, indeed, if I tried to provide a comprehensive blueprint encompassing all facets of liberal Christian beliefs. During a radio interview many years ago, the host, a United Church of Christ minister, supported me so much that I couldn't help but wonder why he was a minister of the gospel at all. He not only repeatedly backed me up but provided additional information to buttress my points. I am told by those in a position to know that churches and seminaries have many people of like mind. During a TV debate with a catholic priest several years ago, he agreed with so many comments our side made with respect to the Bible that I was tempted to invite him over to sit at our table. Among other things he admitted the book contained fables and folklore and could not be considered inerrant.

As far as specific verses alleging the Bible is inerrant are concerned, 2 Tim. 3:16, 2 Peter 1:21, John 10:35, 1 Cor. 2:13, and John 16:13 are among those most often cited by biblicists. Only the first two, however, are worthy of serious consideration.

Issue #163 Editor: Dennis McKinsey

July 1996

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

REVIEWS

In the Spring Issue of the Christian Research Journal fundamentalist professor Gleason Archer attacked my book in an article entitled *A Summary Critique*. This prompted us to devote the entire April 1996 issue to a critique of his analysis accompanied by a written reply which we sent to the Christian Research Institute. We were told by CRI that our response could be no longer than 200 words, although Archer's article was at least 10 times as long. We reluctantly complied and published our entire reply verbatim in our April issue. Unfortunately, the CRI editorial staff chose to omit the last part of my reply which stated: "

*For those who really desire to know the facts by reading the most comprehensive refutation of the Bible available, I strongly recommend that they not only obtain a copy of **The ENCYCLOPEDIA OF BIBLICAL ERRANCY** from either myself or Prometheus Press but a copy of the April issue of our periodical as well. We can be reached at 2500 Punderson Drive, Hilliard, Ohio 43026 (614) 527-1703."*

In effect, they chose to delete just about anything that would give CRI readers a fix on our location. But just as questionable is the fact that they sent a copy of my reply to Archer and allowed him to insert an answer to my brief response. In other words, he was given exclusive access to my reply and provided time to write a response. Apparently CRI feels my articles should not be allowed to appear unopposed. When I called CRI to register my disgruntlement and request an opportunity to respond to what Archer said with respect to my observations, I was told by the Managing Editor, Ms. Cogdill, that the dialogue between me and Archer was over as far as CRI's Journal was concerned and that if I wished to converse with him any further I could call his home. I told her that I did not think it was fair for me to be denied an opportunity to reply and she said that their policy has nearly always been to terminate dialogues after the initial responses.

The bottom line is that Archer gets the last word even though he began our exchange. Since he accused my book of being inaccurate in spots, it would only be fair if I were given the last word. After all, isn't the defendant allowed to speak last in a court of law. So Archer spoke first and Archer spoke last and I was allowed to inject whatever I could.

Some readers are probably curious as to what Archer said that irks my ire; so for their benefit here is his verbatim closing statement. *"I can hardly be accused of refusing to touch the arguments found in McKinsey's book, since--as I noted at the end of my review--I have produced an encyclopedia of my own (**An Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties**) that addresses a whole host of those very arguments. Therefore having dealt with such questions at much greater length in book form than I could possibly do in a brief book review, I chose rather to focus on what I consider most noteworthy about McKinsey's treatment of the Bible: his total*

failure to grapple with the absolutely conclusive evidence of hundreds of fulfilled prophecies that--along with other aspects of the biblical record--demonstrate God's complete control of the sweep of history from beginning to end. This evidence completely excludes the possibility of mere human genius in foretelling the future."

Archer's response is deficient in two major respects. First, he says, "*I can hardly be accused of refusing to touch the arguments found in McKinsey's book, since--as I noted at the end of my review--I have produced an encyclopedia of my own.*" In truth, his book barely begins to cope with the incredible number of problems contained within the Bible. Those who doubt the veracity of this observation need only read his work and compare its contents with that which appears in mine.

Anyone who is reasonably well acquainted with my book and this publication should know that I have never focused on individual points or any set of particular

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points to destroy the Bible's credibility. Certainly not! That approach would open me up to such charges as "taking out of context," "ignoring copyist errors," "being too natural," interpreting too literally, being too petty, failing to take account of the cultural milieu of that era, etc. Instead, our approach has always been one of simply burying the opposition in a mountain, an avalanche, a veritable tidal wave of information. The great volume, the sheer magnitude, the overwhelming mass of our evidence is more than enough to dissuade all but intransigent ideologues desperately grasping for supposes, surmises, and suppositions.

Secondly, Archer alleges I failed to "*grapple with the absolutely conclusive evidence of hundreds of fulfilled prophecies.*" Not only does Archer fail to mention the fact that most of the prophecies which he cites to demonstrate biblical prescience were shown to be unreliable in my *Encyclopedia*, but he neglects to note that the entire 15th chapter of my book is devoted to nothing but an exposure of predictions that landed wide of the mark. Apparently he is willing to concede, or does not wish to contest, the accuracy of my observations, but feels they are somehow overshadowed by a number of accurate predictions. I can only assume that he is operating on the premise that a good batting average is sufficient to substantiate perfection. The problem with this approach is that it not only fails to disprove what I have shown but fails to prove what he is alleging. Hardly a formula for perfection! I demonstrated why the prophecies I discussed are deficient, while he failed to corroborate any of his examples. Merely saying they are true doesn't make it so. Even if his prophecies were valid, which they most assuredly are not, the Book would still be far from inerrant and divinely inspired. Until all of the examples mentioned in my book and this newsletter are shown to be invalid, biblical inerrancy will remain a myth. If Archer feels I did not submit a sufficiently large number of bogus prophecies, then he should register his complaint with my publisher. I would have been more than glad to exhaust my reservoir of relevant data, but the book's editors would never have sent a volume of that size to the printer because of the cost involved. In classic apologetic style Archer is desperately trying to focus on those aspects of the Bible which he deems strongest while trying to ignore those parts that are either blatantly false or too weak to defend. And anyone who has done his homework with a reasonable degree of critical analysis and open-mindedness knows that the latter encompass a tremendous percentage of the entire text. People selling something naturally gravitate toward the positive aspects of their product and eschew the negative. That is endemic to all sales.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #678 from MT of Anaheim, California (Part a)

Thank you for your answers in February's edition of Biblical Errancy. If we may continue the dialogue, that would be greatly appreciated....

On page 146 (of your book--Ed.) you state that John 20:9 refers to Jesus rising twice, since it uses the words "*he must rise again from the dead.*" I've consulted other translations, and a Greek interlinear, and the word "again" is not present. If it's only an error in the translation within the KJV, then there's not really an error in the Bible, is there? If this is the case, why didn't you mention this in your book?

Editor's Response to Letter #678 (Part a)

One of the most common errors made by apologetic critics of the King James is their failure to compare it with other versions of Scripture. Rarely is this version out on a limb all by its lonesome as is so commonly alledged by many biblicists. You say you consulted a Greek interlinear and other translations, but did you read the American Standard Version of 1901 or the Bible in Basic English or the Living Bible of 1971 or the New American Standard Version of 1977. As the teen-agers of today would say, I think not. All have the word "again." The ASV and the NASB are especially powerful support for the King James. So now it becomes a question of whose source is more authoritative. Remember what I said long ago? You could be the world's greatest Greek/Hebrew scholar and still find experts disagreeing with your interpretation. If you press your point, instead of reconciling the problem, you will only succeed in proving the verse needs to be expunged from the Bible. That's the best you can hope for. The sentence becomes worthless, because you don't know how it should be translated. And if you purge John 20:9 from the Bible because of diametrically opposed translations, you are going to play havoc with a sizable portion of the entire book. Literally hundreds of verses are translated oppositely by different versions of Scripture. A competitive struggle pitting my scholars and versions against your scholars and versions will encompass the whole enterprise. And in all of this chaos the layman will be left hanging.

Letter #678 Continues (Part b)

Also, on page 297 of your book--*The Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy*--, you state that Ezek. 29:15 contains a false prophecy. The text says "*Egypt shall be the basest of the kingdoms, and neither shall it exalt itself any more above the nations; for I will diminish them, that they shall no more rule over the nations.*" Technically, this is not a false prophecy. First off, your saying that Egypt ruled over the Sudan is saying

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Egypt ruled over a single nation. The prophecy says that they shall no more rule over the nations, plural.

Editor's Response to Letter #678 (Part b)

Aside from the fact that your "first off" is also your "last off," I am having some difficulty understanding why more than one nation is needed. I interpret the verse as saying that Egypt will never again exalt itself over any other nation and by using the word "nations" it

means all nations. If your interpretation were correct, then why would the text say "*they shall no more rule over the nations,*" when they never ruled over the "nations," (plural) to begin with. Of course, if you know of several nations Egypt ruled, then by all means speak up. If you do, however, please be fully cognizant of the fact that that will destroy your original thesis that Egypt did not rule over other nations (plural).

Letter #678 Continues (Part c)

On page 303, you make a point about the "*rivers of Egypt*" in Ezekiel 30:4-16 being a problem. Could this text possibly mean the tributaries of Egypt, within the delta of the Nile? Was there a Hebrew word for tributaries.

Editor's Response to Letter #678 (Part c)

How could you have tributaries within the delta of the Nile. Webster defines a tributary as a stream flowing into a larger one. Water in the delta would be the Nile's own water flowing into the Mediterranean by many channels. Those aren't tributaries.

Secondly, you are asking me if there is a Hebrew word for tributaries? If you will excuse me for saying so, MT, you appear to be on a fishing expedition. You want me to provide you with information to prove your case. You, not I, are obligated to prove there is a Hebrew word for tributaries and, far more importantly, prove that the Nile had tributaries in Egypt.

And finally, even if there were some streams flowing into the Egyptian Nile, you must prove they are rivers, not mere rivulets. A small creek no bigger than a ditch does not constitute a tributary. You have a whole heap of proving to do my friend.

Letter #678 Continues (Part d)

Also, you state other prophecies and claim that they are false, yet their future fulfillment is still possible. For instance, on page 304, in your sixth point, you state there's a false prophecy. What prevents this prophecy from being fulfilled in the future? How do you know that it's false, merely because it hasn't occurred yet? The same goes with points nine, ten and eleven.

Editor's Response to Letter #678 (Part d)

You seem to be saying that the prophecies you are referring to could more accurately be called unfulfilled, rather than false, prophecies. That would be a valid observation if it were not for the fact that you neglected to note my introduction to this material at the bottom of page 303. I stated, "*The third and final category of prophecies are those that have never materialized. Some biblicists, such as those in the Church of Christ, contend that all the prophecies in the OT have already been fulfilled. If so, one cannot help but ask when the following, which have little or no possibility of being fulfilled, occurred.*" These prophecies were discussed because some biblicists contend they have already been fulfilled. Therefore, in so far as these biblicists are concerned they are false since they haven't occurred.

Letter #678 Concludes (Part e)

I'm not an inerrantist, nor am I a Christian, although at one time I was a Fundamentalist type. Right now, I'm agnostic, and though I found many good points in your book, I also found these things as being inaccurate. Thank you in advance for your response.

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #678 (Part e)

Instead of giving me an opportunity to explain these suspected difficulties, you summarized to the jury by saying, "I also found these things as being inaccurate." Always consult both sides before drawing your conclusions. If you had done so, I don't think you would have been so anxious to rush to judgment.

Letter #679 from NB of Tucson, Arizona (Part a)

Dear Dennis. I have some comments re your comments on me in BE #161, but first I'd note that it ill behooves someone to accuse another of "transparent sophistries", when that someone writes sentences like, "My friend, anyone who doesn't read everything with a critical eye is opening themselves (sic) up to agony galore (p. 161-2, response to Letter #667): You claim to know a lot of Hebrew and Greek, but did you ever learn elementary English grammar?

Editor's Response to Letter #679 (Part a)

Your correction of my sentence is duly noted, but did it have to be done in such a derogatory manner? We have made proofreading errors in the past and will probably do so again. We aren't perfect and have never claimed to be such. Speaking of someone accusing others of being imperfect, when did I ever say that I "know a lot of Hebrew and Greek"? Could you cite chapter and verse for that observation? Now who is being imperfect? I have never engaged in the linguistic approach because it is not going to bear anywhere near the amount of fruit its supporters anticipate. Remember what I said about being the world's greatest Greek/Hebrew scholar?

Letter #679 Continues (Part b)

In re your comments on me in the middle of the right-hand column of page 161-4, you still haven't corrected the incorrect citations you gave for 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles in BE #158-5, but I'll let that pass. If you don't know the distinction between a singular and a plural English pronoun, I guess it's too much to ask that you correctly give the correct Biblical reference when you comment on my letter.

Editor's Response to Letter #679 (Part b)

I think the wound on your ego accounts for more of these corrections than anything else. You say I "still haven't corrected the incorrect citations" I gave for 1 Kings and 2 Chronicles in BE #158-5." To begin with, this is the first time it has come to my attention.

Secondly, in so far as I can determine only one mistake is involved. Second Chronicles 45:5 should have been 2 Chron. 4:5. Where are the incorrect "citations" (plural).

Letter #679 Continues (Part c)

...Back to page 161-4, whether or not the numbers in Hebrew were spelled out or not, you failed to note that 1 Kings 7:26, which makes the "2000-bath" assertion, is missing

altogether from the Septuagint. You might at least have commented on why the Jewish scholars who compiled the Septuagint chose to omit this verse from the older texts. You didn't.

Editor's Response to Letter #679 (Part c)

The Septuagint is nothing more than a translation like the King James, the NASB and hundreds of other versions. If I make this kind of notation with respect to the Septuagint, I might as well make it with respect to hundreds of others as well. Where would this stop? Are you saying the Septuagint is somehow more authoritative than any other translation and deserves special consideration? If so, upon what basis are you making this judgment? The reference to 2,000 baths is in the Jewish Masoretic Text. Should I have noted that?

Letter #679 Continues (Part d)

Now, how about 1 Cor. 10:8, in which Paul said (NIV): *"We should not commit sexual immorality, as some of them did--and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died"*. The reference is to Num. 25:9, which says: *"but those who died in the plague numbered 24,000"* ...Some interpreters have tried to reconcile this by asserting that 23,000 was the number of those who died *"in one day"*, while the total number of deaths in the plague was 24,000. It hardly seems like that if *"only"* 24,000 people died *"in the plague"*, then 23,000 of them would have died *"in one day"*. You may have commented on this in some previous issue of BE, but if so, I am not aware of it. In any case, would you say that Paul couldn't read the Hebrew (even though he wrote in Greek, so as to reach his audience-the Corinthians-directly)? Or might it just be possible that even in transcribing Hebrew numbers, spelled out or not, some confusion might have occurred over the centuries as to which Hebrew letter was meant?

Editor's Response to Letter #679 (Part d)

You are supporting my observation, NB, when you say that *"It hardly seems like that if 'only' 24,000 people died 'in the plague', then 23,000 of them would have died 'in one day'."* I made that very point many moons ago. Welcome to the world of sensibleness.

As far as the initial part of your "explanation" is concerned you appear to be justifying a contradiction rather than reconciling it. If Paul made a mistake because he couldn't read Hebrew, then that's his problem, not that of his critics, and he's destroyed biblical inerrancy.

The second part of your explanation is nothing more than an exhumation of the old copyist defense which has been covered ad nauseum in prior issues. I would urge you to read the back issues of BE that focus on this ploy and effectively decimate its viability.

Letter #679 Continues (Part e)

Also, what then about Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 6? The NIV uses Arabic numerals for both of these, and some differences between these has been noted. Hardly strange, considering that the latter was written about a century after the former. There are many numbers involved here, and I have never claimed that the scribes, who were responsible for copying the manuscripts and making sure that the copies were correct, were divinely protected from error, as the Roman Catholic Church claims of the Pope when he speaks on a matter of

faith and morals. So it is quite possible that (to use the passive voice so favored of Washington bureaucrats) "mistakes were made".

Editor's Response to Letter #679 (Part e)

Remember when you said, " *If you don't know the distinction between a singular and a plural English pronoun, I guess it's too much to ask that you correctly give the correct Biblical reference when you comment on my letter?*" Well, then, is it too much to ask that I request the same accuracy of you? After all, turn about is fair play. The conflicts to which you are referring are between Ezra 2 and Neh. 7 not Ezra 2 and Neh. 6. You'd do well to heed your own advice.

Secondly, as far as Nehemiah being written about 100 years after Ezra is concerned, that would be of no consequence if it were a thousand years. The fact is that the numbers are contradictory and they remain contradictory until you can prove that that is not how they were originally written. And how can you find out if they were written that way in the original? You can't, because the original no longer exists. You are relying very heavily upon the copyist defense and it is not going to bail out the leaking lifeboat if that is what you are counting on.

If, on the other hand, you concede that one of the figures is false and should be changed so as to match the other, then you are faced with the impossibility of deciding which is the incorrect figure. Your only possible escape is to expunge both verses from the Bible because they are contradictory and you have no way of telling which is correct. And, as I told MT earlier, if all conflicting verses are treated in this manner, then you are going to have to expunge, delete, and destroy a sizable portion of the entire Book. The purge will be awesome. If you decide to take this path, I would strongly recommend reading all 162 issues of this publication to find what needs to be eliminated. Happy researching and be sure to buy plenty of No-Doze.

Letter #679 Concludes (Part f)

Anyway to assert that everything in the Bible is false because there is a discrepancy between 2000 and 3000 "baths" is like saying that the Titanic had a problem with a few of its rivets.

Well, at least, you credit me with being "somewhat correct". I wonder if that's something like being "somewhat pregnant"?

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #679 (Part f)

I would challenge you to show me anywhere in the entire history of this periodical that I ever asserted "*that everything in the Bible is false because there is a discrepancy between 2000 and 3000 'baths'*" ? With all due respect, NB, that comment reeks with ignorance. Who on earth with a scintilla of sanity would say that an entire book is false because one contradiction is contained therein?

Moreover, you definitely need to read what I said in the first column of page 2 of this issue regarding Archer's attack on my response to him. Remember my reference to words like "avalanche," "mountain," and "tidal wave"?

The problem with the Titanic was not the absence of a few rivets but the removal of much of an entire side. And that is about the same condition in which the Bible finds itself. Nearly one half of the book is destroying the validity of the other half.

And finally you say, "I wonder if that's something like being 'somewhat pregnant'?" No, it's more like being somewhat healthy. Some organs feel fine while many you feel like doing without.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #680 from SB of Los Angeles, California

Dear Dennis. ...I hope to eventually read all the back issues as I have the time. As I mentioned in an earlier letter, I am a recent convert to a religion-free life. I now subscribe to several free-thinking newsletters and believe BE is by far the most informative, direct, and focused in exposing the Bible for the absurd nonsense that it is.

Editor's Response to Letter #680

Dear SB. We appreciate your generous comments and would suggest that you also look into *The Skeptical Review* which is published by a gentleman and a scholar, former fundamentalist preacher Farrell Till (P.O. Box 707 Canton, Illinois 61520-0717 (309) 647-4764. It is an excellent critique of the Bible that adheres to a format very similar to ours.

Letter #681 from WB of Waterloo, Iowa

Dear Mr. McKinsey.... A little commentary: One is always being told that god is omniscient. If this is so, then wouldn't this imply that everything has already happened, being it is knowable? Would this not reduce us to a trolley car status in that we can only go where the track leads and that no decision was actually made by us? In effect, the movie has already been made, all dialogue has been said, all actions completed.

Editor's Response to Letter #681

Dear WB. You are relating the old free will versus determinism problem which I struggled with for so many years as a youngster. It is not only an inescapable enigma as long as one postulates a god but a dilemma without a resolution. I don't think, however, that it means everything has already occurred, only that what will occur has already been fixed.

Letter #682 from DW of Saskatoon, Canada

Dear Mr. McKinsey. A friend loaned me your Biblical Errancy tapes (the first five?) which I have copied. Would you grant me permission to try to get them shown on the local television station? They are excellent and should be shared with the community.

At the risk of being considered critical of such excellent tapes, do you have an index for these tapes. It would be so handy to refer to various topics like Noah's Ark or the controversial coming of Christ without having to go through the whole collection again. If such reference is available, I would be pleased to reimburse you for sending it to me. Please send me your newsletter and I would be happy to subscribe.

I see in one of your tapes that you do not consider yourself an atheist. At the risk of quibbling, and this is just a quibble, do you consider yourself an atheist as far as the tooth fairy goes. If you don't believe either story, what is the difference? While I will entertain any evidence for a divine entity, I order my life as if there were none and, hence, for me an atheist is the correct label for a person who does that. Thank you again for your excellent work. I hope to hear from you soon.

Editor's Response to Letter #682

Dear DW. Your compliments are most appreciated. As far as playing our video tapes is concerned, you not only have my permission but my encouragement. By all means proceed as you deem appropriate.

As of now we have no index of our tapes, but I intend to compile one eventually.

Although your question with respect to atheism is somewhat nebulous, I think you are asking me if I put God in the same category as the tooth-fairy. My position on the existence of an alleged God has been stated many times. Those who bring up the idea are obligated to prove its valid; I am not required to prove it's not. And until evidence is forthcoming, there is no reason to place any reliance on its reality. Unlike most atheists, I am not saying there is no god; all I am saying is that theists have not proved there is.

Letter #683 from DW of Trotwood, Ohio

Please send me all information available about your Wednesday TV series Biblical Errancy Commentary. Are reprints of the programs available? I enjoy your TV program very much.

Editor's Response to Letter #683

Dear DW. You are living proof that our TV programs are not only needed and effective but are reaching people who would not otherwise be aware of the tremendous number of problems within the Bible. People such as yourself prove that our programs should be played in as many areas as is possible. All we need are those willing to help. I suspect that more people are viewing our programs than we realize, although that does not necessarily mean they agree with everything being said. But they are willing to give us a hearing and at this stage of the game that's progress.

EDITOR'S NOTE: While driving in my car several weeks ago I happened to hear a report on National Public Radio that Florida's governor was about to make a decision regarding prayer in the state's schools. Because that is a rather common occurrence these days, I didn't find that nearly as disturbing as a subsequent comment made by one of the leaders of the Christian Coalition. While explaining his position he said, "*The Constitution provides freedom of religion BUT NOT FREEDOM FROM RELIGION.*" Normally I don't comment on extrabiblical current affairs but that statement is just too sinister, too potent, too revealing, to allow to proceed unchallenged. If that is the philosophy that is gaining ascendancy among the nation's fundamentalists and evangelicals, then the seriousness of what we have been saying over the years and the importance of this publication are undoubtedly being borne out. That is religion on the offensive, make no mistake about it. That is a sophisticated and surreptitious way of saying, "*You are going to have religion in general and the Bible in particular crammed down your throats whether you like it or not.*" Perhaps the spokesperson for the Christian Coalition was only speaking for himself. But I

don't think so. More than likely this individual inadvertently exposed the contents of a Pandora's Box which increasing numbers of fundamentalists are assembling in reserve for society at large and carefully keeping out of public view.

And to add insult to injury, very recently members of the largest protestant organization in the United States, the 15,000,000 member avowedly fundamentalist Southern Baptist denomination, voted at their national convention to institute an assertive program to convert Jews to Christianity.

If Freedom from Religion is not endemic to the Bill of Rights, and the Supreme Court should ever so decide, an aura of religious intolerance, denunciation, aggression and even suppression could begin to cover this nation like that fog, so vividly portrayed in the movie "The Ten Commandments," crept in over the land of Egypt when the Pharaoh refused to release the Hebrews.

Issue #164 Editor: Dennis McKinsey

Aug. 1996

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

COMMENTARY

This issue will continue our on-going policy of devoting an entire issue to letters from our readers.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #684 from JB of Fort Lauderdale, Florida (Part a)

(About a year ago JB read our pamphlet entitled JESUS CHRIST IS THE ANSWER?. Like several individuals before him, he decided to write an itemized critique which is preceded by the following introduction--Ed.)

Dear Mr. MacKenzie (sic)

Just a quick note to say hello and let you know that I enjoyed our brief chat last week on the phone. I really appreciate your taking the time to make sure that I received the material concerning your "ministry."

I must say that it has helped me to "dig deeper into many areas of scripture that I have taken for granted or never knew that anyone had a problem with. I will confess that there are some very difficult passages and apparent contradictions. On the other hand, I think many of them can be reasonably explained. Others will remain "in the dark" but I don't think that means there isn't an explanation. Then there are others that only God knows and has not revealed.... I have enclosed my responses to your material....

(Question #1 on the pamphlet is: While on the cross, Jesus said, "*My God, My God, why has thou forsaken Me*" (Mark 15:34). How could Jesus be our savior when he couldn't even save himself? Those aren't the words of a man voluntarily dying for our sins, those are the words of a man who can think of a hundred places he would rather be. JB's response is--Ed.),

Jesus never intended to save Himself. Could he not have summoned legions of angels to save Him? (Matt 26:53). Christ's mission was clear: "*The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many.*" (Matt. 20:28). Atheists don't understand that, as a human being, Christ was subjected to all the pain and anguish that we mortals are subjected to. No doubt, there was much anguish in Christ's soul over what

He knew He had to do. Yet, He did it all...because He knew that was God's plan of salvation for the billions of people who would accept it.

Editor's Response to Letter #684 (Part a)

Rather than answering the question, JB, you gave me a Sunday School lesson. If Jesus never intended to save himself, then why is he yelling, "Let me out of here. Why have you forsaken me?" (paraphrasing). That sounds exactly like a man who is trying to save his own skin rather than donate it to others. You quote Matt. 20:28 to prove that he came to give his life for many, while completely discounting what he is saying in Mark 15:34. Let's be reasonable. Would he have used those words if that were his intent.

You say "*Atheists don't understand that, as a human being, Christ was subjected to all the pain and anguish that we mortals are subjected to.*" But that's extraneous to the issue. We aren't concerned with the degree of pain involved; we are concerned with his intent, his willingness to undergo what is occurring. You have furtively changed the issue. He isn't complaining

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about the amount of anguish involved; he's protesting about being required to die at all. He's objecting to being on the cross to begin with

You say "*He did it all...because He knew that was God's plan of salvation.*" I know the text says he did it; that's of no concern. Nor is why he did it of any import.. That's not the issue either. The question is: Did he do it voluntarily; that's the bone of contention. And you haven't yet provided a good explanation of why he would have said what he did if he were doing it voluntarily, indeed gladly.

Incidentally, please don't refer to what I am doing as a "ministry." You probably meant no harm, but that word carries definite religious baggage and implies we are somehow serving religion/superstition, an allegation I find utterly anathema.

Letter #684 Continues (Part b)

(Question #3 on the pamphlet is: Except for those of biased Christian writers, there isn't one writing outside the Bible in all of ancient history that refers to Jesus of Nazareth . JB's response is--Ed.),

The most widely read and appreciated book ever written is all you need. It is called the Word of God. What more do you want? The scarcity of books that refer to Christ is not a test of the reality of His existence. Biased Christian writers? You mean like those biased historical revisionists who want no vestige of Christ to remain?

Editor's Response to Letter #684 (Part b)

So "*the most widely read and appreciated book ever written*" is all I need?" I am not really sure I need to respond, since you appear to have opted for verbal hari-kari. I didn't know that degree of accuracy is directly proportional to degree of popularity. A lot of novels, magazines and other religious books must be fountains of truth in your eyes. If accuracy is proportional to popularity, then the Koran and other religious writings must have a significant degree of credibility from your perspective. All you are saying is that you don't

really care how accurate a writing is as long as it's the most popular. You have allowed emotion, feeling, and desire to supplant logic, reason, and evidence.

When you say "*It is called the Word of God. What more do you want?*" the obvious reply is: I'd like some proof. Is that asking too much? That may be what it's called, but that doesn't make it so.

Your scenario seems to imply that if sacred books in other religions throughout the world relate ancient stories of their divine heroes and no other records exist of these heroes, they are authentic as long as they have a mass following.

You say, "*The scarcity of books that refer to Christ is not a test of the reality of His existence.*" Nobody said it was. But it is certainly a giant stride in that direction. The conclusion may not be an air-tight cinch, but it's a close approximation.

And then you say, "*Biased Christian writers? You mean like those biased historical revisionists who want no vestige of Christ to remain?*" I am not sure whom you are referring to, although I assume it's members of the Jesus Seminar. I am in no position to speak for them but only for myself. However, I do think I can safely say that your assertion that they want "*no vestige of Christ to remain*" is a gross distortion. From what I have heard, the Seminar is essentially a body of liberal Christians, some of whom are ministers. But that's immaterial since we are off the topic anyway.

Letter #684 Continues (Part c)

(Question #4 on the pamphlet is: Isn't Jesus a false prophet since he wrongly predicted in Matt. 12:40 that he would be buried 3 days and 3 nights as Jonah was in the whale 3 days and 3 nights? Friday afternoon to Sunday morning is only one and a half days. JB's response is--Ed.),

No Jesus isn't a false prophet. Any part of a day in those times was considered as "a day" (Ester 4:16, 5:1). The day, or any part of it, was more like a time unit, or diurnal period. When you were born, you weren't born in a full day, but only a small portion of that day. Yet, that small portion is called your birthDAY. The portion of Friday to Saturday, was considered one day. Saturday was another day. And the portion of Sunday that He was raised was the third day. Friday, Saturday and Sunday all have a "night and day." Therefore, Jesus was in the grave "3 days and 3 nights."

Editor's Response to Letter #684 (Part c)

Unfortunately you did not heed the advice I offered a long time ago. I suggested that potential critics read our back issues before submitting a resolution to any problem, because more often than not they will be saved time, effort and embarrassment.. We addressed this response long ago and you appear to have been absent.

Jesus was a false prophet because 2 or 3 hours would hardly comprise a day as you are implying. If Jesus had said he would be in the grave for one day, would you contend that the prophecy had been fulfilled after he had been in the grave for only 2 or 3 hours or maybe 10 minutes? I think not. Yet, that is the essence of your argument. It said 3 days.

But even more important is the fact that the prophecy said three days and 3 NIGHTS. Three nights do not lie between Friday afternoon and Sunday morning.

You say, "Friday, Saturday and Sunday all have a "night and day." I see nothing in Scripture about him being in the grave Sunday night. If you insist on using the Jewish calendar in which a new day begins a 6 in

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the evening and assert Sunday evening comprises the

period from 6 pm Saturday to Sunday morning, then that eliminates Friday night which begins as 6 pm on Thursday and ends Friday morning. The crucifixion and internment of Jesus did not occur until Friday after

noon. Either way you are trapped. You should have read our back issues or at least my book

Letter #684 Continues (Part d)

(Question #6 on the pamphlet is: How could Jesus be our model of sinless perfection when He denies moral perfection in Matt. 19:17: "And Jesus said unto him, 'Why callest thou me good? There is none good

but one, that is God." JB's response is--Ed.),

He was not denying moral perfection, rather affirming His Deity. In Mark 10:17 the man refers to Jesus as "Good Master." Christ responds that there is only One who is good, and that is God alone. So Christ is either God, or not good. Indeed, He is both.

Editor's Response to Letter #684 (Part d)

How's that! Run that by me again! You say he is not denying moral perfection and yet he says, "Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is God." I have probably read that verse 30 times and I keep reaching the same conclusion. He is saying he is not good, at least he does not measure up to the perfection of God.

And you top this off with a real jaw dropper by saying, "So Christ is either God, or not good. Indeed, He is both." So he is God but he is not good. How could something be god and not good? How can god not be good and still be god? That goes a long way toward destroying the very definition of god. You might want to think this one through some more.

Letter #684 Continues (Part e)

(Question #7 on the pamphlet is: In 1 Cor. 1:17 ["For Christ sent me [Paul] not to baptize but to preach the gospel"] Paul said Jesus was wrong when he said in Matt. 28:19, "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them...." So how could Jesus be the fountain of wisdom?. JB's response is--Ed.),

The command of Matt. 28:19 was given to the twelve but not limited to them. The NT clearly teaches that the Church is made up of individuals who perform different functions. Baptism is an ordination that can be performed by any Christian. Paul's ministry did not include baptisms, probably because he was too busy.

Editor's Response to Letter #684 (Part e)

You begin by saying, *"The command of Matt. 28:19 was given to the twelve but not limited to them."* Precisely! It extended to Paul as well. Thanks for the assistance. After this gratuitous admission, you then try to reverse direction by saying Paul was not meant to be included in the Matt. 28:19 instruction. He wasn't? Show me where that is stated in scripture. Jesus gave a command to ALL of his followers in Matt. 28:19, not just those he was addressing at that particular moment, which you readily concede. Just because *"the Church is made up of individuals who perform different functions"* does not mean anyone is exempt from this particular function. Where did Jesus specifically assign a particular or limited group of people to be the only baptizers? No, my friend, you have a clash between Jesus and Paul, and this is not the only time their views diverged

And what do you mean by saying he was too busy? Too busy to perform one of the most important rituals in Christianity? Indeed, for some Christians, baptism is mandatory for salvation. Yet, Paul is too busy?

Letter #684 Continues (Part f)

(Question #12 on the pamphlet is: In John 3:13 [*"And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man...."*]) Jesus erred because 2 Kings 2:11 [*"...and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven"*] shows Elijah went earlier. JB's response is--Ed.),

Elijah did not 'originate' from heaven. Although he was taken up into heaven and appeared with Moses at the transfiguration of Christ, this verse deals specifically with Christ. Notice the order of Jesus' wording: Nobody has gone up into heaven who didn't come from there in the first place. Elijah went up to heaven, but he didn't come from there.

Editor's Response to Letter #684 (Part f)

Don't try to change the script. Nothing is said in regard to where Elijah originated. That isn't a consideration. Jesus is merely identifying whom he is referring to, when he says *"but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man."* Jesus is not saying *"nobody has gone up into heaven who didn't come from there in the first place."* Specifically the text says *"but he"* not *"who didn't."* Even clearer is the NIV which says, *"No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven"*.

But even more importantly, even if it did say *"Nobody has gone up into heaven who didn't come from there in the first place"* it would be patently false, because 2 Kings just told you that *"Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven."* and you admitted he did not come from there in the first place.

Succinctly stated, your problem is this. You said nobody has gone into heaven who didn't come from there in the first place. You admitted Elijah went to heaven. Therefore Elijah must have come from there in the first place according to you. But then you said, *"he didn't come from there."* You're contradicting yourself. You might want to think this one through again also.

Letter #684 Continues (Part g)

(Question #14 on the pamphlet is: Jesus told us to "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you" but ignored his own advice by repeatedly denouncing his opposition. Matt. 23:17 (*"Ye fools and blind"*), Matt. 12:34 (*"O generation of vipers"*), and Matt. 23:17

("...hypocrites...ye are like unto whited sepulchers....") are excellent examples of hypocrisy. JB's response is--Ed.),

Christ loved everyone, but did not withhold verbal scoldings at the religious hypocrites of His day. The very people whom He came to redeem turned against Him with threats, accusations and "crucify Him, crucify Him.".... The verbal thrashings given by Jesus were deserved, but He still loved them.

Editor's Response to Letter #684 (Part g)

Does calling people the kind of names Jesus used sound like love to you? I assume you love your children, if you have any. Would you call them "fools, " "hypocrites," and "vipers"? Those aren't the words of a caring, loving and endearing parent.

Even more decisive is the fact that Jesus said you should bless your enemies. I can't help but notice how you dodged the word "bless" and focused on the word "love," because you think you can make an argument that he loved them all the time he was scolding them. But in no way could those words be deemed any sort of blessing. Jesus is cursing his opponents; he's not blessing them. He is ignoring his own advice.

Letter #684 Continues (Part h)

(Question #17 on the pamphlet is: Jesus told a man in Mark 8:34 that *"whoever will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me."* What cross? He hadn't died on the cross yet. There was nothing to take up. That man would have had no idea what he was talking about. JB's response is--Ed.),

At the time, it is probably true that nobody had any idea what Christ was talking about. Following His crucifixion, and especially pentecost, it came to have special meaning. To follow Christ will mean "suffering" to varying degrees, even death on a cross as Peter experienced. Today, many Christians have paid the price of discipleship with their lives. The cross is a symbol of suffering for what you firmly believe in. In this case, it is Christ.

Editor's Response to Letter #684 (Part h)

You begin by stating *"At the time, it is probably true that nobody had any idea what Christ was talking about."* That isn't a refutation, but a confirmation, of my point. Oh if only more apologetic replies were that painless, honest, and quick. Reminds me of a sign a supervisor I know has on her office door: "Save time; see it my way." Your reference to pentecost and the period following the Crucifixion are irrelevant to my question and need not be discussed.

But after your admission you revert to form with a digressive reference to alleged Christian martyrs. Can you prove Peter died on a cross? Do you have any biblical data to that effect? If so, by all means please come forward.

And from whence comes your extrabiblical assertion that *"today, many Christians have paid the price of discipleship with their lives."* Could you cite some examples of where innocent Christians have recently paid with their lives for being disciples?

Letter #684 Continues (Part i)

(Question #18 on the pamphlet is: In Mark 10:19 Jesus told a man to follow the commandments. Yet, one of those listed by Jesus was 'defraud not,' which is not even an OT commandment. JB's response is--Ed.),

"Defraud not ' is certainly not a commandment. But Christ was merely 'elaborating' by citing fraud as a sin whose roots can be associated with stealing, false testimony and covetting. Besides, why should Jesus not have the freedom to speak His mind when discussing such things as the commandments? If He wanted to use 'fraud' to help make His point, what is wrong with that?

Editor's Response to Letter #684 (Part i)

You begin by saying, "*Defraud not is certainly not a commandment.*" and with that I am tempted to rest my case. But I'll string along. Then you say "*Christ was merely 'elaborating' by citing fraud as a sin whose roots can be associated with stealing, false testimony and coveting.*" No he wasn't. Why? Because Mark 10:19 says, "*Thou knowest the commandments, Do not commit adultery, Do not kill. Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Defraud not, Honor thy father and mother.*" This clearly shows "defraud not" being listed as a separate commandment. It is not being used to explain or elaborate on stealing, false testimony, or coveting any more than the latter are being used to clarify it.

I have no problem with Jesus speaking his mind or making his point. But when he says "Defraud Not" is a commandment, he is engaged in prevarication to put it mildly.

Letter #684 Continues (Part j)

(Question #20 on the pamphlet is: In Luke 23:43 Jesus said to the thief on the cross, "*Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise.*" But how could they have been together in paradise that day if Jesus lay in the tomb for

3 days. JB's response is--Ed.),

This is probably one of the toughest things to explain. With Christ, you're dealing with the eternal God-man. As God, Jesus could never die. As man,

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he did. A difficult thing to understand. As God, the thief would join Him in "paradise." This may be very simplistic, but I will dig into this one much deeper.

Editor's Response to Letter #684 (Part j)

I wouldn't say you are going to dig into this as much as be buried by it. This is the old Trinitarian double talk which is not so much difficult to understand as it is impossible. It's an excellent example of what I have always referred to as the Great Back door, an escape hatch. When the gospels' contradictions finally become unbearable, apologists will grab for that final reconciliation of all contradictions by saying it can be both simultaneously. You can have an all-black white horse. You can have an imperfect perfect being. You can even have an omnipotent being who can create another being stronger than himself. Once you start down this cul de sac any concept can be deemed valid and at that point rational discussion becomes superfluous. Jesus has taken over.

Letter #684 Concludes (Part k)

(Question #22 on the pamphlet is: In Matt. 15:21 Jesus said, "*I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel,*" but later told his followers to "*Go ye therefore, and teach all nations*" (Matt. 28:19). To whom, then, are we to go? Only to the Jews or everyone? JB's response is--Ed.),

Jesus was sent only to His people, the "*lost sheep of Israel.*" The ultimate mission for souls was global as commanded by Christ. Today, the gospel is being preached in all nations. The gospel started in Judea, Samaria and then to the world.

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #684 (Part k)

Jesus said he was sent only to his people. He was only supposed to go to the "*lost sheep of the house of Israel.*" That was his mission as he saw it. Are you saying he was only applying that to himself? Only He was supposed to go to the Lost Sheep, while all of his followers were to go into all the world and preach to everyone? Is that your point? When he says "*I am not sent*" to whom does the "I" refer? Does it refer to his message? If so, then he is not telling the truth because he later said his message was to be taken unto all the world. Or does the "I" refer to him personally which would sound ridiculous because that would mean his message and all his followers are to go into all the world while he personally is going to the Israelites only.

You say, "*The ultimate mission for souls was global as commanded by Christ.*" What ultimate mission? You mean the mission changed?

To return to the original question, you say "*The gospel started in Judea, Samaria and then to the world.*" How could that be when Jesus said "*I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.*" Why are missionaries from many churches, including your own, I would presume, traveling around the world in direct defiance of Christ's instructions?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #685 from FN of Huntsville, Texas

Dear Dennis. I am a freethinker incarcerated in the Texas penal system which doesn't pay its inmates. We are provided the basics only, except for orthodox religious literature. Then we are inundated daily with a soul-ful! All secular freethought or truth has to be purchased or donated from an outside source. I am unable to compensate you at this time.... Any issue outdated or otherwise in any condition of your "Biblical Errancy" publication will be read and shared with the few freethinkers here. Also any book like your "Encyclopedia"...would be appreciated. Please note that all packages must be clearly marked from "Biblical Errancy" and return address--no packages from individuals are allowed.

"Hands that help are far better than lips that pray"--Robert Ingersoll.

Editor's Response to Letter #685

Dear FN. Sounds like you are having religion rammed down your throat. As I noted in our last issue, if one of the heads of the Christian Coalition has his way, we could all be headed toward the condition in which you now reside. We sympathize with your plight and for that reason have decided to give you a six month subscription gratis.

Letter #686 from LH of Sherman Oaks, California

Dear Mr. McKinsey. I am the proud owner of a recently purchased copy of your *Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy*. The other evening I was able to spend a very enjoyable hour perusing the volume exploring the Bibliography, Index, and got to read the first 20 pages or so. I look forward to having the leisure time to be able to digest your wonderful book in its entirety!

I am a book collector as well as a reader and have a solid collection of Freethought books. I'm also a bit of a Thomas Paine student and my academic background is in history. I'm certainly weak on what's in the Bible, but I did read about half of the OT and chapters here and there in the four Gospels...35 years ago! I also note the seemingly fair review by Bill Lindley in the Truth Seeker. My very best wishes for *lots* of sales!

The Inerrancy section of chapter one states the crux (of the matter--Ed.). "How do you know what is true e when you begin to admit certain parts are false." Amazing that such a "leaky boat" is still afloat! On page 18 you quote Mr. Golding's synopsis of the process by which the Bible was formed. I'd like to submit to you that the reason the synopsis is "accurate and succinct" is because the passages quoted are taken almost verbatim from Part I of Paine's *Age of Reason*! Unless he credits Paine later, he is probably just unaware of his source....

Lastly, because of my historical background, I'd like to ask if fellow "freethinkers" have ever read Gibbon's marvelous two chapters on Christianity (#'s 15 and 16 of *The Decline and Fall*)? If you've somehow missed them you're in for a treat. Once you get used to the overlong sentence structure and the devastating ironic tone it's a joy to read....

My remarks are to you. I'm sure fundamentalists wouldn't be the least bit concerned with what Gibbon had to say!

P.S. Fortunately, before sending my letter I took the time to read a good part of your chapter 25 regarding tactics and the weakness of the "historical" approach in debating religionists and fundamentalists. I completely agree. Some of your remarks in Chapter 25 bring to mind one of my favorite quotes from J.M. Robertson in *The Dynamics of Religion* on page 61 where he says, "It is one of the stock theorems of modern Christian scholarship that no one is entitled to reject the NT without a good knowledge of Greek, though all are entitled to believe it without knowing one Greek letter from another and all are free to reject the Koran without having so much as seen a letter of Arabic.

Editor's Response to Letter #686

I appreciate your kind comments and especially like the poignant observation by Robertson. A real backslapper, isn't it! Too bad there are so many biblicists who can't sit back and see what is so easily comprehended by outside objectivists.

Letter #687 from DR of Rock Hill, South Carolina

Dear Dennis. In the Spring Issue of the Christian Research Journal I noticed your review of Gleason Archer's review of your book. In your letter you said the April 1996 issue of BE will be a refutation of his review. I would like to obtain a copy of the April issue if you have any left. I noticed CRI Journal did not have your mailing address so their readers could order a copy!

Editor's Response to Letter #687

Dear DR. I noticed that too. Got any theories on why? I do.

Letter #688 from JK of Lynn, Indiana

Sir... I like the #160 April issue very much. You sure knocked the props out from under this con artist, so called professor emeritus, Gleason Archer. You put him in the dung pile where his kind belongs. But like all scam artists of his stripe they have to protect their con game even to stooping to deception and subterfuge, which is their stock in trade. Keep up your good work. Maybe someday, I hope soon, the ignorant, superstitious people will open their eyes and see those religious hucksters for what they really are.

Letter #689 from GF of Mt. Prospect, Illinois

Dear Dennis. I am in the process of acquiring all BE back issues. Would that they were available half a lifetime ago when I spent 8 years in a Roman Catholic seminary.

EDITOR'S NOTE: For those people still having trouble getting through to us by E-mail our correct address is: KLO_McKinsey@K12.MEC.Ohio.gov

We are still seeking volunteers willing to play our video tapes on their local cable access channels. We now have 60 one half hour programs available.

Issue #165 Editor: Dennis McKinsey

Sept. 1996

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

COMMENTARY

We recently received a letter from a long time supporter in Louisiana who felt obliged to comment on what he felt was a change in approach on my part. Because of his comments I climbed upon a soap box and proceeded to write a response that was considerably longer than normal. This, in turn, prompted me to conclude that his observations would be addressed more appropriately in a commentary rather than a letter to the editor section. In any event, he stated,

"Allow me a thought on strategy. I believe I detect a new note of aggressiveness that I fear may prove counter productive. Religious superstitions are and will die of their own weight over a period of time. Whether this period of time is decades, centuries, or millennia I don't know but their demise is a certainty as long as scientific and rational thought progresses. Your own scholarly contribution is not yet fully appreciated but I have no doubt it will be. I just hope scientific and rational thought progresses fast enough for you to enjoy the accolades. Alas, I doubt it. But I have no doubt that the best strategy to convince others of the correctness of your position is to adopt a passive rather than an aggressive stance. Aggressiveness will not convince those who can not be convinced and will only further steel them and give them emotional ammunition in protecting the lord, the savior, et Al. So a strategy of foregoing aggressiveness loses nothing with them. However, aggressiveness may alienate some with the potential to be persuaded. They may well at first blush interpret aggressiveness as evilness and whatever open mindedness they might have may be turned off by the natural reflexive mechanism that religion has ingrained into them since childhood. On the other hand, if you are passive, merely defensively picking apart the statements of the bible and the arguments of religion generally, then "evilness" will less likely become a factor and, in fact, your reasonableness will be counter to what they have been led to expect from the godless."

In response to this letter I said, I appreciate the positive aspect of your observations but I'm somewhat puzzled as to why you would "*detect a new note of aggressiveness on my part*" Perhaps it's because of my comments in last month's issue regarding some extra biblical statements by a leader of the Christian Coalition in Florida. To be perfectly frank, I don't feel any more aggressive now than I did the day I started. Actually, I am not very comfortable with the word "aggressiveness.to begin with." The first definition of *aggressive* in Webster's New World Dictionary is that of being inclined to start fights or quarrels. His Thesaurus equates it with being warlike, bellicose, destructive, rapacious and barbaric. I would hardly consider those words to be an accurate representation of what I am doing. The word "aggressiveness" has an aura of hostility and animosity. We don't hate or demean our detractors, but we do sincerely feel sorry for them. They just don't realize how deeply and all pervasively they have been indoctrinated. It came to them as if through their

mother's milk and they have never known anything different. A crude analogy would be one of having been born and raised in a cesspool. By the time you have reached adulthood you would not only fail to notice the smell but be quite convinced the aroma was normal. If those same people who defend the Bible with such vigor today had been born in Iran or Saudi Arabia, they would believe and adhere to the teachings of Mohammed with all the compassion and conviction they now apply to those of Jesus and the Bible. But they just can't see what is so obvious to any objective external observer.

We have always had an active and assertive program of taking facts to the opposition, but I don't consider that being aggressive. You say, "*I have no doubt that*

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the best strategy to convince others of the correctness of your position is to adopt a passive...stance." I just can't agree. Sitting back and resting on your laurels won't get the job done. You have to take the message to the other side. As I have said before, you can't expect them to come to you when they are already convinced they have the truth and believe your views are not only false but those of the devil. Passivity is the death knell for ideologies that seek to grow. Mormons and Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, spend millions of dollars on propagandizing each year. Do you seriously think they would continue these programs if they weren't gaining adherents and effectively spreading the word? Do you know of any companies or corporations that don't spend valuable funds to advertise their message? They spend billions each year fully aware of the fact that passivity to them would be comparable to a death sentence. Political parties spend untold sums to get their ideas out to as many people as possible and also spend millions to frustrate and thwart dispersal of their opponent's message. From telemarketers to the visual media, nearly everybody is selling something and passivity is the last thing on their minds. Passivity is precisely what a good salesman does not exhibit.

Apparently you are operating on the theory that as long as your views are correct you don't have to worry. Eventually the world will beat a path to your door. I am sorry to say but that is completely wrong! If people with money are opposed to what you are disseminating; if people of power and influence don't want your message to get around, your entire program can be kept in a detached state of limbo almost indefinitely. Being right does not guarantee automatic victory. Not by any means. Just because you are correct does not mean your program is going to prevail. The word "religion" is nothing but a euphemistic veneer for superstition, mythology, and folklore, but that has not prevented it from having been around for a long time, nor has it forestalled its continued growth. Money, power, and influence have far more to do with what prevails than accuracy, truthfulness, and realism.

Problems in this regard have even fallen on my own doorstep. I have personally encountered problems in this regard. I have been in radio debates with fundamentalists in which, to put it mildly, I have embarrassed the competition. In several instances, it was more than a defeat and clearly showed that my ideas deserved as much of a hearing on the airways as my competitor, if people are to hear the truth. But do you think I was called back? No way! They weren't about to provide me with any more access to the public than I had already received. Talk show hosts have told me on the air that they definitely wanted to have me back but I never heard from them again. Why? Either callers, sponsors, station management, owners, or influential people managed to work their will, which shows beyond doubt that accuracy, truthfulness, and precision alone are not sufficient by any means to carry the day. It takes more than that, believe me. As I said, I know from

personal experience, first hand, no less. If you doubt what I am saying, just go out and present a powerful, accurate, and convincing case against the Bible and Jesus and see how far you get on the airways.

Not only do you have opposition from powerful and influential people as well mass objection, but you have the additional problem of dealing with the profit margin dilemma. Talk shows are especially egregious in this regard. They aren't nearly as interested in accuracy as they are in ratings and the bottom line. Even though what I have to present is true and my arguments are potent and convincing, stations don't care, if it's turning off listeners and viewers. I am not making them sufficient money and that's their primary concern. The same problem is encountered with getting a book published. Consequently, the word that gets out, the voice that gets heard, is the one that tells people what they want to hear rather than what they ought to hear. As is true of so much in this society that which circulates best is that which appeals to the lowest common denominator. Talk about a program made to order for the dumbing down of America.

Not only does the bottom line strongly influence what gets heard but you are not going to get your message distributed throughout the land, no matter how accurate it may be, if those in charge of the organs of dissemination or those who can afford dissemination costs are not providing assistance. In fact, they could very well be not only be a positive hindrance but very supportive of the Bible and religion in general, in which case truth will remain buried for a long time, unless somebody struggles to bring it to the surface.. TV preachers, for example, spread an incredible number of lies, distortions, misinterpretations, and out of context remarks and do so totally unopposed, simply because they have the wherewithal. Do you see them fading into the sunset? Where do you see truth overtaking them? No my friend, passivity does not cut it. Assertiveness supported by the means to get the job done is where it's at.

You say, "*Religious superstitions are and will die of their own weight over a period of time.*" Too many freethinkers have been kidding themselves with that remark for too many centuries. All these years of growth have made the trunk of their religious tree extremely heavy, that's true, but unfortunately it has become very thick and solid with money, power and influence. Regarding religious superstitions, you say that "*their demise is a certainty as long as scientific and rational thought progresses.*" A certainty yes, but in what century? Unfortunately, if you don't push them, they are not going to fall over, especially when they have hundreds of millions of dollars, the media, and vast resources propping them up. You are talking like an optimistic determinist who believes that goodness will triumph in the end. This kind of thinking is indicative of

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one who has been religiously influenced to believe that a kind, beneficent being presiding over the universe will not let evil prevail. But unfortunately it will reign supreme as long as good men and women remain passive. What is that old canard: All that is necessary for evil to prevail is for good men to do nothing.

Recently I received an advertising pamphlet from the largest circulating secular humanist magazine in the world, Free Inquiry. Although I am not an authority on their editorial policies I detect from the pamphlets contents a significantly heightened concern about the inroads being made by biblicists . It is entitled *Fighting Back! A Manual for Free-Thinkers* and among other things it says, "*There's a time for reading philosophy. There's a time for reformulating your own ideas. And there's a time to stand up for your ideals. NOW is the time*

to stand up and fight back. If not now, when. You are currently facing a serious and immediate threat to your liberties and constitutional rights. Armies of zealots are invading the very fabric of your freedom to live and think as you like. They block abortion clinic entrances. They threaten to control public schools. They censor textbooks and curricula. They use the mainstream media with impunity to infuse fear of free thought. And they indoctrinate the susceptible with notions that are clearly counter to our constitution. (Even more, they are counter to the truth--Ed.). This is no horror story taken from a novel. It's happening now...and it is growing in strength. It's not a lively, heated debate..it's action, deeds--and has even gone so far as murder.... Your freedom and liberties are getting less secure with each passing day. A look at newspapers and TV news makes the vulnerability of your freedom crystal clear...." All of these inroads and assaults are to be expected when Christian organizations are led by people who say that the United States Constitution does not guarantee freedom from religion.

My main criticism of this document is that it does not mention the importance of combating the Bible and biblical indoctrination wherever possible. Rather than fighting biblicists at a rather superficial level, wouldn't it be more realistic to demolish the base from which all their leaps spring. Unless the fundamental beliefs of these zealots are altered, weakened, or destroyed, freethinkers are going to find themselves on a never-ending treadmill of running from pillar to post putting out one brushfire after another. Even more importantly fires are going to arise faster than they can be extinguished because there are more of them than us.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #690 from NB of Tucson, Arizona (Part a)

You seem obsessed with me, for some reason, devoting far more space than I personally think I am worth

Editor's Response to Letter #690 (Part a)

Why would you think I am obsessed with you, since you have received considerably less print than many other people. I am inclined to believe you've allowed a subconscious yearning to supplant reality. As far as you receiving more attention than you are worth is concerned, those are your words, not mine.

Letter #690 Continues (Part b)

But I feel I must reply to your comments on my letter #679. First, I know you never claimed specifically to know a lot of Hebrew and Greek, but you are constantly criticizing your readers for their ignorance of the original texts, so what else could I assume.

Editor's Response to Letter #690 (Part b)

You could assume you misinterpreted the point I made. I never said people could not read the original texts, be they in Greek or Hebrew. I said they couldn't be found for certain in order to be read. That's a significant difference. Since everyone agrees the originals no longer exist, there is no way people can know for certain what the original text said, assuming there was an original text.

Letter #690 Continues (Part c)

When I said you "still" had not corrected the incorrect citations, I was noting that the original incorrect citations were in BE#158. By the time of BE#161 you still hadn't commented on them. (Remember--Ed.) you have an incorrect citation for Kings and another for Chronicles, and by my count that makes two. Whether I have commented in a "derogatory" manner is open to interpretation, but then I never accused you (as you did me) of "transparent sophistries".

Editor's Response to Letter #690 Continues (Part c)

As I told you when you made this same point earlier, I was not aware of two incorrect citations on my part. I am now aware of them and they have been corrected. But you keep acting as if I am either too lazy, too stubborn, or too uncritical to make the corrections. If there is anyone with an obsession it is someone who keeps returning to the same arguments in a futile attempt to patch up holes they made earlier. You are commenting in a furtively "derogatory" manner and you know it. And as far as "transparent sophistries" is concerned I would only ask readers to read the contents of this letter as well as your prior one and judge for themselves.

Letter #690 Continues (Part d)

I'm well aware that the Septuagint is just another translation, but it does have some authority. At the very least you could have commented on why you think the Septuagint's translators chose to omit the bit about 2000 "baths", If they weren't using the Masoretic Texts, what texts were they using?

Editor's Response to Letter #690 Continues (Part d)

To begin with, I think you could do with a refresher course in the history of textual formation. How could the Septuagint's translators have used the Masoretic text when the Septuagint was written around 250 BC and the Masora did not come onto the scene until approximately 400 years later.

Second, if I am obligated to comment on why I think the Septuagint's translators chose to omit the bit about 2000 "baths," then you are obligated to explain why so many translations inserted it. And you can start with the Jewish Masoretic Text.

And lastly, as far as I am aware the Septuagint translators were using Hebrew manuscripts to make a Greek translation of the OT. But how does this have any more bearing on the issue than any other translation?

Letter #690 Continues (Part e)

As to 1 Cor. 10:8 ("Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day 23,000"--Num. 25:9 says it was 24,000"). The copyist defense may be old, but some things improve with age. You don't actually disprove that defense, you merely attack those who try to use it. This is the "argumentum ad hominem" and it is far earlier than any issue of BE.

Editor's Response to Letter #690 (Part e)

I'm sorry to differ! I discredited that ploy long ago in no uncertain terms. You, not I, are obligated to prove somebody copied something wrong. The versions that are available and

the manuscripts from which they came have the contradictions staring us in the face. And until you produce some tangible, bona fide, hardcore evidence that something was copied incorrectly, the contradictions stand. How do you know the contradictory manuscripts are not an accurate reflections of what the original says? Speculation is not going to save your idol. If speculation is sufficient, then I am of the opinion that I am a reincarnation of Napoleon. Now prove my belief is invalid. The copyist defense does not improve with age; it just ages those who try to prove it.

Letter #690 Continues (Part f)

I plead guilty to a typographical error in citing "Nehemiah 6" instead of "Nehemiah 7. I was using the NIV (silly me) and I only noticed the heading "Nehemiah 6:16" at the top of the page and I didn't notice that Chapter 7 started in the middle of the left-hand column. But I am not publishing a newsletter which purports to debunk the Bible, as you are. I shall, in the future, "heed my own advice", but it is you, not I, who can ill afford to make mistakes in your citations. I am more than willing to admit that I made a mistake, though the correction was obvious and in any case it didn't destroy my argument, a statement that you may not always be able to make.

Editor's Response to Letter #690 (Part f)

You are trying to sound profound and only floundering in the process. But, of course, you did admit you were being silly at one point didn't you. You say that your incorrect citation did not not destroy your argument, but when I make that kind of mistake it does destroy mine. I fail to see the distinction. Perhaps that's because there is none. No one can afford to make mistakes in their citations, neither you nor I. That is not a prerogative bestowed upon those engaged in dialogue. You allege that *"it is you, not I, who can ill afford to make mistakes."* I couldn't disagree more. Letters to the Editor are no more exempt from this obligation than the writings of the editor himself. We all have a responsibility to be as precise as possible and anyone who sends us a letter with incorrect citations and erroneous comments should feel thoroughly ashamed for having possibly deceived an audience willing to give that writer a hearing. I am not only quite willing to admit any incorrect citations I have made but more than eager to make the needed corrections. My assistant and I proofread, but we can't get them all. Not when you are dealing with a periodical as packed with facts and figures as this one is and when all assistance is voluntary. If I had the staff and money of CRI, you can safely assume incorrect citations would be history.

Moreover, we don't just purport *"to debunk the Bible."* We do debunk it.

And finally, you say in reference to yourself, *"I made a mistake, though the correction was obvious and in any case it didn't destroy my argument, a statement that you may not always be able to make."* Run that by me again! I *"may not always be able to make"* but you will? You are somehow exempt but I am not! Talk about a double standard! If a statement is applicable to me, then it is equally applicable to you. Your "logic" leaves me bewildered

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Letter #690 Continues (Part g)

I have no desire to try to prove how the accounts in Ezra and Nehemiah were "originally written". It is you, not I, who claim infallibility. I only suggest possibilities. It is you who must, in your "ipse dixit"

(arbitrary or dogmatic statements--Ed.), have "truth on your side", while I don't really care all that much about it. When I suggest that the possibility may exist, I don't say that I can prove that such a possibility actually happened. Contrary to your oft-stated assertion, the burden is on *you* to prove that you are right. Merely deriding your critics won't do the job. The critics may be wrong, but it will take more than your say-so to prove it.

Editor's Response to Letter #690 (Part g)

Keep trying. Maybe eventually you will get it right.

First, when did I ever "claim infallibility"? Give me the exact time and place. I don't want any glittering generalizations. I want a specific citation and you have nearly 14 years of back issues to select from.

Second, you say that you don't really care that much about having truth on your side. Well finally it comes to light! That's the most accurate and candid remark you have made. I can certainly believe that judging from your statements so far. Apparently you finally got something right after all. Now, why can't you be that truthful and open in all of your remarks? You can begin by admitting that you are desperate to unearth or concoct any defense of the Bible that can somehow be made plausible.

Third, you say you have "*no desire to try to prove how the accounts in Ezra and Nehemiah were 'originally written'.*" In other words, you are not going to be so foolish as to try to reconcile them. And I can understand that. I wouldn't want that assignment either. I am in no mood to generate a migraine or foment insomnia.

Fourth, I don't really think you are in any position to accuse others of tossing around "ipse dixit", in view of the fact that they seem to be endemic to your stock and trade.

Fifth, you are still lingering under the delusion, along with many of your cohorts I might add, that the mere concoction of possibilities is sufficient to reconcile contradictions. According to you the mere act of suggesting something could have occurred is enough to prove whatever is suggested is valid and is to be accepted as possible until skeptics or doubters prove it did not happen. For some reason or other the inherent fallacy in this line of reasoning is not getting through to you. Why do I have to keep going back over plowed ground again and again. Don't you understand that this is nothing more than a variation of the "Prove God does not exist" ploy? Why is that so difficult to understand? Worm and squirm as you may, you are never going to escape from the dirt. You are not going to elude my fundamental premise that the burden of proof lies on he who alleges. As I have said so often, it is the death knell of all religious/superstitious thought. If the mere possibility of something happening is all that is necessary, then I could have a field day with the Bible and its supporters. Happy times would, indeed, have arrived. My obligations and research burdens would be drastically reduced, my imagination would be unfettered and scenarios could flow like waters from a mighty stream. I could say Paul was a pedophile since he constantly told people to greet others with a holy kiss. And since Jesus was never married, he regularly visited brothels. Peter was the devil in disguise in light of what Jesus called him and the OT's authors were actually agents of the devil who intentionally wanted to make god look bad by depicting him as they do in the OT. Jesus's mother was a prostitute and Joseph was nothing more than a nice guy trying to cover up for her immorality. Although Adam and Eve were kicked out of the Garden of Eden for eating the forbidden fruit, that was nothing more than a symbolic reference to having had intercourse without permission. And Moses was allowed to lead the Israelites out of Egypt only because he

agreed to sleep with the pharaoh's wife who then persuaded her husband to let them go. To say that my inventiveness could go absolutely wild in this regard is an understatement. The possibilities are almost infinite. Every one of these accounts could have happened. Prove they didn't. In fact, according to you they are to be given credibility until biblicists can prove they didn't occur, which is virtually impossible. Under your "logic," and as a biblicist, you have no right whatever to criticize those who suggest these scenarios because you cannot prove they did not occur.

Additional evidence that you did not internalize what went before is shown in the fact that I told you earlier that even if there had been a copyist error, you have no way of knowing which fact or figure is inaccurate. Consequently you are left with no alternative except to expunge both from the Bible. For example, you noted the fact that 1 Kings 7:26 and 2 Chron.4:5 are identical except the first says 2000 baths while the second says 3000. You say, in effect, "No problem, somebody just copied something wrong." Sorry, my friend but it's a monumental problem of staggering proportions. You have no way of knowing which was copied wrong, even if we assumed a copyist mistake was the source of the dilemma. And because you have no way of knowing, you are left with no alternative but to extract both from Scripture. One of them is definitely a lie, to put it bluntly, and since there is no way of determining which is the culprit, the only way to retain the Bible's alleged perfection is to delete both. Of course, once you start down this path you are going to all but massacre the Book. By the time you are done, there won't be enough Scripture left of real substance to fill a thimble. With defenders like you the Bible wouldn't need critics like me.

Letter #690 Continues (Part h)

Of course, I never accused you of saying specifically that "everything in the Bible is false because there is a discrepancy between 2000 and 3000 'baths'". I was being facetious and you should have recognized it as such.

Editor's Response to Letter #690 (Part h)

What do you mean you never accused me of saying "*everything in the Bible is false because there is a discrepancy between 2000 and 3000 'baths'*". For goodness sake man, don't you have any integrity. Is your blind allegiance to the Bible and Jesus so all consuming that nothing else really matters and the ends justifies the means. You said, and I am quoting verbatim, "*Anyway to assert that everything in the Bible is false because there is a discrepancy between 2000 and 3000 'baths' is like saying that the Titanic had a problem with a few of its rivets.*" And I responded by saying, *I would challenge you to show me anywhere in the entire history of this periodical that I ever asserted "that everything in the Bible is false because there is a discrepancy between 2000 and 3000 'baths'"? With all due respect, NB, that comment reeks with ignorance. Who on earth with a scintilla of sanity would say that an entire book is false because one contradiction is contained therein?*

And please don't try to hawk any of this "*I was being facetious*" nonsense. Who are you trying to kid? You made a stupid statement and now you are trying to back peddle out of it by saying it was all just a joke. You even went out of your way to make an analogy with the Titanic. Remember what I said long time ago. Pick your words very carefully, like apples from a tree, because what you pick you may have to eat. I have eaten a few in my day and even gagged on a couple; but you learn from experience. I'm not perfect but I'm light years ahead of my competition.

Letter #690 Continues (Part i)

Nevertheless, as a matter of logic, a single counter example is sufficient to disprove an entire argument. If the Bible is supposed to be "inerrant", as the majority of fundamentalists/evangelicals routinely claim, then one single contradiction disproves the whole proposition. You don't need "avalanches", "mountains" and "tidal waves". to prove the errancy of a document for which the claim is made that it is "inerrant". One will do quite nicely, thank you.

Editor's Response to Letter #690 (Part i)

For once we agree. I have no problem with these comments whatever. In fact, that is precisely the point biblical exposers have been making for centuries. Now if you can just get your compatriots to see the accuracy of your observation, my task will have been accomplished. Unfortunately, tidal waves and avalanches are necessary for those who insist on fighting on every point and keeping their finger in the dike like the Dutchman. For millions of biblicists, to concede anything is to concede everything and only by drowning them in a baptism of contradictory revelations can they be "born again." *(To be Concluded Next Month)*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #691 from TS of Prescott Valley, Arizona

I've just received my introductory copy of BE. It's great!.... Your weekly T.V. shows are like a breath of fresh air here in an area that is saturated with superstition. Too bad you're not shown on a daily basis.

Editor's Response to Letter #691

Thanks for the compliments and I'd like to see our programs shown daily as much as you. You might want to see if more showings during the week can be arranged. Stations respond to interest. We would sure appreciate the assistance.

Issue #166 Editor: Dennis McKinsey

Oct. 1996

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

COMMENTARY

This issue will continue our on-going policy of devoting an entire issue to letters from our readers.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #690 from NB Continues From Last Month (Part j)

Let me change the subject a bit, and congratulate you for you Editor's Note on the Florida situation on prayer in the schools. Were you also aware that in Alabama, textbooks must now carry a disclaimer that evolution is "a controversial theory"? Or that New Hampshire is considering requiring "parental permission" before teaching evolution? Or that last spring the Tennessee legislature narrowly defeated a law making it illegal to teach evolution as fact? And that the Tennessee Senate approved, by a vote of 37 to 1, a non-binding resolution urging businesses and families to post copies of the Ten Commandments on their walls and to "live by them?" (The only dissenting vote was cast by the Tennessee Senate's only Jew.).... Looks like you've got your work cut out for you.

Editor's Response to Letter #690 (Part j)

No. I would say it looks like anyone who cares about the Constitution, and especially the first amendment to the Bill of Rights, has his work cut out for him. I wasn't so much concerned about prayer in the public schools of Florida as the far broader question of freedom from religion in general. In Saudi Arabia and Iran freedom from religion does not exist. Women must dress in religious garb, prayer is mandatory, as is religious education in the schools. Your taxes are used to support religion, all criticism of religious teachings is suppressed and failure to attend the mosque of your choice is punished one way or the other.. Algeria, Egypt, and Turkey could very well adopt this repressive philosophy and, make no mistake about it, many Christians are surreptitiously working to adopt similar medieval nonsense here. We both know they put "under God" in the pledge of allegiance and "In God we Trust" on our coins. How could one have more blatant violations of the First Amendment?

Your congratulation is most appreciated but you seem to make light of the overall situation. I have no idea what your religious orientation is but you should realize that liberal Christianity and Judaism are viewed by fundamentalists as being in league with atheists, agnostics, and humanists and will no doubt be opposed in the same manner when

conditions warrant.. Who knows, they might even be physically treated in the same manner if given the opportunity.

Letter #690 Concludes with an Addendum (Part k)

Having said all that, I am herewith renewing my subscription to BE for another year. Contrary to the popular myth, Voltaire never said "I disagree with every word you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it", but it is a philosophy to which I heartily subscribe.

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Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #690 (Part k)

A fair and impartial hearing is all we ask. If only all biblicists were of like mind..

Letter #692 from RN of Moscow, Idaho (Part a)

Dear Dennis.... Your treatment by the Christian Research Journal is outrageous but typical of fundie outfits. They exist not to do research but to reinforce the wishful thinking of themselves and their ad-herents. A similar "research" organization is the Institute for Creation Research. Neither the CRI nor the ICR has any standing in the world of scholarship. As the Rev. Nick Cardell, the Unitarian-Universalist minister at Syracuse, N.Y. told me, "There are Bible scholars, and there are fundamentalists."

I had a similar experience recently with the editor of the Spokane, Washington *Spokesman-Review* . He just threw my carefully researched reply in the waste paper basket.

No doubt Gleason Archer--pardon me, I should have said Dr. Gleason Archer;; the fundies sure like their academic degrees--has already read your exposures of his joke book *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*. Although it was copyrighted in 1982 neither a supplemental volume nor a revised edition has yet appeared. This is strange because in his preface (page 12) he invites readers to send further contradictions and errors--pardon me, *difficulties* --to his publisher. In the meantime, since 1983, you have published *Biblical Errancy* every month and your huge book entitled *The Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy in 1995*. DOCTOR Archer obviously has read them but we won't hear anything more from him.

Editor's Response to Letter #692 (Part a)

From what I have been able to judge I think your last sentence is on the mark. Very few fundamentalists are willing to participate in an on-going discussion. Hit and Run is much more their style.

Letter #692 Continues (Part b)

The argument over the word *again* in John 20:9 ("*For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead*") in some translations seems to me to be a matter of usage rather than literal meaning. In *The New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, c1990)--the only worthwhile book ever issued by that publisher--we read *ek nekron anastenai* = from the dead to rise up.

The Greek prefix *an* is similar to the Latin prefix *re*, which Jerome uses in his Vulgate: *a mortuis resurgere*. We have many English words derived from Latin which begin with the prefix *re*, like resurgent, resurrect, replace, restore, etc. The prefix *re* doesn't necessarily mean that the action had taken place before, any more than the word again. For example we can say, "The Book fell off the shelf, but I put it back again" or "Jesus died, but he rose again...."

Editor's Response to Letter #692 (Part b)

Although I am in general agreement with the first part of your letter, this second half is another matter. I think you got lost in the shuffle somewhere, RN, and only succeeded in disproving your own argument. You began by saying "*The argument over the word again in John 20:9 in some translations seems to me to be a matter of usage rather than literal meaning.*" Apparently you are saying the word "again" does not mean the event is being repeated. But then you say, "*The Greek prefix an is similar to the Latin prefix re, which Jerome uses in his Vulgate: a mortuis resurgere.*" The prefix "re" means again and all you are doing is providing evidence that those who used the English word "again" when they translated from the Greek were correct. You further verify the accuracy of their translation by saying, "*We have many English words derived from Latin which begin with the prefix re, like resurgent, resurrect, replace, restore, etc.*" All of these words mean the event is happening more than once which provides additional support for use of the word "again" in the original translation. But then you say, "*The prefix re doesn't necessarily mean that the action had taken place before, any more than the word again.*" It doesn't? I think it does. Your own examples which you subsequently submitted prove it does. You say, "*For example we can say, 'The Book fell off the shelf, but I put it back again' or 'Jesus died, but he rose again.'*" These examples are clearly saying the act is being repeated. If no repetition were involved, then the word "again" could be omitted in each.

The problem with your analysis is that you make comments and then turn around and provide evidence to disprove your own assertions. Moreover, your disproof is far more accurate than your original allegation. I know you have been a long-time supporter of BE and I hope you take these observations in the comradely manner intended.

Letter #692 Concludes (Part c)

A couple of nits. *Ad nauseam* is correct. Remember, fundamentalists give us *nausea*.

Instead of the roundabout construction--which you always get correct, I might add--"As far as...is concerned." it is easier and just as correct to say, "As for.... Then you don't have to be concerned at the end. Keep up the good work.

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #692 (Part c)

Your observations are well taken. I just hope I can

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remember them. Writing is something you can never get perfected. It is an on-going process of constant improvement.

Letter #693 from DA of La Puente, California (Part a)

(DA never lays any groundwork for what he is about to discuss but always leaps right in as if we had just spent several hours discussing it. In referring to the contradiction we mentioned between Matt. 21:31 ("*The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you*") with 1 Cor. 6:9-10 ("*Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners shall inherit the kingdom of God*") he begins by saying,

You sent another issue (May, 1996--ED.) so I send you a few corrections. Matt. 21:31 Harots (sic) are more likely to make it into heaven than chief priests. vs. 1 Cor. 6:9-10 sinners will not get into Heaven. Okay, we try again to explain (sic.). a) As a technical point, 1 Cor. 6:9-10 doesn't mention prostitutes, the subject of Matt. 21:31. (Adultry [sic] is the sin of the married, the male in particular, and the prostitute may or may not be married.) Of course, the author would, correctly, insist the proper reading would include prostitutes, and a number of other unmentioned classes of sinners, but you do like to be technical on words, and on such a basis, there is no logical conflict at all.

Editor's Response to Letter #693 (Part a)

Your main point is that 1 Cor. 6:9-10 doesn't mention prostitutes. It doesn't? You'd better check again. What do you think fornicator means. *Webster's New World Dictionary* says fornication is "*any unlawful sexual intercourse, including adultery.*" You made the mistake of focusing on the word "adultery" when "fornication" is much broader and encompasses the former. Either you erred or you were trying to deceive, because the word adultery is subsumed within the word fornication and for that reason the contradiction stands.

Letter #693 Continues (Part b)

A comparative does not mean either will in fact do anything. It merely ranks. If a plane has 50 seats and 60 people already in them, an announcement that women and children will be ranked ahead of men among any additional customers is perfectly correct, if hardly important since neither will board.

Editor's Response to Letter #693 (Part b)

To begin with, how do you get 60 people into 50 seats. I think that highlights your facility with biblical defense in general In any event, who said a comparative did anything other than rank? I didn't. But later, when these people die, the inaccuracy of the prediction will be borne out, unless, of course, no prostitutes or chief priests will ever enter heaven. Is that what you are contending? If you are, then you are portraying Jesus as something of an incompetent. Why would he say, "*The publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you*" when neither is going into heaven?

Letter #693 Continues (Part c)

When we add (the following verses in--Ed.) context, Matt. 21:32 and 1 Cor. 6:11, we find both are saying the repenting sinner...is not barred from Heaven. The reformed prostitute is getting into Heaven before the unreformed chief priest...

Editor's Response to Letter #693 (Part c)

If the person is reformed, then that person is no longer a prostitute. If that person is no longer a prostitute, then that person is no longer entering heaven as a prostitute. And if

that person is no longer entering heaven as a prostitute, then you have completely ignored the original contradiction by simply rewriting the script. Remember the original problem? Matt. 21:31 said harlots will go into the kingdom of heaven while 1 Cor. 6:9-10 says they won't. You tried to resolve the problem by saying a prostitute reformed and then entered heaven; so there is no problem. Yes there is. Because that person reformed, she did not enter heaven as a prostitute. What are you trying to say--Once a criminal always a criminal?

Letter #693 Continues (Part d)

"THE BURDEN OF PROOF IS ON HE WHO ALLEGES." a) You have heard the sermon note "Argument weak here, yell like hell."? b) tho actually you are quite correct. the allegor must prove the alleged. & you the one alleging the contradiction. You are the one saying there is a green man, to use your earlier example. If I make a statement like the Bible is true, I am the one doing the alleging and under the burden of proof. But contradictions within the Bible, exist or don't exist, without regard to the truth of the Bible. So when you say that X contradicts Y, you are the one who must prove it. Your claim that "...two statements...are contradictory on their face." is not sufficient proof.

Editor's Response to Letter #693 (Part d)

I didn't know I was yelling and I fail to see how my position is weak. Because I ask someone to prove their point, my position is weak? You never cease to amaze me DA. Have you ever thought of enrolling in Rational Thought 101. Then, after your snide remark you turn 180 degrees and say I am "quite correct." How could my argument be weak, when you just admitted I was quite correct?

Then you say that my claim that two statements are contradictory on their face. "*is not sufficient proof.*" I beg to differ. When one statement says Jesus is god and another says he is not; when one statement says all men are sinners while another says Job was perfect; when one statement says Jesus was the first person to go to heaven and another says Elijah went there earlier; when one statement says go to all the world and another says go to the Jews only; when one statement says you are saved by works and another says it is by faith alone; when (well you get the idea). When you have contradictions on their face, such as these, I don't have to prove there is a contradiction. That's obvious. You have to prove there isn't.

You allege that when I say that X contradicts Y, I must prove it. No I don't. It's obvious to anyone who is not an intransigent ideologue and can read simple English. Taking your "reasoning" to its logical conclusion, if I said I had an all black white horse and you said that was a logically impossible contradiction, I could turn to you and say, prove it. You are living proof of why children should not be allowed to get near religion. Anything that can warp your thought processes that much is just plain dangerous. Sanity is no longer a factor. The Bible and Jesus have taken over. When you allege that my claim "...two statements...are contradictory on their face." is not sufficient proof, you leave the world of reasoning, rational thought, and logic and enter a phantasmagoric realm of deception, denial, and duplicity in which you really can have an all-black white horse, $2 + 2$ can equal 5, a perfect God can be imperfect, a dead man can be living, millions can be saved without accepting a mandatory universal savior etc. Even the most intractable fundamentalists rarely deny there is a contradiction, or what they would call a seeming contradiction, on the face of what I present. Instead, they try to reconcile, rationalize, explain or harmonize the conflict. But they are not so unbalanced as to deny what is staring them in the face.

You, on the other hand, appear to be determined to deny even the most elemental laws of logic in your on-going crusade to salvage the Bible. The kind of strategy you are trying to foist on others is very similar to that which is found among inmates of mental institutions. When you tell me you can have an all black white horse or X can be X and not X simultaneously, and when you also tell me that I must prove that you can't, then further discussion becomes useless, because I have no intention of wasting my time talking to the human equivalent of a door. The latter moves, acts as a hindrance, and doggedly shuts things in and out but that's about all.

Letter #693 Continues (Part e)

(In the May issue I stated, "The KJV and the ASV were written when religion ruled the roost and translators didn't have to worry about critics such as myself--Ed.). DA says in response,

a) the writers of the KJV had to worry about critics, like the King, who could throw them in jail among other things. That's a little more serious than a bad book review which is all you can manage.

Editor's Response to Letter #693 (Part e)

What a desperate comparison. The King and his aides hand-picked the men who were on the translation committee. The general views of those chosen to compile the KJV were already known before the committee was even assembled. And yet we are supposed to believe the King is going to imprison men he, himself, chose?

Even more importantly, the King had the final say on what the book contained. After all, it had his name on it, so it had better say what he wanted. Anyone who was not translating to his specifications could have been easily dismissed or outvoted.

Thirdly, and most important of all, you again performed your quick-foot shuffle by shifting the focus from what I said to what you wanted to twist into the issue. If you had read with more concern for care and less for carp, you would have noticed that I said, "*translators didn't have to worry about critics such as myself.*" Was King James a critic such as myself? Was there the remotest possibility he would ever become a critic "such as myself?" Of course not. He was extremely religious and had no intention of criticizing the Bible in manner I propound.

And your final comment is indicative of one who is more concerned with offense than clarity. Are you saying my review is bad or the book being reviewed is bad? I would agree wholeheartedly with the latter but not the former. If the former would you be so kind as to provide some citations that would make this observation valid. In true biblicist style, you just saw what you incorrectly perceived to be a good opportunity to make a snide comment with little regard for lucidity.

Letter #693 Continues (Part f)

b) The KJV was written under a set of rules, the 1st of which was political. (That the officially approved Bishops Bible was to be the approved text on points of dispute.) The idea that the KJV was free from political taint has to be rejected. If anything, it probably suffered more from politics than more recent works.

Editor's Response to Letter #693 (Part f)

I have no doubt the KJV was wrapped in religious politics and various individuals and groups were pushing for their version of every verse. But all of them had a pro-Bible perspective. None of them were openly critical of the Bible per se. So we are not talking about inter-religious politics; we are talking about the politics associated with the KJV's composition vis a

vis potential critics and detractors such as myself. And because the influence of critics such as myself in 1611

was significantly less than exists today, the Book's translators did not have to worry about "writing out" or excising contradictions by adding to, subtracting from, or altering the text. Because these translators were not "under the microscope" from people such as myself nearly as much as would be true today, expediency could be of less concern than fidelity to manuscripts.

In your last sentence, you say "*if anything, it probably suffered more from politics than more recent works.*" As far as inter-religious politics is concerned, that may or may not be true. I wasn't at the negotiations, either then or now, so I am in no position to pontificate. Apparently you were.

On the other hand, as far as the Bible versus critics such as myself is concerned, I have little doubt what you say is false. The NIV, the Living Bible, and the Bible in Basic English are prime examples of books composed with extra-biblical politics in mind. If you don't wish to believe what I am saying, that is your choice. But there is no doubt in my mind, based upon the words, phrases, and paragraph structure employed, that the translators had people such as myself, skeptical Christians, and people of other religious viewpoints in mind when they assembled them. That is not quite true, however, for such books as the RSV and the ASV.

Letter #693 Continues (Part g)

(After going back over material we discussed in May regarding whether or not "replenish" means people lived before Adam, DA says--Ed.),

"Good to have YW to supply a little Hebrew for us (Letter 671)... I of course point out he is telling you what has been said before, that your beloved contradiction doesn't exist.

Of course, a sizable number of Hebraic translators made a..mistake." They were/are human. They goof (sic). In a way, you seem to insist the KJV is perfect. What do we have to do to convince you it is hopelessly inferior to scads of more recent Bibles.

Editor's Response to Letter #693 (Part g)

First, as we noted in May, YW claims that the Hebrew should not have been translated into the word "replenish." In effect, he is saying he knows Hebrew better than some Hebrew scholars in so far as this translation is concerned. Maybe he does; but then, again, maybe he doesn't. That is an issue to be settled between biblicists themselves and is not my

problem. All I am saying now is what I said then. The word "replenish" generates a contradiction.

Second, when you say my "*beloved contradiction doesn't exist*" you are whistling through the graveyard. You only have YW's word to go on. You are telling me "*a sizable number of Hebraic translators made a..mistake*" and you admit you don't even know Hebrew. Rather presumptuous, don't you think? What are your qualifications as a Greek/Hebrew translator? None!

Third, I didn't know it was my beloved contradiction. I have no more affection for it than thousands of others that are readily available. Why would I show it any more attention than the rest? Do you have any data to substantiate this gratuitous observation or is it based on mere "gut reaction"?

Fourth, you say I "*seem to insist the KJV is perfect.*" When did I say the KJV is perfect or even imply as much. I said there is virtually nothing in the KJV that is not in one or more modern versions. You and some of your apologetic compatriots try to give people the impression that this translation disagreement is a battle between the KJV in one corner and all the modern versions in the other, which is far from reality. How many times have I listed one or more 20th century versions of the Bible that corroborate the KJV translation of this or that? The KJV is by no means all alone and if you wish to retain some integrity I would suggest that you stop trying to paint it as such. You are more than willing to throw it in the dumpster every time you encounter a bind.

Fifth, you say, "*What do we have to do to convince you it is hopelessly inferior to scads of more recent Bibles.*" It is? Name some of these scads. You might want to make that argument to Dr. Peter Ruckman, David Otis Fuller, Edward Hills, John Burgon, Robert Barnett and Norman Ward, all of whom are King James Only advocates and have written extensively on the fallacy of the point you just flippantly proffered. From their perspective it is the only one that is accurate. All the others that should be dumpsterized. I am by no means as willing to discard the King James as you are when it comes to biblical analysis. Just because you want to throw it out of the building don't expect me to open the window.

Letter #693 Continues (Part h)

Of course YW has his own errors when he ventures past his knowledge.

(He says--Ed/), "*profit-driven Bible translators who have their own agenda.*" This is something of a contradiction. Unless their agenda is profit (quite possible, but not what YW seems to have in mind), they are either not profit-driven, or do not have their own agenda.

"..and know it's all a load of crap.." After his experiences, he ought to realize they know nothing of the sort. People can be very firm in believing what they want to in spite of the most obvious facts. You and I know that (tho we have a minor disagreement over who is the pig-headed jackass.)

Editor's Response to Letter #693 (Part h)

Your criticisms of what YW said are between you and him. He might decide to respond. Your final remark is more in the nature of an admission than an accusation, wouldn't you agree. After all you did admit to being a nut in Part j of this letter (in the next issue), didn't

you? Although that kind of characterization is quite prevalent in your letters, I think you have pretty well located to whom it aptly applies. After all, who am I to contest an observation made by someone who is in a better position to know than anyone.

(To Be Concluded Next Month)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #694 from RN of Moscow, Idaho

Dear Dennis. I enclose a check for \$20 for which please send me a couple of your videos.... We hope to show them on the public access channel on the local TV cable. (What follows is my analysis of "THE HARMONY OF THE GOSPELS"--Ed.)

Most Christian bookstores sell what is known as "harmonies of the gospels." These books purport to put the contents of the four gospels into one continuous account. This is supposed to serve two purposes: one, to be a sort of "reader's digest" of the gospels for people who have little time to read; two, to smooth out, or "harmonize," the contradiction among the gospels.

Although several dozen of these harmonies are currently available, new ones continue to be written in the hope that someone will finally determine what "really" happened in the gospel stories. But this is a vain hope, because back in the middle of the second century A.D. the gospels already contradicted each other. And if they were not the original manuscripts, they were certainly very early copies of them.

So about the year 160 a Christian writer called Tatian compiled the very first "harmony of the gospels." He picked out the events and sayings that appealed to him and left out the rest. But other Christians did not agree with his choices, so they have been playing the same, old, no-win game of "harmonizing the gospels" ever since. The gospels cannot be harmonized because they have contradicted each other from the very beginning.

(What follows is my analysis entitled LIES ABOUT THE BIBLE--Ed.)

LIE: The Bible is without error or contradiction

FACT: The Bible is filled with errors and contradictions from cover to cover.

LIE: The Bible consists of exactly 66 books.

FACT: The Jewish Bible has 39 books; the Catholic Bible, 72; some Protestants Bibles, 66. The 1611 KJV has 72 books in it.

LIE: The Bible is the "Word of God."

FACT: Nowhere does the Bible make such a claim

LIE: The OT contains many prophecies about Jesus of Nazareth.

FACT: There is not a single reference to Jesus in the OT

LIE: The OT teaches that there is life after death.

FACT: In the entire OT no one dies and goes to heaven. And there is no hell in the OT religion. Death is the end. (Except in Daniel, ca. 167 B.C., the latest book in the OT)

Beware of evangelists who lie about the Bible. They are wolves in sheep's clothing. They just want your mind and your money.

Issue #167 Editor: Dennis McKinsey

Nov. 1996

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

COMMENTARY

This issue will continue our on-going policy of devoting an entire issue to letters from some of our readers.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #693 from DA of La Puente, California Continues from Last Month (Part i)

The presence of critics such as yourself produces more accurate Bibles, not faking it. Faking it is far more common when religion rules the roost. Nobody was going to challenge the fake, so the faker could expect to get away with it. By contrast, the presence of critics means that the faker is being watched. How is he to get his fake accepted at all? You will be pouncing on it 1st thing. It is perhaps ironic that those attempting to destroy the Bible are in fact also improving it. Each act of criticism is a spur to show the criticism unjustified. & (sic) sometimes those spurs work. Errors are detected, and corrected. The modern Bible is more accurate in part because of generations of atheists who have said it was inaccurate.

Editor's Response to Letter #693 (Part i)

What a speech! Looks good on paper. Too bad it has almost nothing to do with reality as is so true of nearly everything else you concoct. Atheists, agnostics, humanists, and other freethinkers do not make a habit of going through ancient manuscripts and documents to find errors in biblical translations. Most have little or no interest in the Book and many find it to be childish, superstitious, fanciful, silly, boring, repetitious, and contradictory. Just getting them to read it is quite a challenge as I have discovered to my chagrin. For many, the less they have to do with the Bible the better they like it. So, for you to say critics such as myself are finding mistakes in ancient manuscripts and the like and causing them to be corrected is erroneous.

Second, the absence of people such as myself in the days of King James caused translations to be more in tune with the manuscripts, warts and all. The incentive to alter what the manuscripts were saying just wasn't there, even though the language was often raw and the inconsistencies anything but rare.

Third, "faking it" is not the problem; expediency is. In many respects the earliest translators were more honest and closer to the manuscripts being translated than those who imbibed much later. Because so many of the manuscripts were plagued by repulsive terminology and contradictory data that was becoming increasingly noticed by growing

numbers of biblicists and non-biblicists alike, more and more apologists, especially in this century, decided to create new versions of the Bible in order to remove or ameliorate many embarrassments. Some 20th century translators have been much more involved in this skullduggery than others.

Fourth, another major factor accounting for so many recent translations is the failure of various groups and denominations to arrive at theological agreements. In order to foster their own particular theology, different denominations have seen fit to commission their own version of the Bible. The Jehovah's Witnesses denomination is a prime example. Theology rather than concern for textual accuracy was the prime motivation. The Bible had to be brought into line with what they wanted

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taught.

Fifth, you say, "*The modern Bible is more accurate in part because of generations of atheists who have said it was inaccurate.*" What modern Bible? What are you talking about? Are you talking about a currently circulating Bible that is an exact replica of the alleged original? If so, where is this modern Bible? I need a copy immediately. Apparently you are referring to one of the versions on the market. In that case, please, by all means, tell me which one is "the" Bible. Again, you appear to have not read our back issues. Did you read the issues that exposed the clashes that exist between the major versions on the market? I think not. If you did, then tell us which is an exact copy of "THE BIBLE"?

And lastly, you say, "*The modern Bible is more accurate....*" More accurate than what? The King James? Says who? Do you know that there is almost no part of the King James that is not duplicated in one or more recent translations.

Letter #693 from DA Concludes From Last Month (Part j)

Letter #674. Most distressing. Not because JS calls me a nut. Of course I am. Otherwise I wouldn't be writing you. But he says you used to be less willing to attack people's motivation. In other words, you have gone downhill with time. Not only is attacking motivation a classic fallacy, you are decidedly inaccurate in guessing the motivation of those who write you.

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #693 (Part j)

You admit you are a nut! Well, at least we don't have that hurdle to clear. You say you are a nut; other-

wise, you wouldn't be writing to BE. I can readily un-

derstand your motivation. You are seeking therapy and you've come to the right place for precisely the ill that ails you. Our first prescription is that you read all of our back issues followed by a long rest. You will need it in order to recover from the shock of exiting the realm of fantasy and entering the sphere of reality. For many that is more than their constitution can endure. Hopefully you can bridge the chasm without too much trauma. That should certainly go a long way toward expelling that biblical malignancy currently in possession of your psyche.

Secondly, apparently you didn't notice that I made no comment in support of the observation by JS, and the reason is quite simple. I wasn't aware of any change in the policy I have followed for nearly 14 years. Being involved in motivations, ulterior motives, and psychological stimulations have never been much of a factor on my radar screen. They are not only too hard to fathom but too irrelevant to consider. BE can be employed for self-induced therapy, but its author does not view himself as a psychologist or psychiatrist.

Letter #695 from NB of Tucson, Arizona (Part a)

Dear Dennis. I hadn't intended to write you, but two things have happened since I last wrote, which I feel should be brought to your attention. First, in connection with your response to letter #684 (Part c), BE #164-2. Yes, I know you have dealt with the question of how Jesus could be in the tomb "3 days and 3 nights," if he was crucified on a Friday and rose again on Sunday. I would first ask you: where in the Bible does it say that Jesus was crucified on a Friday? Answer: nowhere. I bring this up because the other day I happened to be surfing the cable TV channels, and on one of the local public access channels, there, of all people, was Jimmy Swaggart, the prototypical charlatan preacher. And yet, he had the most plausible explanation of the "resurrection dilemma" I've ever heard: **JESUS WASN'T CRUCIFIED ON A FRIDAY AT ALL; HE WAS CRUCIFIED ON A WEDNESDAY.** Why do I say this? Well, as Swaggart pointed out, Jesus was actually crucified on what was called "The High Sabbath of the Passover". This was the evening before the start of Passover, which began (and still begins) on the 14th day of Nisan, not necessarily on a Friday.... I say again: **WHERE IN THE BIBLE DOES IT SAY THAT JESUS WAS CRUCIFIED ON A FRIDAY?** I have seen your 'explanation many times in BE over the years, but not once have you addressed the explanation that Swaggart made. Can you do so now?

Editor's Response to Letter #695 (Part a)

Dear NB. I'd be glad to, although we thoroughly covered this issue and the Wednesday defense long ago. You might want to read the appropriate issues.

First, you ask where does it say he was killed on a Friday. Well we might begin with the 15th chapter of Mark which, while describing the crucifixion, says in the 42nd verse,

"And now when the evening was come, because it was the preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath."

Since the sabbath is Saturday, the day before the sabbath would be Friday. After describing the crucifixion Luke 23:54 says,

"And that day was the preparation, and the Sabbath drew on."

And while describing the crucifixion John 19:31 says,

"The Jews, therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the Sabbath day ... besought Pilate that ... they might be taken away."

So Friday was the big day, not Wednesday. That's why Christians celebrate Good Friday, not Good Wednesday.

Second, what on earth is the "High Sabbath of the Passover"? I can't find that phrase anywhere. It's not in *Strong's Concordance*. Either I missed something or Swaggart decided

the way to escape the problem was to concoct a concept. What are you talking about and where is it in Scripture?

Third, as I showed long ago the Sabbath was always on a Saturday, except for some special sabbaths dis-

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cussed in the Book of Leviticus that only occurred in the 7th month. Since Jesus was crucified at the time of the Passover which only occurred during the first month, these special (possibly non-Saturday) sabbaths are ruled out and only the normal Saturday sabbaths are

ruled in.

Letter #695 Continues (Part b)

The second thing has to do with the problem of "an

omnipotent God being able to set a task which he him-

self is unable to do", such as creating a rock so heavy not even God can lift it, or creating a two-sided triangle, etc. Setting aside the fact that two-sided triangles do in fact exist in "Elliptic Geometry," you had a pretty good go-around on this with my friend.

Editor's Response to Letter #695 (Part b)

Before we proceed I would rather not set aside your assertion that "*two-sided triangles do in fact exist.*" I was a math major in college for a short while and I never saw a two-sided triangle in any kind of geometry, plane, solid or otherwise. According to my *Webster's New World Dictionary* a "triangle" is specifically defined as "*a geometrical figure having three angles and three sides. Any three-sided or three cornered figure ...etc.*" How could you have a two-sided figure which by definition is three-sided? How could you have a two-sided three-sided figure? Sort of like having an all black, white horse, isn't it? The lengths to which some people will go to defend that book are downright unnerving.

Letter #695 Concludes (Part c)

But what brings this up now is that as I was watching the proceedings of the House of Representatives on C-SPAN on July 11, Rep. Toby Roth was droning on about some obscure bill, when he suddenly chose to reveal that he was taught by Jesuits, and the Jesuits taught him that "*not even God can square a circle*". I almost dropped out of my chair.... They're the last persons I would expect to assert that there is something that "*not even God can do.*" ...I'm wondering if there is any light that you can shed on this notion of the Jesuits that there is something that *their* God can't do.

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #695 (Part c)

Rather than dropping out of your chair, rising to cheer would have been more appropriate. Isn't it nice to know that the Jesuits are not quite as divorced from reality as they're depicted?

Letter #696 from DA of La Puente, Cali-fornia (Part a)

(On page 2 of the 151st issue I quoted Eccle. 1:9

(RSV) which says,

"What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; there is nothing new under the sun."

Then I wanted to know how many cities had an atomic bomb dropped on them prior to 1945 and how many people walked on the moon before 1969. Rev. BB provided a weak response and DA provided even weaker support of Rev. BB. DA now wishes to redeem his ego by saying--Ed.),

Eccle. 1:9

"...nothing new under the sun."

You claim that ***"For the first time in history man set foot on the moon. That's what's new! That's what changed!"***

So what? As the poet put it, ***"I went out the same door I came in by."*** What has really changed? You get up in the morning, go to work, come home, go to bed. How has going to the moon changed your life? Or changed much of anything? It was just a great feat, not a change. But when we classify it as a feat, we find that great feats happen all the time. The details may vary, but they are indeed

"nothing new under the sun."

A man goes to the moon. A man sails around the world. Both just feats, and both nothing new, despite never having been done before.

Editor's Response to Letter #696 (Part a)

I say ***"that's what changed"*** and you respond with ***"so what."*** Instead of denying it's new, you focused on discounting its importance. Apparently you are un-able to realize that its importance is irrelevant. I don't know what its value is and for purposes of this discussion I couldn't care less. Who cares how it has changed our lives? I said it was new. I didn't say it was important. As usual you employed your fast foot shuffle and changed the point at issue. You say ***"it was just a great feat, not a change."*** How wrong can you get! You are unbelievable DA. It's been years since I have confronted such an intractable ideologue. You will argue with blatant facts staring you in the face. You don't even have enough savvy to know when to hold them and when to fold them. If you are going to make a stand for Jesus, believe me this is not the place to dig in. It certainly was a change. Footprints were left on the moon's surface and they weren't there before. You are trying to make the issue one of importance as opposed to innovation. I don't care how important it was. It was new, wasn't it!

And to top it all off, your final comment is the mother of all brain twisters--***"both nothing new, despite never having been done before."*** You want us to believe that although its never been done before it's not new? Speaking of the moon, sometimes your thought processes are so far out in space I can't help but feel the astronauts took your reasoning skills on their ride to moon and left them there.

Letter #696 Continues (Part b)

(On page 3 in the 152nd Issue I noted the conflict

between Jesus' comment in Matt. 28:19 (

"Go ye there-fore and teach all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost"

) and Paul's assertion in I Cor. 1:14, 17 (

"I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius. ...For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel"

). DA sought to reconcile this contradiction in issue #162 and now wishes to return to the encounter by saying--Ed.),

Among other things, your conflict depends on "baptise" being the top priority, indeed, sole priority. We have no showing of that. Quite the contrary.

If a CEO gave a sales pep talk and told everybody to sell, sell, sell, we would routinely assume he is not talking to his accounting department, who are expected to remain at their desks and do non-selling activities, as are many other employees. Even within the sales department, many told to sell are expected to be doing other duties either full or part time. No contradiction exists when the CEO then selects as employee of the month somebody who has done very little sales.

Jesus fits in nicely as the CEO here. He issues or-ders to baptise, preach, give alms, love god, man.... There is, accordingly no clear requirement that a partic-

ular follower, Paul in this case, has to follow a particu-

lar order to the exclusion of the others, and Paul tells us his prime directive was to preach.

Editor's Response to Letter #696 (Part

b-)

I don't know which is worse, DA, your wholly un-

textual assumptions, your poor logic, your bad writing, or your bogus analogies.

First, where does "priority," much less top priority, come into the picture? The text says nothing whatever about any order of magnitude of importance. My argu-

ment has nothing to do with, and is in no way dependent upon, *"baptise being the top priority, indeed, sole priority."*

Second, from whence comes this departmentaliza-tion nonsense? Jesus gave an order to his followers in Matt. 28:19 and there is nothing whatever in the text to justify your contention that his instruction was only in-tended for a certain segment. Where did Jesus make this division or distinction?

Third, if what you said were true, then Jesus specifically told some group or other that they were not to engage in baptizing. Where, when, and to whom did he say that? If he did not single out anyone or any group, then Matt. 28:19 must have been intended for all his followers.

Fourth, since we are on this poorly conceived analogies business, we should note that you say, "No contradiction exists when the CEO then selects as employee of the month somebody who has done very little sales." What does employee of the month and volume of sales have to do with the issue? How are they analogous? And if anything we wouldn't be talking about "employee of the month;" we would be talking about "sales employee of the month." Remember we are talking about one mission-baptism-or in the case of your analogy sales. And that excludes the accounting department. But you tried to cover yourself with some more fancy footwork by saying the "CEO then selects as employee of the month somebody who has done very little sales." In other words, somebody in the ac. counting department who is also selling. But to the extent that he is selling he is not an accountant. You are back to having everyone do everything and have nullified your whole argument.

Fifth, you say, "There is, accordingly no clear requirement that a particular follower, Paul in this case, has to follow a particular order to the exclusion of the others." Oh I am afraid there is, unless you can prove the instructions given by Jesus in Matt. 28:19 only applied to a specific group of his followers and excluded Paul. And that you can't do because no part of Scripture will support you.

Sixth and lastly, your final sentence only adds to your sophistic pile. What Paul said about preaching is not even the issue. It is neither relevant nor material, while what he said about baptism is both relevant and material. Always trying to channel us down back alleys, side roads, detours, and off the beaten paths, aren't you! Tangents are your speciality. Paul said he was not sent to baptise when Jesus sent every follower to do just that according to Matt. 28:19.

Letter #696 Continues (Part c)

(Still trying to dig his way out DA seeks to defend his statement in the June issue that since "Paul was not present at Matt. 28:19, I was under the burden of showing that Paul was in fact ordered to baptize." I re-

plied by saying, "So Paul was not present at Matt. 28? Well, 1, along with millions of others, wasn't with Moses on Mt. Sinai or with Jesus when he delivered the Sermon on the Mount; so I guess that relieves us of those responsibilities." Now DA says--Ed.),

Possibly. Possibly not. In each case we need to decide if the orders in question still apply, and that can't be done on an automatic basis.

You of course like to call this dodging, but it is the normal practice with any set of orders. They routinely deal with both the temporary and the permanent. Some of the orders are void after a certain time, do not apply to certain groups, etc. It can be dodging, but it is also the normal practice of all mankind and can't be sustained as a contradiction.

Editor's Response to Letter #696 (Part c)

Boy are you trying to tip toe past this one! You know you have a marvelous facility for getting yourself out of a hole only to fall into a canyon. Remember when I told you, "Don't you think any further ahead"

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than the next sentence?" But you have done went and did it again. The principle you just laid down will play havoc with the Bible and its defenders. There are liter-ally thousands of maxims, rules, instructions, and teachings in the Bible that would be up for grabs, if your policy were to prevail. How are you going to separate that which applies to everyone from that which applies only to those being addressed at that particular time? What's your criteria and who is going to make that determination? You will all but destroy the authority and effectiveness of biblical teachings in thousands of instances. In far too many cases, if someone did not like a teaching being thrown in his or her face, they could easily respond by saying, it only applies to, or was only meant for, people being addressed at that par-

ticular time thousands of years ago. It's no longer ap-plicable. Don't you realize you are arguing for situa-tional ethics which fundamentalists deplore. But, then, maybe you are not a fundamentalist, although I am in-clined to believe otherwise.

Secondly, when Jesus gives instructions to his fol-lowers, they are intended to apply to all of his follow-ers, unless you can find Scripture to the contrary. Matt. 28:19 is a good example of a universal command. There is nothing in the verse or related verses that would restrict the baptismal instruction to a select group of people. If you say it did not apply to all of his followers, then I could apply the same principle to most of the NT and nearly all of his admonitions. With defenders like you the Bible wouldn't need critics like

me-

Letter #696 Concludes (Part d)

(On the fifth page in the June issue I asked DA, "How do you know Paul was afraid he would divide the church by baptizing? Would you be so kind as to cite chapter and verse for that observation?" DA says--Ed.),

First Cor. 1:11-17 seems to say that.

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #696 (Part d)

I can't help but notice that you inserted the word seems" because you are not very convinced of your own argument. And with good reason because in the 14th and 15th verses to which you allude Paul gives a more explicit reason by saying,

"I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; Lest any should say that I baptized in mine own name."

He does not want people to think he is baptizing in his own name rather than the name of Christ. In other words he is more concerned with people thinking he is getting a "bighead" than dividing the church.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #697 from FN of Huntsville, Texas

(In the August issue FN sent us a letter which said, "I am a freethinker incarcerated in the Texas penal system which doesn't pay its inmates. We are provided the basics only, except for orthodox religious literature.... I am unable to compensate you at this time.... Any issue outdated or otherwise in any condition of your "Biblical Errancy" publication will be read and shared with the few freethinkers here..." I responded by saying, We sympathize with your plight and for that reason have decided to give you a six month subscription gratis. This prompted FN to send the following letter--Ed.).

Thanks for the six months. It's not often that I even receive an answer much less a book, magazine, or newsletter. There seems to be, even among freethinkers, an attitude that only misfits are in prison and if the state has'em in there they need to be and do not warrant consideration any longer. With the non-thinkers I understand--but when freethinkers act in such a manner it's surprising....

"Of course, every man in jail is in favor of liberty, as a prejudice,--but it takes a far grander man who is not in jail, to fight and suffer for a man who is." R.G. Ingersoll.

Editor's Response to Letter #697

FN. I don't know why you are in there and am not really concerned. But I do know there is an extremely high probability you will be out with the rest of us someday. So, there is no sense in letting your mind go to waste, when you have time to learn the truth. It could very well help forestall a possible reincarceration. If we had the money, we would distribute more free subscriptions to inmates. Serving time doesn't mean you exit life.

Letter #698 from EE of Dayton, Ohio

... I pray and hope that there will be more Biblical Errancy programs in the future. Your programs are definitely what should be taught during Wednesday evening and Sunday morning Bible classes. I believe that the information you express on your program may get many upset but do not let their words upset you or revile you. Isa. 51:7 and Luke 6:22 explain that we should not fear the reproach of men, neither be afraid of their revilings or abuse.

"Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you and cast out your name as evil."

May Peace Be Upon You.

Editor's Response to Letter #698

Dear EE. You are living proof that some Christians not only watch our TV programs but definitely feel they are needed. Showing programs on TV is not an exer-

cise in futility by any means, as some have alleged. I often hear freethinkers assert that talking to biblicists is a waste of time because "you can't change those people." I have never agreed with that contention and never will. As I have said before. I have never been to an atheist meeting in my life in which nearly all of the participants did not come out of some sort of religious background. And if they can make it over the wall so can others.

EDITOR'S NOTE: I would STRONGLY encourage everyone in sympathy with the goals and philosophy of this periodical to buy a computer and a modem, obtain a service provider, and learn how to carry our cause to the world of biblicism by going on-line. Let's

face it. Most freethinkers have very little, if any, contact with Bible adherents. Those are not the circles in which we circulate. But with the Internet a whole new world is opened up in which you can meet hundreds of firm believers in the Bible, whom you certainly don't know and would never meet otherwise, but who are greatly in need of the information only you can provide. I urge all of our subscribers and readers to make an effort to learn how it's done. Believe me; it's well worth the time if you are into dialogue. Four years ago I thought of the Internet as little more than a fad and I had almost no interest in pursuing it further, after some brief encounters. Boy, have I changed. I am now having some difficulty trying not to become excessively involved. I am constantly getting electronic mail (e-mail) requests from my subscribers to provide them with information to debate some apologist with whom they are interacting on the Internet. Many of you have been with me for years and couldn't help but have a vast and potent body of anti-bible information that other freethinkers could use. Many of you have bought and read my book as well as scores of issues and audio tapes. Some of you have used our material to develop your own tactics for biblical encounters. Some of you just love to debate scripture. No matter what your inclination or capabilities, those battling the religious crowd on the Internet need your assistance and what better way to help than by joining in. You are badly needed, because our troops are significantly outnumbered.

While on the Internet you can go into Christian newsgroups, or what are really bulletin boards, and post some powerful stuff. You can respond when they reply, pick a topic where you think they are weak, and pounce on points where they have left themselves open. You can focus on the Bible, Jesus, atheism, humanism, or any one of hundreds of other religious topics. It is all up to you. Some of the apologists I've encountered know the book, so you will have to do your homework. But once you are on-line you can debate people throughout the world on virtually every religious/biblical topic imaginable. The sky is the limit. BE could even act as a clearing house should you so desire by providing your e-mail address to others of our persuasion who need your assistance or vice versa. We are in terrible need of teamwork and the Internet is an excellent way to proceed. And don't think you are too old or inept to learn. It is not that hard. Nor is it that expensive. You'll need to purchase a computer that can use a modem, a modem (a device that allows you to communicate to the world through your telephone line), and pay a monthly bill to a service provider who will hook you up with thousands. Well known providers are America On-Line and CompuServe. You can possibly avoid the monthly bill by finding a library or some other agency that provides the service free. But by all means get involved. This whole enterprise has real potential.

Even as I was writing this, I received some e-mail from a strong supporter outlining his response to a biblicist who claimed biblical critics interpret Scripture too literally. His response was good and could be relayed to other BE supporters to use as the need arises.

Issue #168 Editor: Dennis McKinsey

Dec. 1996

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

COMMENTARY

This issue will conclude for the time being our on-going policy of devoting an entire issue to letters from some of our readers.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #699 from DA of La Puente, California (Part a)

Dear McKinsey. You are really steamed over your "mistreatment" at the hands of the Christian Research Journal, but that treatment is identical to what you dish out to writers to your own periodical. You always get the last word, and you decide how many, if any, and which ones, of any critics' response gets printed. & (sic) you print nowhere near all the critic sends to you, or wants printed. "*..it would only be fair if I were given the last word...*" which you never give anyone writing to you.

Editor's Response to Letter #699 (Part a)

Dear DA. I'm wondering how you can make these accusations without ever having been in our office or seen our mail? Boy, are you off base! What did you decide to do? Just take a lot of shots in the dark and see if you could hit something? You might be interested in knowing that you missed on every round fired but one.

First, I do determine what goes into the periodical; that's true. But that's by no means anywhere near as sinister as you try to imply. Over the years I have made a scrupulous attempt to include virtually every letter sent to this publication. In fact, I have used so many that my current supply has been reduced to the bare minimum. The only letters excluded over the years have been those which were irrelevant, immaterial, incoherent, poorly written, too verbose or specifically excluded by request from the source.

Second, I get the last word in an individual issue, since I don't know of any other practical way it can be done, do you? If someone feels I got the last word unfairly, they are more than welcome to write another letter criticizing my closing in the prior issue. Some people, such as yourself, have done just that, as this very letter demonstrates. This tete a tete can go on quite a while. But I can't remember when I was the one who terminated the process. I need and expect critical letters and do not make a point of discouraging critics. Indeed, without them my *Dialogue and Debate* section would vanish and that would be unacceptable. Contrary to your unwarranted vilification, I did not get from CRI what I "dish out" nor do I necessarily get the last word.

Third, you allege that I "*print nowhere near all the critic sends*" to me. Wrong again. Except for critics, such as yourself, who think BE is a publication of 66 pages rather than 6, I can't think of anyone over the years who has not had nearly all of his material printed. In fact, a couple have had more printed than they preferred and sent me a subsequent letter expressing some displeasure. I need critical material. As I said, it is an inseparable part of this publication. How am I going to show biblicists the error of their ways, if I never hear from them and never confront their mistakes and misconceptions. D and D is of critical importance and I am not about to discourage critics from writing as a result

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of not addressing their letters. D and D deals with people where they are in order to escort them to where they should be.

Fourth, the word "steamed" is not only inaccurate but hyperbolic, unless, of course, you choose to characterize every objection as being "steamed." It connotes an aura of emotional outrage that is not in keeping with either my style or demeanor. If I was really "steamed," you'd know it by the employment of terminology that would be considerably less civil than you have experienced do far. Simply put, you overdramatized to the point of being deceptive and this is by no means the only time you have subtly invoked this underhanded ploy.

Letter #699 Continues (Part b)

(In my response to Letter #678 I said, "Rarely is the KJV out on a limb all by its lonesome as is so commonly alleged by many biblicists." DA says in reply--Ed.).

It is rarely on its lonesome because it has been the most popular and influential Bible in English for centuries. Accordingly, its errors have been copied many times by many successors. But that does not alter the basic situation. The KJV is frequently wrong, and an error in the KJV is only an error in that book, not an error in the Bible.

Editor's Response to Letter #699 (Part b)

Now you are telling me the Greek and Hebraic translators of modern versions agreeing with the KJV are incompetent. You mean all they did to create modern versions was take the KJV off the shelf and duplicate its text. From whence comes that piece of wisdom? Any high school student could have done that. Versions are created by going back to manuscripts, codices, uncials, minuscules, papyri, and lectionaries written in Greek and Hebrew, not by taking an already existing version and copying its text.

Just because the KJV has been "*the most popular and influential Bible in English for centuries*" does not mean the creators of the modern versions to which you are referring immediately went to the KJV to discover what to say. Not by a long ways. There are thousands of extant manuscripts that are considerably closer to the "alleged" originals. Why would they bother to improve on what they had if all they intended to do was update the verbiage and copy the text of the KJV without checking its reliability with other sources closer to the alleged originals?

You assert quite authoritatively that the KJ's "*errors have been copied many times by many successors.*" How do you know that? Where did you get that information? Were you on the translation committees? Were you even present when the translations were assembled? Of

course not! You have already admitted that you don't even read Greek or Hebrew. You are talking through your hat again.

And then you say that *"an error in the KJV is only an error in that book, not an error in the Bible."* You don't know that either. More whistling in the dark! We have been over this ploughed ground repeatedly. As I have said several times before, how do you know the contents of any version is not an accurate reflection of the originals, since the originals no longer exist and copyist errors cannot be proven? Until you can make that comparison, that verification, we are left with nothing more than contradictions staring us in the face. You want us to replace contradictions in front of our eyes with theories, conjectures and speculations on what could have been. That's not how it is done, my friend. Until you come up with something tangible and quantifiable, the contradictions stand out bold as brass.

Letter #699 Continues (Part c)

(DA notes that in the same prior response I said, "The ASV [American Standard Version] and the NASB [New American Standard Bible] are especially powerful support for the King James" and then continues by saying--Ed.),

Which is why the KJV is such a weak source. Neither of these powerful supports is much more than a rewrite job, designed to modernize the language more than correct any flaws. To lean on them is to lean on a broken reed. Granted, that does make them superior to the Living Bible you also mention, which has been de-rided as having errors as frequent as the water in the sea. But the point remains that these supporters are not able to do much supporting.

Editor's Response to Letter #699 (Part c)

The more you speak DA, the more you expose your inadequacies. The ASV is the American Version of the English Revised Version of 1885. Let me quote what even the apologists McDowell and Stewart are willing to concede on pages 50-52 of their book entitled *Reasons Skeptics Should Consider Christianity*.

"The publication of the KJV of 1611 did not mark the end of new translations of the Bible. Sixteen years after the release of the Authorized Version (KJV), a 5th century Greek manuscript (Codex Alexandrinus) was brought to England. This manuscript was centuries closer in time to the writing of the NT than the handful of manuscripts used to translate the KJV. Moreover, the Greek Codex Alexandrinus was different in certain respects than the text which was used to translate the KJV.

During the next two and one half centuries, a great number of other new manuscripts were discovered, some dating as early as the middle of the 4th century (Codex Vaticanus, A.D. 325; Codex Siniaticus, A.D. 350).

With these discoveries and a refining of the science

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of textual criticism, it was inevitable, and even desirable, that voices would cry out for a revision of the KJV.

The purpose of the revision committee was revealed in a report submitted on May 3, 1870 by the Canterbury Committee.... 1. That it is decided that a revision of the KJV of the Holy Scriptures be undertaken.... 3. That in the above resolutions we do not contemplate any new translation of the Bible, or any alteration of the language, except when in the judgment of the most competent scholars such change is necessary....Any changes from the King James were to be done only when absolutely necessary....If such evidence warranted a change, the approval of at least two-thirds of the revisers was required before it would be incorporated into the text. The actual number of changes far exceeded the original expectations of the committee, but most of the numerous changes were merely grammatical (i.e., word order, sentence structure)....

The great value of the RV is that it set a precedent for further translations which could incorporate the latest manuscript and linguistic and historical evidence into their versions.

Regarding the NASB they say on page 71, "...the translators of the NASB attempted to bring the American Standard Version up to date, to be as faithful to the original languages as possible, and to present a clear and readable style...."

In essence, the above shows that you erred grievously when you asserted, "Neither of these powerful supports is much more than a rewrite job, designed to modernize the language more than correct any flaws." They most assuredly were designed to correct any flaws. In fact, that is precisely why they were written. They were designed not only to correct flaws but modernize language and the very fact that the overwhelming bulk of the changes dealt only with grammar and word order changes testifies to the KJV's basic reliability. New manuscript discoveries made in the 300 years following 1611 revealed the need for linguistic changes. You imply that the creators of the ASV and the NASB simply went back to the KJV and rewrote off the top of their head somehow what they thought needed rewriting. No they didn't. They went back to the manuscripts that were available, especially those discovered since the KJV was published, and made the needed corrections. The KJV was not their criteria for accuracy, as you strongly imply; the manuscripts were. When you say "a rewrite job," a rewrite job based on what, if not ancient manuscripts and new discoveries.

Then you say, "But the point remains that these supporters are not able to do much supporting." Wrong again. The very fact that they did not change the KJV significantly, other than in word order and sentence structure etc., even after 300 years of new manuscript discoveries, is excellent proof that the KJV was essentially correct from the start. The revisers were not wedded to the KJV. In fact, they were specifically told to correct it wherever necessary and the fact that the changes they made rarely went beyond grammar and sentence structure is potent proof that the KJV had it together from the beginning as far as the creators of the ASV and the NASB were concerned.

Letter #699 Continues (Part d)

(On page 2 of the July issue I said, "Remember what I said long ago? You could be the world's greatest Greek/Hebrew scholar and still find experts disagreeing with your interpretation. If you press your point (of saying I have to prove there is a contradiction in the originals--Ed.), instead of reconciling the problem, you will only succeed in proving the verse needs to be expunged from the Bible. That's the best you can hope for. The sentence becomes worthless, because you don't know how it should be translated." DA assails this by saying--Ed.),

Now there are two answers to that. a) We often do know which is the correct translation. Such matters have been studied for lifetimes, and answers discovered. We do not need to just throw up our hands when we discover that 2 different versions have different language. And b) You are asserting there are contradictions in the Bible, not obscurities. Accordingly, you are asserting that the meaning of the conflicting passages can be established. So you must abandon the claim for contradiction if you want to push a claim of obscurity....

Editor's Response to Letter #699 (Part d)

You have an overriding propensity to sophistically shift the focus every time a problem comes your way, DA. We aren't talking about instances in which the translation is not disputed. You know that as well as I. We are talking about instances in which it is up for grabs and fosters divergent translations. You focused on disagreements which can be reconciled in an attempt to give the impression that this is true of all conflicts in general, which is miles from reality. Your claim that "*We do not need to just throw up our hands when we discover that 2 different versions have different language*" is patently false in many key instances. Experts disagree on how many verses should be translated. Don't you understand that? So who is correct? If they all agreed, then you could keep your hands down. But since they don't, you are well within your prerogatives to raise them.

Secondly where did you get the idea that the only conflicts are between different versions. You are way off base again. Many contradictions are within versions, not between versions. Indeed, in so far as numbers within the same version are concerned, they are often in conflict. Entire versions of the Bible are internally contradictory, even though they were translated from beginning to end by the same people.

As far as your part b) is concerned you are continuing to play your game. In reference to me you say, "*You are asserting there are contradictions in the Bible, not obscurities. Accordingly, you are asserting that the meaning of the conflicting passages can be established.*" In truth, I am not "*asserting that the meaning of the conflicting passages can be established.*" Those who translated the verses in question are making that claim. They must be; otherwise, why would they have translated them that way. And after they translated them that way, I am saying we are left with contradictions. So we are not dealing with obscurities; we are dealing with contradictions.

Why would I even contemplate contending they are not contradictions but obscurities? Oh I know! It's because you think I will feel that my position is somehow weak and voluntarily switch from contradictions to obscurities.

We have a group of experts creating a version of the Bible which is filled with contradictory statements. You say they are not contradictory until we know for sure how they should have been translated, and until we know for certain they are nothing more than obscurities. Wrong again! They are contradictions staring us in the face and remain as such until you prove that the translations are in error. Linguistic scholars looked at the manuscripts and translated them as they deemed most accurate. Until you prove they erred (yet you admit you are unable to read Greek or Hebrew) or produce your own group of experts who can, the contradictions remain in tact and obscurity is not a factor.

I hope you realize that this whole rigamorole you have put us through is nothing but a variation on an argument we have confronted repeatedly; namely, contradictions are due to errors in translation. If you have read our back issues in this regard, then all I can say is

that you don't listen very well or read very closely. If you have not read our back issues on this topic, then you certainly should have done so before leaping into the quicksand. I am increasingly encountering defenders of the Bible who have not read BE over the years and are merely revivifying arguments that have long since been buried. To all those inclined to attack future issues of BE I say, Please read our back issues first before you pick up the poisoned pointed pen to ride out and fight for Jesus.

Letter #699 Continues (Part e)

[After citing Ezek. 30:12 ("*And I will make the rivers of Egypt dry*") on page 303 in my book, I asked,

"What rivers are in Egypt other than the Nile?"

DA responds by saying,--Ed.],

The KJV may say "rivers", but the NEB says "streams" and the RSV says merely "Nile". Here too, you can't escape saying which is correct if you want to claim a contradiction.

Editor's Response to Letter #699 (Part e)

My stars! Is there no end? Always trying to shift the burden of proof, aren't you? You want me to provide the definitive and inerrant translation of your book and then claim that until I do, I can't know for certain that a contradiction exists. In effect, you want me to "perfect" your book. That's one for the books if you will pardon the pun. I addressed a variation of this ploy earlier, and either you didn't read my response or you decided to ignore it. So, for your enlightenment I'll go through it again, although I feel no obligation to do so.

I don't have to say which is correct in order to claim a contradiction exists. All I need do is expose the contradiction. Reconciliation is your problem. You deviously say humanity does not know what is the correct translation, so we can't be certain that a contradiction exists. Your strategy is inadequate in several respects.

First, as I have said before, the contradiction is staring us in the face. People who know Hebrew and Greek far better than you (which shouldn't be very difficult since you aren't knowledgeable in either) have provided what they claim is the correct translation of the manuscripts. So the contradiction stands.

Second if you are going to rely upon those instances in which the scholars are in disagreement and the translation can't be known for certain in order for me to prove a contradiction exists, then all you have done is expose a section of the Bible that should be expunged from Scripture. There is no definitive answer as to what the Bible is saying in that particular instance and the relevant verses should be deleted in order not to jeopardize biblical inerrancy. But as I said earlier, once you adopt that strategy a large part of scripture will become history, but not in the normal sense. Second Kings 8:26, for example, says Ahaziah began to rule at age 22 while the same account in 2 Chron. 22:2 says he was 42. Obviously both can't be correct. Now what are the possibilities. (a) 22 is correct and 42 is wrong, which means the Bible made a false statement. (b) 42 is correct and 22 is wrong which also means the Bible made a false statement. (c) Both say 42 in the original or both say 22 in the alleged original. But you have no way whatever of proving either part of (c), because the originals no longer exist, if they ever did. And until you can verify one or the other, the contradiction stands. I am providing tangible, verifiable, obvious contradictions

that lie on the page in front of you. You, on the other hand, are providing unsubstantiated, unverifiable theories based upon nothing more than some alleged writings that you never saw a day in your life, writings everyone concedes do not exist, and you have no solid mechanism by which to prove they ever did.

With respect to my question regarding the Nile, you

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assert that the NEB says "streams" (plural) and the RSV says "Nile" (singular), not rivers. Don't you understand that by adopting this kind of strategy all you are doing is saying that one group of scholars knows Hebrew better than another. How do you know which

is correct? How do you know either is? Perhaps there is an accurate third option? You don't know, and you never will, since the alleged originals are gone forever. As I mentioned earlier, even if you were the world's greatest scholar in one or both languages, you would still have scholars disagreeing with your translations. In effect, you would be on one team or the other. So who's correct? No one knows. And the only way to make sure the Bible is inerrant, the only way to remain on the safe side, the only way to create and maintain biblical consistency, is to expunge verses generating conflicts of this kind. Of course, once you start down this road you will all but eviscerate Scripture. There won't be enough left for a good evening's reading.

Letter #699 Continues (Part f)

& (sic) even if we decide the KJV is correct for once, the Nile within the Delta is more than one river (a common event for the delta of rivers). "*Rivers of the Nile*" is at least arguably correct.

Editor's Response to Letter #699 (Part f)

You paid no attention whatever to what I wrote in the July issue. Since when did the branches of a river's delta constitute many rivers? The delta at the end of the Mississippi River looks like a fan. Are you telling me each branch, each fork, of that delta is a separate river? If so, then by all means give me the names of all these rivers. I'm sure people living in that delta would like them as well.

You say "*Rivers of the Nile is at least arguably correct.*" Another erratum. It isn't even arguably correct. The branches of a river's delta do not constitute separate rivers. They are all branches of the same river and get their water from that river.

Letter #699 Concludes (Part g)

(In Letter #679 in the June issue another apologist, NB, criticized me by saying, "*whether or not the numbers in Hebrew were spelled out or not, you failed to note that 1 Kings 7:26, which makes the '2000-bath' assertion, is missing altogether from the Septuagint. You might at least have commented on why the Jewish scholars who compiled the Septuagint chose to omit this verse from the older texts. You didn't.*"

To this I said, "*The Septuagint is nothing more than a translation like the King James, the NASB and hundreds of other versions. If I make this kind of notation with respect to the Septuagint, I might as well make it with respect to hundreds of others as well. Where would*

this stop? Are you saying the Septuagint is somehow more authoritative than any other translation and deserves special consideration? If so, upon what basis are you making this judgment? The reference to 2,000 baths is in the Jewish Masoretic Text. Should I have noted that also?" DA now wishes to come to NB's defense by saying--Ed),

The Septuagint is, however, over 1500 years older than the KJV (maybe 250 B.C.), making it an eyewitness by comparison. The scholar quotes the Septuagint when talking about meaning. By contrast, the KJV is quoted merely to be dismissed as wrong....

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #699 (Part g)

You say "*The Septuagint is, however, over 1500 years older than the KJV.*" That's supposed to prove it is more accurate? Following that "logic" the King James Version should blow away all these modern versions because it's over 300 years older than they are. It is over 300 years closer to the actual events.

Secondly, you refer to the Septuagint as being "an eyewitness by comparison. Oh my goodness! Have you no sense of historical perspective and contemporaneous events? There are more years between the Septuagint and the events related by it in Genesis than there are between the Septuagint and the King James Version. You want people to believe the Septuagint is nearly an eyewitness to the The Creation Myth, the Adam and Eve tale, the Flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, etc.? Where on earth did you learn your biblical history? I don't even know of any fundamentalist seminaries that are that far off base.

Let's face it DA. At this stage of the game you are so all-consuming by antipathy, so blindly opposed to what I am doing, that if I said two and two is four, you would deny that emphatically by saying it's 22. Few observations are more accurate than the judicious adage that there is none so deaf as he who won't hear. And your entire line of argumentation in recent letters clearly bears this out.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #700 by E-Mail from RH of Dayton, Ohio

Hi, Dennis My Bible spouting friend on the Internet, Michael, said I was taking the matter of prayers too literally? Here is my reply.

Michael, you tell me I must take a broader view, I must not be so literal in my readings. Let's take another example. Look at Matthew 18:19 - "*Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in Heaven.*" OK, now I admit that I read this literally. "Literally" means "according to the letter." And to me, this verse says that two praying people who agree on what they are praying for will have their prayer granted (not answered, but granted, done) by God. This is the way I read the letters and the words which are there. You will have to educate me as to your method of more broadly and less literally reading this verse. How do you do this? Is it that after you broadly read it, it means "...it shall *maybe* be done for them of my Father," or perhaps "...it shall *sometimes* be done for them of my Father," or perhaps "...it shall be done for them of my Father *if they are worthy*" or perhaps "...it shall be done for them of my Father *if He thinks it best*" I have heard people who believe that prayers work and the Bible is true use all these rationalizations. They use them to make sense of the obvious problem that the verse says

prayers will be granted, while the world shows that many prayers are not granted How would you, Michael, view this verse in your broad interpretation compared to my literal one? And wouldn't you think that any interpretation, however narrow or broad, must not change the meaning of the words that are in the verse itself? I have trouble with all these broad and non-literal readings and explanations. If you insist that to read it broadly you have to insert the sorts of weasel words that I have put between the asterisks above, then I do not see how you can avoid realizing that such a broad interpretation dramatically changes the meaning of the verse. Let us think about it; do we have any right at all to so dramatically change the meaning? In this verse, Jesus is talking to his disciples, his companions, the closest people he had to friends on earth. He wanted to convince them of just how powerful prayer was. And he told them exactly what his conviction of the degree of power of prayer: Pray together and you will get what you pray for. He was specific, he was concise, he used no other qualifying words. What would his disciples think when they heard him recite the verse? Is it not probable that they would get the impression that his words meant literally what they said, and that Jesus was telling them that when they prayed together their prayer would be granted? If you were there at the time, Michael, would you have advised them, *"Well, OK, that's what our leader said, but we must not take him literally. We must take a broader view, because maybe prayers are not going to be granted in the way that he told us they would."*? I do not mean to ridicule or be flippant, Michael, but how would you convince those who had heard Jesus speak these words, that they were not to be taken literally? They just heard Jesus say prayers would be granted; do you think you could convince them that he was somehow overstating the power of prayer?

Once you start on the non-literal interpretation, where do you stop? If the verse says literally *"Love thy neighbor as thyself,"* and you decide that a broader, non-literal view must be taken, what is to stop you from using more weasel words to get its "true" broad meaning: *"Love thy neighbor as thyself *when you can*/*if you feel he will reciprocate */*if he is a good Christian too* and so on?* I think verses like these mean what they mean literally, or we can never be sure what they mean. I believe that those who wrote these books wanted us to look at what the words say, and not to add words of our own to get us past the hard parts.... For me, I admit that I can't understand how this verse could possibly be true. I can tell from it that Jesus seems to have thought it literally true and his disciples would have felt it was literally true, but my worldly experience convinces me that it is *not* literally true. Sure some prayers may seem to be granted, but I know of many that are demonstrably disappointing and futile. You must know this yourself, since you believe prayers are "answered in subtle ways" rather than granted. Believe this verse, believe this promise that Jesus made to his followers, and you have to believe that no such disappointments could happen. This verse, along with so many other specifics in the book, is simply not true. And to take a "broad" interpretation of it in order to make it true is to change the meaning of the verse so significantly that it can no longer mean what its original speaker and hearers thought. I welcome your thoughts on these issues, Michael, and thank you for taking the time to look them over.

Issue #169 Editor: Dennis McKinsey

Jan. 1997

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

COMMENTARY

Having devoted many of our prior issues to Dialogue and Debate and Letters to the Editor exclusively, we will now return to our original policy of biblical analysis through commentaries and book reviews

REVIEW

THE KINGDOM OF THE CULTS (Part 1)--One of the most famous critiques of groups pejoratively referred to by fundamentalists as cults is a 545 page book entitled *The Kingdom of the Cults* by Dr. Walter Martin. Known as the Bible Answer Man of Radio, Martin specialized in exposing the degree to which cult theology deviated from orthodox, fundamentalist Christianity. Although much of the book is credible from a fundamentalist perspective, many observations and conclusions contained therein need to be exposed as fallacious. Because our publication has no more empathy for the theology of cults, such as the Mormons and the Jehovah's Witnesses, than it does for Martin and fundamentalism, we have no intention of carrying a torch for the former by defending it from assaults by the latter. However, we do have a great deal of interest in revealing the degree to which Martin comes up short while accusing others of propagating lies, distortions, half truths, and perversions. He himself is by no means free from a propensity to spread erroneous theological and biblical concepts, nor does he speak accurately with respect to a variety of comments on related religious material. So that people do not become ensnared by his biblical maneuverings, we thought some critical observations are well within the realm of propriety. Throughout the book Martin occasionally made statements proving he, too, could profit from several corrective observations. What follows are some randomly chosen prominent examples of errors that can be laid at his doorstep.

First, early on Martin attempts to define cults by saying the following pages 25-28,

"There is no doubt in my mind that the belief systems of the cults share much in common, and that some of these common factors are worth noting.

First and foremost, the belief systems of the cults are characterized by close-mindedness. They are not interested in a rational cognitive evaluation of the facts. The organizational structure interprets the facts to the cultist, generally invoking the Bible and/or its respective founder as the ultimate source of its pronouncements. Such belief systems are in isolation; they never shift to logical consistency. They exist in what we might describe as separate compartments in the cultist's mind, and are almost

incapable of penetration or disruption if the individual cultist is completely committed to the authority pattern of his organization.

Secondly, cultic belief systems are characterized by genuine antagonism on a personal level since the cultist almost always identifies his dislike of the Christian message with the messenger who holds such opposing beliefs.

Thirdly, almost without exception, all cultic belief systems manifest a type of institutional dogmatism and a pronounced intolerance for any position but their own.

The fourth and final point in any analysis of the belief system of cults is the factor of isolation."

Notice anything interesting about this list? Does it conjure up any images with respect to pots, kettles and the color black? Once the word "Christian" in the second point is changed to the word "opponent," it should strike a chord to those within range, because every one

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of these traits is applicable to nearly every fundamentalist in the land. Although no doubt typical of cults in general, these characteristics are also applicable in large measure to fundamentalist Christians. Martin would do well to take inventory of his own entourage.

Second, on page 70 Martin states,

"God the Father rained fire on Sodom and Gomorrah, and God the Son spoke and ate with Abraham and Sarah."

Where does the OT say Abraham and Sarah ate with god the son, Jesus?

Third, on page 82 Martin attacks the contention of the Jehovah's Witnesses that Christ ascended as a spirit and would only return as an invisible spirit by saying,

"Paul, contrary to Jehovah's Witnesses, never believed in an invisible return, nor did any bona fide member of the Christian Church up until the fantasies of Charles Taze Russell

(one of the founders of the Jehovah's Witnesses--Ed.)

and his parousia nightmare, as a careful look at Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians plainly reveals. Said the inspired Apostle,

'For this we say unto you but the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall prevent them which are asleep.

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven [visible] with a shout [audible], with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first.'

Here we see that in perfect accord with Matthew 26 and Revelation 1 Christ is pictured as coming visibly...."

Martin accuses the Jehovah's Witnesses of acting

"at their crafty best, as they desperately attempt to make Paul teach what in all his writings he most emphatically denied, namely that Christ would come invisibly for His saints,"

and yet, Martin behaves no better. He inserted the word [visible] into the 16th verse, when it's not to be found in any version. Even his beloved NASB will not corroborate his textual revision. Where does 1 Thess. 4:15-16 say that Christ will be "visible" when he descends? If Martin insists upon attacking the Jehovah's Witnesses in regard to a visible versus an invisible descent, these are not the verses upon which he should have relied.

Fourth, probably the most prominent clash between orthodox Christianity and Martin on the one side and the Jehovah's Witnesses on the other concerns the nature of Jesus. Was he, or was he not, God in the flesh. The former say yes and the latter say no. In defense of a fleshly God Martin says,

"Throughout the entire content of inspired Scripture the fact of Christ's identity is clearly taught. He is revealed as Jehovah God in human form in Isa. 9:6, Micah 5:2, Isa. 7:14, John 1:1, 8:58, 17:5, Exodus 3:14, Hebrews 1:3, Philippians 2:11, Colossians 2:9, and Revelation 1:8, and 1:17-18. The Deity of Christ is one of the cornerstones of Christianity, and as such has been attacked more vigorously throughout the ages than any other single doctrine of the Christian faith. Adhering to the old Arian heresy, which Athanasius the great Church Father refuted in his famous essay 'On the Incarnation of the Word,' many individuals and all cults steadfastly deny the equality of Jesus Christ with God the Father and hence the Triune Deity. Jehovah's Witnesses, as has been observed, are no exception to this infamous rule. However, the testimony of the Scriptures stand sure and the above mentioned references alone put to silence forever this blasphemous heresy, which in the power of Satan himself deceives many with its 'deceitful handling of the Word of God.'

The Deity of Christ then is a prime answer to Jehovah's Witnesses, for if the Trinity is a reality, which it is, if Jesus and Jehovah are 'one' and the Same, then the whole frame-work of the cult collapses into a heap of shattered disconnected doctrines incapable of even a semblance of congruity. We will now consider the verses in question, and their bearing on the matter."

In order to prove Jesus is God, Martin relied on the verses listed previously. Unfortunately for him, most do not say that Jesus is God. In fact, one strongly implies the opposite. Hebrews 1:3 says (*"Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high"*). How could Jesus sit down next to God if he is God. More-over, being

"the express image"

of someone does not mean you are that someone. We often hear the expression that A is the "spittin image" of B, but that does not mean A is B. If anything, it implies the opposite. They are two separate and distinct entities.

Most of the other verses used by Martin to prove Jesus is God don't go so far as to prove the opposite, but they don't say Jesus is God either. Micah 5:2 (RSV) says, *"But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose origin is from of old, from ancient days."* Isa. 7:14 says, *"Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold a virgin shall*

conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel." John 8:58 says, "Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am." And Ex. 3:14 says, "And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you." Where do any of these verses say that Jesus is God?

Martin also cites Isa. 9:6 (*"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace"*) to prove Jesus is God. We showed in issue #78 on messianic prophecy that this verse could not be referring to Jesus, because he was the son, not the father.

John 17:5 says, *"And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was."* "Before the world was" does not imply eternity because the universe existed

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long before this planet. Second, if Jesus is God's equivalent, why would he need to be glorified by God? And third, by saying *"the glory I have with thee,"* two separate entities are being referred to.

The remaining verses are too nebulous to make a decision either way. Rev. 1:8 says, *"I am the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty."* Although the Lord is speaking, where does he equate himself with Jesus or say they are identical? On the other hand, by saying "which is to come" the parousia of Jesus does seem to be implied.

Rev. 1:17-18 says, *"And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death."* Assuming Jesus is speaking as is alleged by biblicists, the question in this instance becomes one of determining what he means by "the first and the last." Does he mean he had no beginning and will have no ending, in which case his existence extends eternally in either direction and he is God. Or does it mean he was the first created of all those created and will be the last destroyed of all those created, in which case he is not equating himself with God, since God by definition has no beginning or end. His assertion *"I am he that liveth and was dead"* has no weight because of prior resurrections by others. And for him to say *"I am alive for evermore"* means almost nothing because that will be true of every human being who ever lives according to biblical theology. Whether you are headed toward heaven or hell, you are still immortal and alive forevermore.

Our third and final group of quotes from Martin is composed of those which can justifiably be used to argue that Jesus was God. They are among the most potent in the reservoir of orthodox fundamentalist Christianity. Prime examples are: John 1:1 (*"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"*) in conjunction with verse 14, Col. 2:9 (*"For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily"*), and Phil. 2:11 (*"And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord..."*).

Fifth, on page 109 Martin says,

"As I stated at the beginning of this point, it would be futile to refute all the errors of thought in Jehovah's Witnesses theology. Therefore, I have presented what I feel is sufficient evidence to show that man has an eternal soul and will abide somewhere either in conscious joy or sorrow eternally, and that those who believe and trust in Christ as their personal Savior will 'put on' that immortality when Jesus returns."

In his urge to recruit people to the cause of Jesus, Martin overstated the contribution of Jesus. He says,

"man has an eternal soul and will abide somewhere either in conscious joy or sorrow eternally."

Man is, therefore, immortal. But then he turned around and said,

"those who believe and trust in Christ as their personal Savior will 'put on' that immortality when Jesus returns."

How could they "obtain" or "put on" immortality by accepting Christ, when he just said they had an eternal soul and will abide somewhere, regardless. Even when you go to hell you are still immortal. He is really saying that you don't obtain immortality by accepting Jesus. You obtain immortality the moment you become a human being and, thus, obtain an immortal soul. He is trying to give more credit to Jesus than he is due, even under orthodox theology. According to the latter Jesus doesn't give you immortality; you have it whether you want it or not. It's not your choice to make. If you don't want it, then you should never have become a human being to start with.

Sixth, on page 207 Martin notes the conflict between Ex. 33:20 (*"And the Lord said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me and live"*) and Ex. 33:11 (*"And the Lord spoke to Moses face to face"*) by saying,

"Ex. 33:11 (face to face) in the Hebrew is rendered 'intimate' and in no sense is it opposed to verse 20."

Martin is just wishing that were true. I have many versions of these verses and not one of them has anything approximating the word "intimate." Apparently Martin views his comprehension of Hebrew to be superior to that of those Hebraic translators who created the most well-known versions available.

In an additional attempt to refute the Mormon contention that God became flesh and blood in the OT, Martin attacks the Mormon's reliance upon Gen. 32:30 by alleging

"it is the angel of the Lord...not Jehovah Himself"

who is speaking to Jacob. Unfortunately for Martin his argument is utterly without substance and exposes the lengths to which apologists will go to distort scripture for their own ends. The text clearly shows that Jacob wrestled with God, not an angel, and God was flesh and bone at the time. The most appropriate method by which to prove as much is to cite the relevant text. Gen. 32:24-30 says, *"And Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him unto the breaking of the day. When the man saw that he did not prevail against Jacob, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and Jacob's thigh was put out of joint as he wrestled with him. Then he said, 'Let me go, for the day is breaking,' But Jacob said, 'I will not let you go, unless you bless me.' And he said to him, 'What is your name?' And he said, 'Jacob.' Then he said, 'Your name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed. Then Jacob asked him, 'Tell me, I pray, your name.' But he said, 'Why is it that you ask my name? And there he blessed him. So Jacob*

called the name of the place Peniel, saying, 'For I have seen God face to face, and yet my life is preserved.'

Well there you have it in all its radiant detail. Martin was wrong in several respects. First, it specifically states that Jacob wrestled with *God*. The man with whom Jacob wrestled said *"you have striven with God."* Nowhere does the text say Jacob wrestled with an angel. Second, Jacob was blessed by the man with whom he fought. God certainly blessed people in the OT but where was this function performed by angels? And third, Jacob directly states that he saw God "face to face." He did not say he saw an angel or wrestled with an angel. So, for the text to be clearer would be difficult.

As part of his summary of this debate Martin erroneously states,

"To argue, as the Mormons do, that such occurrences indicate that God has a body of flesh and bone, as Prophet Smith taught, is on the face of the matter untenable and another strenuous attempt to force polytheism on a rigidly monotheistic religion."

Actually there is virtually no stress involved and the position is quite tenable. In fact, Martin would have done better to have avoided this issue entirely.

On top of everything else, this discussion returns us to the Trinitarian dilemma. If God can not be flesh and bone as Martin contends, then how could Jesus be God, since he was clearly flesh and bone?

(To be Concluded Next Month)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #701 from Ken Bonnell of Los Angeles, California

Dear Dennis. In issue #164 your response to letter #684, Part i, should be reconsidered. Your writer (I think Ken means me--Ed.) was wrong in asserting that "Defraud not" is not a commandment. There are, especially in Leviticus, many commandments that are outside of "The Ten Commandments." Specifically, look at chapter 17 of Leviticus, which begins, *"And Yahweh spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to Aaron and to his sons and to all the children of Israel, and say to them: This is what Yahweh has commanded..."* Then follow commandments pertaining to sacrifices, eating of blood, etc. on into chapter 19 where at verse 13 it says, *"You shall not defraud your neighbor."* It is therefore a commandment, statute, or ordinance, all words being synonymous, and lose their distinction by the command to obey the statutes and ordinances. If you use any of this letter, please use my name.

Editor's Response to Letter #701

Dear Ken. Three points.

First, we are talking about the Ten Commandments, not commandments in general. I fully realize that many instructions throughout the Pentateuch are referred to as commandments, but in Mark 10:19 and Matt. 19:18-19 Jesus lists the commands that were written on stone and are specifically referred to as the Ten Commandments in Ex. 34:28, Deut. 4:13, and Deut. 10:4. So we are only talking about THE Ten Commandments, not commandments in general.

Second, "Defraud not" was not in the list written on stone. So I was correct "in asserting that 'Defraud not' is not a commandment." At least it's not one of the Ten Commandments and that is all we and Jesus are discussing.

And finally, you say, "*It is therefore a commandment, statute, or ordinance, all words being synonymous, and lose their distinction....*" No, they are not synonymous. If that were true, then why does Gen. 26:5 say, "*Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws*"? Why the distinctions if they are all the same? Why does Deut. 4:40 say, "*Thou shalt keep therefore his statutes, and his commandments, which I command thee this day..*"? Why does Deut. 5:31 say, "*I will speak unto thee all the commandments, and the statutes, and the judgments, which thou shalt teach them...?*" And why does Deut. 6:1 say, "*Now these are the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments, which the Lord your God commanded to teach you...*"? Why the distinctions? Why, because they are not synonymous. If they were, one word would be sufficient. Unfortunately the Bible is by no means clear as to how they are different. What is the difference between a commandment, an ordinance, a statute and a judgment? No clear answer is provided, although they are different.

Letter #702 from JS of Grosse Pointe Farms, Michigan

In reaction to your July 1996 issue of *Biblical Errancy*, let me say the following. The other day I was "surfing" the internet, and decided to do a search on the phrase "Biblical Errancy." The search resulted in three, and only three, hits. Numbers two and three were simply lists that a couple of public libraries chose to post on the internet, giving newly acquired titles--on which your book was included.

Number one, however, was the web site of some guy who claims to defend the accuracy of the Bible. I scanned quickly, and, although I did not bother to read it all, I was impressed with the quantity of material, and the number of suckers who have been dialoguing with the guy. Credit, by the way, was given to three guys for the web site--at least one of whom seems to be a theology student. I think something ought to be done about this. Whenever anyone punches in "Biblical Errancy," *your* web site should be the first one to pop up.

Editor's Response to Letter #702

Dear JS. I couldn't agree more but when I checked the cost for a web site my conclusion was that my pocketbook would be caught in a web. More importantly, I don't think I would have time to keep it current, even with sufficient funds. Still, I certainly con-cur with your sentiments and thanks for the concern.

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Letter #703 from HB of Kettering, Ohio

Dennis. For those who are interested in entering into a dialogue or a debate with Christians or those who proselytize (try to convert) door to door I believe one of the most effective ways is to let them in (they usually come in pairs). Appear to be naive as this seems to make them feel you are vulnerable to their subject matter. Ask them if they will give you equal time to ask them questions. If they are willing, and if you have done your homework, your questions should be far superior to their answers.

The method I have found that works best is to use numbers that contradict each other and give chapter and

verse. The same is true in the Old and New Testament such as in the following examples: 2 Sam. 6:23 (Michal had no child), 2 Sam. 21:8 (Michal had five sons); First Kings 7:26 (2,000 baths) vs. 2 Chron. 4:5 (3,000 baths); Matt. 1:16 (Joseph's father was Jacob) vs. Luke 3:23 (Joseph's father was Heli). Then we have Bible absurdities: Gen. 3:1 (a talking serpent), Num. 22:27-28 (a talking ass), Gen. 19:26 (Lot's wife becoming a pillar of salt), Psalms 22:21, 29:6, Num 23:22, and Deut. 33:17 (Unicorns).

(HB inserts my video tapes into his VCR and asks guests like Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons to view them--Ed.). If you know you are weak in some areas you can use some video tapes produced by Dennis McKinsey on just about every part of the Bible that could assist you. I like tapes 1 and 2 on biblical contradictions. Before viewing a tape I request them to take a pen and write chapter and verse where they disagree. When I ask them questions, they usually say, "I don't know, I don't know" and head for the door or they become quiet. I believe the contention that *"you will know the truth and it will set you free."*

Letter #704 from Anonymous in Ohio

Dear Dennis. If I recall, the last conversation I had with you was over the phone. We talked a bit about the pro's and con's of your disarmingly placid demeanor during your radio debates of earlier years. We were at variance at bit, you feeling that you had "sounded like a wimp" and I feeling that humility and patient tenacity was more in evidence.

Editor's Response to Letter #704

Dear Anonymous. I remember our conversation well, especially the support you gave for my radio appearances years ago. Perhaps I was too harsh on myself. After all I was basically a novice at the time and was quite reticent in both demeanor and speech. When I listen to my tapes of ten and fifteen years ago the first thought that comes to my mind in several instances is: Why was I so timid; why did I sit back and take it; why didn't I come down harder and respond more forcefully? Rest assured that policy has been changed dramatically. Not long ago I was asked to reappear on a Buffalo station on which I was a guest in the mid-1980's. After my appearance concluded the host immediately said something to the effect: Man have you changed. You sure come on strong now, don't you. How right he was. Unfortunately he did not send me a recording of the second program as I requested. I wonder why? I let stuff pass unchallenged in years gone by that wouldn't get more than a toe through the door nowadays. I also submitted to some patronizing Christian sermons that would be blown out of the water if they were again to rear their condescending heads and juvenile judgments. I can especially remember meekly submitting to a harangue I received during a private meeting with 5 Church of Christ members around 1984. The head minister, who had his own call-in radio program, dressed me down as if he were pontificating to the wayward. As kids say on the playground, I'd like to see him try that again. I would welcome an opportunity to rectify that miscarriage of justice.

When I began this journey of blazing new trails years ago, I was understandably uncertain and reticent. That entire attitude of reluctance is now history and a new philosophy prevails.

Letter #705 from RP of Roseburg, Oregon (Part a)

I wholeheartedly agree with the sentiments in your Editor's Note of the Nov. 1996 issue. I finally got on the Internet a couple of months ago, and found it to be a treasure-trove of material on topics such as biblical errancy, atheism, creationism, and related topics. I usually spend half an hour down-loading files to my computer, and then spend the next day reading them and printing them out.

I was surprised, then, to be unable to find your e-mail address, either printed in BE or in any of the several internet directories I searched. I also read (I think it was in the Internet Infidels Newsletter) that you had declined an invitation to participate in the Secular Web site. If that report is correct, I hope you will reconsider, for the reasons that you stated in your Note.

In particular, I would love to see the back issues of BE on the Web. You often refer to them, and you cite them frequently in your Encyclopedia, but I am a fairly recent subscriber (I only learned about you last year) and I don't have those back issues. If I were wealthy I would order them all at a dollar apiece, but I'm not.

Editor's Response to Letter #705 (Part a)

Putting my literature on the Web sounds like an excellent idea to me. I hope those who can do so will proceed apace. They have my permission as long as people are apprised of the name and address of the source.

The overriding reason I originally declined an invitation to participate in the Internet of Infidels was that I had a real problem with belonging to a group calling itself "Infidels." *Webster's Dictionary* defines "infidelity" as unfaithfulness or disloyalty to another. I am neither. I am very loyal to reason, logic, science, and evidence. But even more importantly, "infidelity" implies I somehow stabbed someone in the back after I led them to trust me. That is the image Christians seek to portray of those who reject their theology and other superstitions. It is an ignominious term applied by religionists to their opponents and I saw no reason to corroborate accusations that are wholly inaccurate. However, I have since reconsidered and decided to join, despite this major reservation. As they say, you can't have everything

As far as our E-mail address is concerned it will henceforth appear *correctly* at the end of all issues.

Letter #705 Concludes (Part b)

By the way, let me thank you for *The Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy*, which I recently bought. It is a treasure, and you are to be complimented and praised for the work you put into it.

I was touched by the letter from FN (#697) from the Texas penitentiary. May I suggest that you tell him about Farrell Till's offer of a year's free subscription to his newsletter, *The Skeptical Review*. Please also tell him that I would be happy to send him materials I may download from the Internet. You may give him my address. Thanks again for all your efforts.

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #705 (Part b)

Thank you for your compliment regarding *The Encyclopedia*.

Rather than sending your address to the Texas inmate, I will send his address to you and you can take it from there. Although I have no reason to question the sincerity of the Texas inmate, I wouldn't feel comfortable mailing the addresses of people to those who are incarcerated.

We are more than happy to publicize Farrell Till's address and have occasionally done so, since Farrell and I are on the same page in so far as Scripture is concerned. In no sense do we consider Farrell a competitor. When he gets subscribers I am delighted.

**His address is: Skepticism, Inc., P.O. Box 717, Canton, Illinois 61520-0717 ----
jftill@midwest.net**

Letter #706 from G. Noble, 13201 North 70th Place, Scottsdale, Arizona 85254 991-6714

Dear Dennis. Yes, I would really appreciate it if you could put my name, address, and phone number in your newsletter in hopes of finding someone here in Arizona who could help me with my computer and the Internet. I have the equipment, and I'm willing to pay the cost of the Internet hook up, and I can supply the Bible knowledge, but I need someone who knows the mechanics and can help me get the information out.

Editor's Response to Letter #706

Dear G. Noble. We are more than glad to be of assistance and hope that one of our fine subscribers can either assist you or recommend someone who can. Any of our supporters trying to counteract religion in general and the Bible in particular via the Net deserves whatever aid is feasible because we certainly need troops.

***EDITOR'S NOTE:* (a) We would like everyone to know that our voluminous book entitled THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF BIBLICAL ERRANCY is still being sold by me and Prometheus Press in New York . It is as good a synopsis of our publication as is available.**

(b) If you or your public access station have had technical problems with our video tapes pertaining to such things as color bars please send the tapes, along with a description of the problem, to our fine duplicator, Nancy Stanley, who will be glad to make whatever corrections are possible. Her address is: 5315 East National Road, #29, Richmond, Indiana 47374-2603. Phone (317) 935-2540

Issue #170

Editor: Dennis McKinsey

Feb. 1997

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

COMMENTARY

This month's issue will conclude our analysis of some biblical problems and mistakes found in apologist Walter Martin's book entitled *The Kingdom of the Cults*.

REVIEW

THE KINGDOM OF THE CULTS (Part 2): Seventh, on page 225 Martin tries to slip in a subtle twist on the Book of James in order to escape from the dilemma it presents to those who adhere to Paul's maxim that you are saved by faith alone. In his continuing battle with Mormon theology he states,

"The Scriptures disagree with the Mormons in their insistence upon good works as a means of salvation. The Book of James clearly teaches (chapter 2) that good works are the outgrowth of salvation and justify us before men, proving that we have the faith which justifies us before God (Romans 4 and 5)."

Martin often worked on the principle that if he talked authoritatively enough and sounded sufficiently resolute in his convictions that would carry the day. But unfortunately, all too often that tactic doesn't fill the bill. In this instance, for example, James 2 proves nothing of the sort. In fact, James specifically states that man is justified by works. While verses 2:14 (*"What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can faith save him?"*), 2:17 (*"Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone"*), 2:20 (*"...faith without works is dead"*), and 2:26 (*"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also"*) say both faith and works are necessary for salvation, verses 2:21 (*"Was not Abraham our father justified by works..."*), 2:24 (*"Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only"*), and 2:25 (*"Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works..."*) say works alone are sufficient. And that is diametrically opposed to Paul's reliance upon faith alone. Martin could not have picked a worse chapter to prove his point. He should have avoided James 2 as if it had the plague.

Eighth, on page 299 Martin attacked the Unity School of Christianity's employment of Matt. 11:14 to prove reincarnation. While talking about

John the Baptist, Jesus said in that verse ("And if ye will receive it, this is Elias, which was for to come"). Jesus clearly referred to John the Baptist as the deceased Elias. In response Martin says,

"Jesus was here commenting on Malachi 4:5 and applying to John the Baptist the mantle of prophecy in the tradition of Elijah. Christ, in answering the Jews, merely gave the prophecy its true meaning. Neither the context nor the prophecy refers in any way to John being a reincarnation of Elijah...."

Martin's defense is little more than a variation on the old cliché: That's what it says but that's not what it means. The problem lies not with the fact that the verse is being interpreted too literally, but with Martin's inserting a construction that is alien to the text. Nowhere does the verse imply, much less state, that a "mantle of prophecy in the tradition of Elijah" is being bestowed on John the Baptist. That is a wholly gratuitous overlay. The fact is that Jesus said John the Baptist is Elias, not merely an inheritor of his mantle.

***Ninth*, the weakest attack upon the cults mounted by Martin in his book lies in his assault upon the Adventist belief that the Sabbath, Saturday, is the true day of worship, not Sunday. Here, more than anywhere else, his arguments fall like duck pins in a bowling alley. On page 460 Martin states,**

"We may certainly assume that if the Sabbath had meant so much to the writers of the NT; and if, as Adventists insist, it was so widely observed during the early centuries of the Christian Church, John and the other writers of Scripture would have equated it with the Lord's Day, the first day of the week. Scripture and history testify that they did not, and Adventists have, therefore, little Scriptural justification for their Sabbatarianism."

While magicians practice sleight of hand, Martin practices sleight of head. True, NT writers never equated the Lord's day with the Sabbath or the 7th day of the week, but what Martin artfully neglects to mention is that they never equated it with the first day of the week either. He tries to give his readers the impression that because the 7th day is never equated with the Lord's day, the 1st day becomes the Lord's day by default. Sorry! But that's not how it works. Martin says

"the Lord's Day, the first day of the week."

Where does the Bible ever state that the Lord's Day is the first day of the week, or the first day of the week is the Lord's Day? Martin slipped in this little tidbit, hoping his readers would not catch a wholly unsubstantiated assumption. The phrase "the Lord's Day" only appears once in all of Scripture.

To prove that Sunday is the Lord's Day, Martin relies upon *extra biblical sources*, especially church fathers, instead of Scripture, since the latter doesn't support his position. He states,

"The Church Fathers provide a mass of evidence that the first day of the week, not the seventh, is the Lord's Day."

Not only does he leave the Bible in order to make his case but, interesting enough, three of the ten sources he cites, don't even prove the very point he is trying to make. Where do any of the following citations specifically state that the Lord's Day is Sunday? He cites:

- Didache of the Apostles (*"On the Lord's own day, gather yourselves together and break bread and give thanks"*),
- Bardaisan, (*"Wherever we be, all of us are called by the one name of the Messiah, namely Christians and upon one day which is the first day of the week we assemble ourselves together and on the appointed days we abstain from food"*),
- and the Epistle of Pliny to the Emperor Trajan (*"They [the Christians] affirmed...that the whole of their crime or error was that they had been wont to meet together on a fixed day before daylight and to repeat among themselves in turn a hymn to Christ as to a god and to bind themselves by an oath...; these things being duly done, it had been their custom to disperse and to meet again to take food--of an ordinary and harmless kind. Even this they had ceased to do after my edict, by which, in accordance with your instructions, I had forbidden the existence of societies"*).

Again, where do any of these sources say the Lord's Day is Sunday? Where are the two equated? Even Bardaisan's comment that they assembled on the first day of the week does not prove or state that's the Lord's Day.

Of the seven remaining citations, only one, just one, calls Sunday the Lord's Day. Cyprian (Bishop of Carthage) states, *"The Lord's Day is both the first and the eighth day."* All the rest, which includes Ignatius (Bishop of Antioch), Justin Martyr, The Epistle of Barnabas, Irenaeus (Bishop of Lyons), Eusebius, and Peter (Bishop of Alexandria), link the two only indirectly by referring to the Lord's Day as the day of the resurrection.

Martin concludes this section by saying on page 461,

"In their zeal to establish the authority of the Sabbath, Adventists either reject contrary evidence as unauthentic (and so conflict with the preponderance of scholastic opinion), or they ignore the testimony of the early church. Although they seem unaffected by the evidence, the fact remains that the Christian Church has both apostolic and historical support for observing the Lord's Day in place of the Sabbath."

How wrong can you be? Martin is accusing Adventists of practicing precisely the attitude that he so vividly exhibits. He rejects contrary evidence by completely ignoring the fact that Scripture nowhere justifies substituting the Lord's Day for the sabbath, Saturday, and he relies upon a "preponderance of scholastic opinion" as if that were sufficient to overrule the clear teachings of Scripture. Since when did the pronouncements of a body of extra-biblical individuals have precedence over Holy Writ?

He also says he has apostolic support for the belief that the Lord's Day should be observed in place of the Sabbath. Unfortunately he is never so kind as to cite his apostolic verses, and in the final analysis that is all that really matters to a true Christian. No doubt the lack of citations can be attributed to the fact that there are no verses to cite.

As further evidence of his confusion, Martin continues by saying,

"Recently the Adventist radio program Voice of Prophecy circulated a 31 page pamphlet entitled, Authoritative Quotations on the Sabbath and Sunday. In it they quoted 'leading' Protestant sources to 'prove' that Sunday usurped the Sabbath and is a pagan institution imposed by Constantine in 321.

However, many of the sources quoted actually establish what the Adventists flatly deny; i.e., that the seventh-day Sabbath is not the Lord's Day or the first day of the week, but is, in fact, the seventh day as its name indicates.

Since the Adventists are willing to quote these authorities to buttress their position in one area, surely they will give consideration to contradictory statements by these same authorities in another:

At this point Martin injudiciously decided to quote these Adventist authorities.

1. "The Lord's Day did not succeed in the place of the Sabbath.... The Lord's Day was merely an ecclesiastical institution.... The primitive Christians did all manner of work upon the Lord's Day" (Bishop Jeremy Taylor, *Ductor Dubitantium*); 2. "The observance of the Lord's Day [Sunday] is founded not on any command of God, but on the authority of the church" (*Augsburg Confession of Faith, quoted in Catholic Sabbath Manual*); 3. "But they err in teaching that Sunday has taken the place of the Old Testament Sabbath and therefore must be kept as the Seventh day had to be kept by the children of Israel" (*J.T. Mueller, Sabbath or Sunday*); 4. "They (the Catholics) allege the Sabbath changed into Sunday, the Lord's Day, contrary to the Decalogue as it appears, neither is there any example more boasted than the changing of the Sabbath Day" (*Martin Luther, Augsburg Confession of Faith*); 5. "Although it (Sunday) was in primitive times and differently called the Lord's day or Sunday, yet it was never denominated the Sabbath; a name constantly appropriate to Saturday, or the Seventh day both by sacred and ecclesiastical writers" (*Charles Buck, A Theological Dictionary*); And 6. "The notion of a

formal substitution by apostolic authority of the Lord's Day (meaning Sunday) for the Jewish Sabbath (or the first for the seventh day)... the transference to it perhaps in a spiritualized form of the Sabbath obligation established by promulgation of the fourth commandment has no basis whatever, either in Holy Scripture or in Christian antiquity" (Sir William Smith and Samuel Cheetham, A Dictionary of Christian Antiquities).

Thus the Adventists have in effect destroyed their argument by appealing to authorities which state unequivocally that the first day of the week is the Lord's Day and that it was observed by the early Christian Church from the time of the Apostles."

After having read these quotations, one can only conclude that Martin got lost in the shuffle somewhere, or is hoping his readers will be. He quoted sources that, in effect, are proving the Adventist position instead of his own. He failed to carefully note the wording of the fourth commandment ("Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God...."). In other words, the sabbath is to be honored not the Lord's Day, whenever that may be. The Fourth Commandment directs mankind to observe the sabbath, and nothing whatever is said regarding paying homage to the Lord's Day. He helped discredit his own argument. The sources he cites actually say the Lord's day did not replace the sabbath, and observance of the Lord's day is not based on scripture but on church teachings.

After ill-advisedly quoting these authorities Martin concludes,

"Thus the Adventists have in effect destroyed their argument by appealing to authorities which state unequivocally that the first day of the week is the Lord's Day and that it was observed by the early Christian Church from the time of the Apostles."

The Adventists did not destroy anything of the sort, because their concern is with honoring the Sabbath, not the Lord's day. After all, isn't the Sabbath the day to be honored? Where do the Ten Commandments say "Honor the Lord's day and keep it holy"? What difference does it make if several authorities allege that the first day of the week is the Lord's day? That's not the day that matters. That's not the issue. And what difference does it make if the early Christian Church was observing the Lord's day from the time of the apostles? All that would prove is that members of the early Church were ignoring a clear mandate of Scripture. Honoring the Lord's day, even if it could be proven that Sunday was the Lord's day, was not one of the original commandments.

Martin has done everything he can think of to shift the focus from concentration on the word "sabbath" to concentration on the phrase "the Lord's day" because everyone knows the former can only be the seventh day or Saturday. By trying to shift the attention of everyone to "the Lord's

day" and somehow link that with Sunday, he hopes to be able to justify the systematic violation of the fourth commandment by nearly all of Christendom.

Martin concludes his steady descent into quicksand by saying, *"It should also be carefully noted that in their 'Authoritative Quotations' the Adventists overlook the fact that nearly all the authorities argue forcefully for the Lord's Day as the first day of the week, and state that legal observance of the Sabbath terminated at the cross (Col. 2:16-17)."* Which day of the week is the Lord's day is of no consequence, since there is no obligation to honor the Lord's Day in the Ten Commandments. It's the sabbath that matters. But even more importantly, Martin says that "legal observance of the Sabbath terminated at the cross." Oh really! Then what are Christians doing to honor the Fourth Commandment, may I ask? After all, it says Honor the sabbath and keep it holy. Nowhere does it say honor the Lord's Day.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #707 from DM of Supply, North Carolina

Dear Dennis.

I spoke with you about the passage in Matt. 12:40 (*"For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth"*) and you suggested I write to you about it and here goes.

The difficulty caused by Matthew 12:40 when compared to other passages in the Bible was the first one that initially caused me to lose confidence in the inerrancy of the Bible. I was a born-again Christian, totally sold on the infallibility and inerrancy of the "Word of God". I spent ten years (1974-84) attending services with the Worldwide Church of God, voraciously reading the "Plain Truth", and the "Good News" magazines, studying the Ambassador College Home Bible Study Course and hundreds of other "booklets" and "reprint articles" that claimed to impart the plain truth to the spiritually hungry. I really believed that I was being "called" by God to understand his truths. From 1974 to 1988 I did not consider myself "born again". The WCG taught at that time that no one is "born again" until the return of Christ. However, I left the WCG in 1984 (for personal reasons) and four years later I did the unthinkable. I joined a Sunday keeping church in Atlanta! It was the First Baptist Church, pastored by Charles Stanley. Such a move was not made lightly, and despite being four years removed from WCG indoctrination, I still had difficulty making the change. I never totally embraced all the doctrines that the rest of the members of FBA held, but rather I held a combination of some of the

beliefs I had held in the WCG and some of the beliefs held by the majority of members at FBA. I even refused to call myself a baptist but rather called myself a "Christian who worships in a baptist church." I was already a freethinker in the making because I determined that a church would never again dictate for me what was true and what was false without my full informed consent. It is true that my "full informed consent" was insufficient at the time because my idea of full and informed consent was reading apologetic works from different denominations that believed in the inerrancy of the Bible. In other words, I wanted to know what different denominations taught so I could be better qualified to select what was true and what wasn't, but I limited myself to those who believed in the inerrancy of the scriptures. To me, inerrancy couldn't even be debated, so I never thought about reviewing my beliefs on inerrancy, just the different doctrines that denominations disagreed upon.

This criteria didn't last long. When you have spent 10 years of your life in a church believing with all your heart and soul you have the truth and no one else has it, and you are so convinced you have the truth you would even die for it, but later find some of your doctrinal beliefs were in error, it makes it difficult to totally sell out the second time. Yes, I was in a baptist church, but I never sold my soul to them. I began an investigation on Christian doctrines and determined that the FBA would be my home church until I found something better. I knew then I had been wrong before, terribly wrong, and I didn't want to be wrong again. I could testify how fervently one could believe something, and be absolutely sure of it and later discover it to be false. I would sometimes lie in bed at night and talk to God, imploring him to help me to KNOW the truth. I could see that intelligent people at FBA believed the doctrines they held, so how could they be wrong? But then I remembered that the WCG had their intelligent people too, and they held just as fervently to their beliefs. I didn't imagine myself as intelligent as some of them, so I wondered how could I ever be certain again. I was sure that the intelligent ones prayed just as fervently as I for the truth and yet they arrived at different conclusions from each other. It was becoming obvious to me that intelligence wasn't enough. A person had to totally empty himself of any prior beliefs and start over, even if he had to begin with the basic question of: Is the Christian Bible the word of God? Of course no matter how hard I tried to be impartial, I still was aware that I was prejudiced in my belief that the Bible was the word of God. I had to MAKE AN EFFORT TO BE FAIR.

It was during the summer of 1988 that things really began to change. I first noticed a discrepancy between Matt. 12:40 and the other passages describing the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. I also noticed the conflicting genealogies in Matthew and Luke. I read the apologetic works for answers and they all failed to provide satisfying answers. My Christian friends told me to just "trust God", but that didn't help resolve the issue. Once one begins to entertain the very real possibility of mistakes in the

Bible, then all kinds of thoughts begin to occur. The implications for a fundy like myself are huge. My whole world view was threatened. But I'm getting off the subject. My change from fundy to liberal Christian to outright infidel took a little over 12 months, from the summer of 1988 to early fall 1989. Once a crack in the dam occurs, it is only a matter of time before the whole thing collapses. Two difficult passages that couldn't be reconciled became outright contradictions, but the implications of Matt. 12:40 being a contradiction did more to damage the trustworthiness of the Bible than the genealogies did. Too much was riding on Matthew 12:40 for it to prove to be a contradiction. Once my internal bias for the Bible had been damaged, I began to notice more "difficulties" and "discrepancies" that in time I had to admit were contradictions or absurdities. The trickle became a stream, the stream became a flood. You can figure the rest. I left FBA in the fall of 1989 and ceased being a "member" at that time. I called myself a deist when I left and used deist interchangeably with atheist from fall 1989 to fall 1991, at which time I began to have contacts with the writings of freethinkers like myself, and was able to accept the label "atheist" without worry.

In December 1992 I came into contact with the *Truth Seeker* magazine and through them I was able to contact you, Farrell Till, the Freedom From Religion Foundation and others. It is always a joy to read of others who have had similar experiences like myself. Thanks for your publication.

Letter #708 from RN of Moscow, Idaho

Dear Dennis.

I enclose a check for \$20 for which please send me a couple of your videos.... We hope to show them on the public access channel on the local TV cable.

Moving to another topic, (What follows is my analysis of "THE HARMONY OF THE GOSPELS"--Ed.)

Most Christian bookstores sell what are known as "harmonies of the gospels." These books purport to put the contents of the four gospels into one continuous account. This is supposed to serve two purposes: one, to be a sort of "reader's digest" of the gospels for people who have little time to read; two, to smooth out, or "harmonize," the contradictions among the gospels.

Although several dozen of these harmonies are currently available, new ones continue to be written in the hope that someone will finally determine what "really" happened in the gospel stories. But this is a vain hope, because back in the middle of the second century A.D. the gospels already contradicted each other. And if they were not the original manuscripts, they were certainly very early copies of them.

So about the year 160 a Christian writer called Tatian compiled the very first "harmony of the gospels." He picked out the events and sayings that appealed to him and left out the rest. But other Christians did not agree with his choices, so they have been playing the same, old, no-win game of "harmonizing the gospels" ever since. The gospels cannot be harmonized because they have contradicted each other from the very beginning.

(What follows is my analysis entitled LIES ABOUT THE BIBLE--Ed.)

LIE: The Bible is without error or contradiction.

FACT: The Bible is filled with errors and contradictions from cover to cover.

LIE: The Bible consists of exactly 66 books.

FACT: The Jewish Bible has 39 books; the Catholic Bible 72; some Protestant Bibles 66. The 1611 KJV has 72 books in it.

LIE: The Bible is the "Word of God."

FACT: Nowhere does the Bible make such a claim.

LIE: The OT contains many prophecies about Jesus of Nazareth.

FACT: There is not a single reference to Jesus in the OT.

LIE: The OT teaches that there is life after death.

FACT: In the entire OT no one dies and goes to heaven. And there is no hell in the OT religion. Death is the end. (Except in Daniel, ca. 167 B.C., the latest book in the OT)

Beware of evangelists who lie about the Bible. They are wolves in sheep's clothing. They just want your mind and your money.

Letter #709 from JS of Grosse Pointe Farms, Michigan

Dear Dennis.

Here's a couple of bucks for that prisoner guy in Texas (Letter #697; Issue #167). Take this and add it to all the other money that will surely pour in from all freethinking *Biblical Errancy* readers, and give him a decent subscription to your august journal.

I stand by my statement referred to in Letter #693 part j; same issue: Not only is DA obviously a nut, but you have begun to attack people's motivations, something I never saw in the first three years of *Biblical Errancy*. As I said previously, this is a positive development. Of course, this

necessarily implies that *Biblical Errancy* is up against not mere ignorance but psychological problems. And if this be true, then I wonder about the ancient cliché: If you stand on the street corner arguing with a fool for too long, people will soon wonder who is the fool!

If you don't question the motivation of people like DA, then you are either a fool or extremely naive. DA is like the typical Unitarian: he believes what he wants to believe, then expends enormous amounts of energy justifying his beliefs.

One last thing: when you say things like "relevant back issue" or "years ago," can you cite chapter and verse? People need to know where to look in the back issues of *Biblical Errancy* for the information you are referring them to. Five years ago I knew where to find anything in *Biblical Errancy* merely from memory; that is no longer the case.

Editor's Response to Letter #709

Dear JS.

A concerned subscriber has been kind enough to purchase a subscription for the inmate in Texas, and some back issues have been sent to him courtesy of another generous donor. I trust he will put his copies to good use in his ongoing struggle with his religious environment, since they can't very well be used for much else in view of his current status.

Insofar as the analogy you draw between arguing with DA and standing on a corner arguing with a fool is concerned, that has come to my mind in fleeting moments as well. No doubt many people would agree with your assessment of DA, including Unitarians, but I don't think the latter are going to be very happy with your comparison between them and DA.

Lastly, if you force me to give the actual cite every time I refer to what I said in past issues of BE, then I might have to delete some of what I intend to say. I, like you, long ago forgot what I have in each issue and made no attempt to memorize them. I don't have time to create the kind of index that is needed for this type of retrieval. The technical aspects of BE are a concern that I have largely left to others over the years. All I can do at this stage of the game is make my references and hope others will believe me or look them up. The first couple of years I had every issue memorized, but that kind of comprehension has long since gone by the boards.

Letter #710 from FDN of Huntsville, Texas

(FDN is a Texas inmate who wrote to us earlier, and in doing so prompted one subscriber to buy him a subscription to BE and another to buy him the first 20 issues of BE--Ed.)

Dear Dennis.

I got the fabulous package of back issues and news of another year's subscription to your great polemics. I attribute much of my clear understanding and continued advancement in learning "*how to think*" to Biblical Errancy. Your intensity to reason fulfills a daily desire I have to stimulate the "critical thinking" part of who "I am." And when I say "thank you" over and over it takes on a hollowness I try to avoid. During this one life, acts of thoughtfulness and the greatest act of all, kindness, such as you and two of your other subscribers have shown, simple as it may seem to some, deserves more than a thank you. However, I am limited by our language and my situation. So, would you please accept and convey a deep sense of appreciation that a mere thank you could not accomplish.

Also please feel free to publish my address, which is P.O. Box 32 248997, Huntsville, Texas 77348. I enjoy discussing *any topic*, both with freethinkers or religious individuals.

Editor's Response to Letter #710

Dear FDN.

I have no doubt you kind sentiments are appreciated, not only by me but by your benefactors as well. Incidentally, you have inadvertently hit upon a key element of this whole enterprise, a factor that is often overlooked. After having engaged in biblical dialogue and debate for more years than I originally planned, I have come to the conclusion that many biblicists defend religion in general and the bible in particular because they are simply unable to think critically, logically, objectively, or accurately. They have real problems marshaling the critical thinking that is so inseparable from good reasoning. That can primarily be attributed to the fact that some basic premises incompatible with logical thought were inculcated during their vulnerable formative years of youth. They have serious difficulty thinking rationally when confronted with facts that do not meld with what they have been taught, especially in regard to religion and the Bible. To put it simply, they just can't think straight when certain topics appear on their radar screen. The power of their wish almost invariably exceeds the strength of facts. They just can't see non sequiturs, unsubstantiated conclusions, superstitions, and anemic arguments. And they can't seem to separate that which is trivial from that which is significant.

Letter #711 from TS of Prescott Valley, Arizona

Dear Dennis.

Just a note to inform you that the Prescott Community Access Channel 13 is constantly having problems with your B.E. video tapes and usually ends up showing only a portion of your program.

This frequently occurs also whenever the Atheist Forum is shown. I called Channel 13 complaining about this, and I'm always given an apologetic excuse about the computer "shifting the tape."

This never happens during religious programs, so I can't help but wonder if the real problem lies with adults who are thinking like children (superstitious), also acting like children. Keep up the good work!!

Editor's Response to Letter #711

You are beginning to get a feel for what I have been encountering for years. Having been in this business for a long time and encountered numerous roadblocks, there is no doubt in my mind that official and unofficial censorship is the real problem in far too many instances. I never cease to be amazed at the number of people who spout free speech platitudes without surcease until their own basic beliefs are under serious assault.

***EDITOR'S NOTE:* (a) We are still seeking volunteers willing to play our video programs on their local access channels. In my earliest shows I am somewhat ill at ease as you can probably tell, but I settle down as time goes by. Frankly I was concerned about how they would be received.**

(b) We are still publishing the names and addresses of those wanting to be contacted by people living nearby. If you wish others to contact you, just send us your name and address for inclusion in a future issue.

Issue #171 Editor: Dennis McKinsey

Mar. 1997

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

COMMENTARY

This month's issue will begin an analysis of the apologetic work entitled *The Bible Has the Answer* by apologists Morris and Clark.

REVIEW

THE BIBLE HAS THE ANSWER (Part 1)--Nearly two decades ago one of the leaders of the Institute of Creation Research, Henry Morris, and a companion, Martin Clark, wrote a book in which are contained the answers to over 100 questions regarding the validity of the Bible. Although Morris has a distinct interest in "science" as he views it, the range of questions contained within the work is considerably broader. The work has occasionally been quoted in BE, but a thorough critique of that which has not been addressed is long overdue. Although Morris and Clark apparently view themselves as capable defenders of the Bible, a rather substantial body of evidence exists to the contrary. The most appropriate means by which to prove as much is to unveil the sizable number of fallacies found within their apologetic work.

First, they are asked on the very first page, "How do you know the Bible is true?" They begin by saying they know the book is valid because of the large number of accurate prophecies contained therein, a defense which we debunked long ago. Then they say, "Another striking evidence of divine inspiration is found in the fact that many of the principles of modern science were recorded as facts of nature in the Bible long before scientists confirmed them experimentally." Some of those listed are: the roundness of the earth (Isa. 40:22), the almost infinite ex-tent of the sidereal [of or pertaining to the stars--Ed.] universe (Isa. 55:9), the vast number of stars (Jer. 33:22), the equivalence of matter and energy (Heb. 1:3), the law of increasing entropy (the disorder or randomness of a system tends to increase--Ed.) (Psa. 102:25-27), the paramount importance of blood in life processes (Lev. 17:11), the atmospheric circulation (Eccle. 1:6), the gravitational field (Job 26:7), and many others."

In true apologetic style Morris and Clark chose to interpret some verses as they desired, ignored those which are contradictory, and dwelled on those which are quite obvious to even a child. With these considerations in mind, let's address their examples.

(a) Isa. 40:22 ("It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth") may imply the earth is round but our illustrious scholars ignore the fact that Isaiah also said earlier in 11:12, "he...shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth." If the world is round or a globe, how can it have corners? If one is to be interpreted literally why isn't the other?

They also conveniently ignore the misstatement found in Matt. 4:8 which says, "Again, the devil taketh Jesus up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world." How could any-one see the entire world from the top of a mountain, no matter how high it may be?

(b) Isa. 55:9 ("For as the heavens are higher than the earth....") doesn't say anything substantive about the extent of the universe. It merely says one is higher than the other. If I say the roof in my house is higher than my floor, that is hardly equivalent to alleging "the almost infinite extent of the sidereal universe." One can say without fear of exaggeration that that is stretching things a bit.

(c) Jer. 33:22 ("As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, neither the sand of the sea measured...") is rather obvious to anyone who takes time to go out on a clear night and stare into the sky. Not much illumination is required for that observation.

(d) To say that Heb. 1:3 ("Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high") proves the equivalence of matter and energy is little short of incomprehensible. The verse is both irrelevant and immaterial.

(e) Psa. 102:25-27 ("Of old thou didst lay the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They will perish, but thou dost endure. Thou changest them like raiment, and they pass away; but thou are the same, and thy years have no end.") doesn't prove anything definite in regard to entropy because the latter is more in the nature of a process than an event, while these verses could easily entail a sudden alteration. When you change your clothes or raiment that could be considered a sudden occurrence as could be the process by which the earth and the heavens perish scripturally. The verses are just too indefinite, too vague, to definitely allege they are asserting entropy in some manner.

(f) Lev. 17:11 ("For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul") is not particularly informative or insightful either because the results of someone bleeding without surcease are obvious to all. Simple medical data assures us blood is needed for life.

Secondly, Morris and Clark slipped in the word "processes" earlier in order to make it sound as if Leviticus was ahead of its time and making reference to the circulatory system. The verse says blood is necessary for life, but nowhere does it say blood circulates throughout the body and contributes to "life processes" such as breathing, feeling, and thinking.

And thirdly, the entire verse has been twisted in such a manner as to serve apologetic motives. Leviticus is contending that the loss of blood atones for sins and by being shed it provides life to the soul. In that ethereal and secondary sense it is providing life for the flesh. Leviticus is referring to a kind of spiritual life giving, not the kind of life provided via blood flowing from the heart to the kidneys to the liver to the intestines, etc.

(g) Eccle. 1:6 ("The wind blows to the south, and goes around to the north; round and round goes the wind and on its circuits the wind returns") is another one of those verses that is nowhere near as perceptive as Morris and Clark would have us believe. Any reasonably intelligent child knows that atmospheric winds blow in different directions and return.

(h) And lastly, it is also mentally taxing to determine how Job 26:7 ("He stretcheth out the north over the empty place, and hangeth the earth upon nothing") proves the Bible taught the existence

of a gravitational field. It would be considerably easier to prove a field of gravitation exists by simply pushing something off a table.

The lengths to which the imaginations of apologists will go to assist their belief in biblical prescience with reference to science are truly something to behold. As with messianic prophecy, they have scoured scripture with a fine tooth comb and gleaned every verse or group of connected verses that could possibly be warped in such a manner as to serve their ends.

Second, Morris and Clark address the following question on page 4: In what sense and to what extent is the Bible the Inspired Word of God? As part of their answer they say, "Those modern-day preachers and professors of religion who seem to take delight in finding supposed mistakes in the Bible thus in effect are calling God a liar!" This comment would only have validity if the Bible were in fact the word of the divine being in whom religionists place so much faith. Until they prove as much, which can't be done because of a veritable ocean of evidence to the contrary, this comment remains pure nonsense. Morris and Clark are following in the footsteps of many apologetic predecessors by assuming the very point in dispute. They assume the Bible is the word of a supreme being and proceed from there, when more than enough evidence is available to destroy their premise. If anyone is being called a liar, its those who compiled the book to start with.

Third, on page 7 they say, "Science has never disproved any statement of the Bible--rather, most scientists have simply repudiated it because of their unwillingness to submit to God's authority as Creator and coming Judge."

(a) This is typical of the bogus rationale so often employed by apologists. They seek to blame the messenger rather than reality creating the message. To begin with, as we have so often said, scientists are not required to disprove anything. He who alleges must prove. When the Bible says people rose from the dead or a stick turned into a serpent or a woman turned into a pillar of salt or a donkey talked or a woman was made from a man's rib or the sun stood still, it is obligated to prove as much. And until the requisite proof is forthcoming, these contentions remain, what they have always been, figments of people's imaginations.

(b) The unwillingness of scientists to accept mere testimony and words in a book as proof is not evidence of a superego and an unwillingness to accept the authority of a higher entity on the part of scientists. It is proof that scientists are rational, logical beings making nothing more than a simple request for something more substantial than somebody's attestation. Is that too much to ask? Of course not.

At the bottom of page 8 they say, "Not one statement has ever been disproved by any real facts of science or history." Utterly false! A far more accurate way to state

this would be "Many biblical statements have not been proven by any facts of science or history." As long as the burden of proof is kept on the shoulders of those with whom it justifiably remains, the religionists are going to remain dead in their "tracts."

Fourth, at the bottom of page 10 they make another grandiose assertion by saying, "The Bible is a marvelous unity in all its diversity.... Every part throws light on every other part...." If there is anything the Bible does not display it is "unity in all its diversity," let alone "marvelous unity." It would be far more accurate to say that nearly every part throws exposure, rather than "light," on every other part.

Fifth, while discussing on page 12 whether or not the King James Version should be abandoned in light of all the modern versions, they finally offer a credible generalization by saying, "After all, why should one commit to memory a particular verse of Scripture if even the authorities don't agree on what the verse says?"

Unfortunately they quickly follow this up with a comment that can only lead one to believe that they have not read very many versions on the market today. They state, "Furthermore, the English of the King James is not nearly so archaic or difficult to follow as its critics allege. In fact, it is in general written in a much simpler vocabulary, with a higher percentage of one- and two-syllable words than almost any of the modern translations. The honest reader will find it at least as easy to understand as any other." Since this statement deviates dramatically from reality, one can't help but wonder what modern versions they have in mind and how many they have read. How one can say the Revised Standard Version or the Good News Bible, for example, are not clearer and easier to read than the King James is anyone's guess.

Sixth, while trying to answer the question of how they can be sure God exists, they state on page 14 that, "Many people today would like to escape the authority of God and therefore have tried to convince themselves and others that science has done away with God and creation. Men would like to believe that they are accountable only to themselves...." As usual the fundamental premise upon which their "logic" rests is fatally flawed. Rather than acknowledging the obvious intelligence and logic inherent in the question--How do you know a God exists and what is your evidence--they choose to cast aspersions on the inquirer's motives. They don't confront the question; they attack the intentions of those posing the inquiry. Even if it were asked by someone with the worst of motives, it remains no less valid, logical, and sensible.

More often than not the question is solicited by those with perfectly understandable and proper concerns and doubts. After all, when people contend a god must exist because of what is said in a book that also tells you people rise from the dead, sticks turn into serpents, people walk on water and donkey's talk, one can certainly understand their reluctance to believe other claims that are equally bizarre and deficient in evidence.

Seventh, although this publication is not normally concerned with the existence of a god, we can't help but note some other comments by Morris and Clark that just can not be allowed to slip past the guards. On page 14 they state, "Yet the evidence for God is so clear and certain.... The very essence of the scientific method, in common with all human experience, involves the basic principle of Cause and Effect. That is, no effect can be greater than its causes. 'From nothing, nothing comes!' There must therefore be a First Cause of all things which has at least all the characteristics which are seen in the universe which has been produced by it." In so far as I am aware, the Law of Cause and Effect simply states that for every effect there must be a cause. But how does this prove there must be a first cause? Why must there be a first cause? And if everything must have a cause, then why doesn't that apply to God as well? They are relying upon what is commonly known as a non sequitur.

Morris and Clark state, "The First Cause must have intelligence, because there are intelligent beings in the universe...." This argument is about as sensible as saying the First Cause must be a car because there are cars in the universe. Why can intelligence only come from intelligence? The physical entity from which human intelligence emanates could easily have evolved over an incredible number of years into the complex organism it is today, the human brain.

They also state, "Similarly the First Cause must have emotional attributes since such things as emotions are surely present in the world. The highest and noblest emotion, most men would agree, is that of love, and thus the Cause of love must itself be One who possesses love in a very

high degree." This is another poorly thought out conclusion. Love is only one of many emotions that exist in the world. If the First Cause must possess Love because love is the highest and noblest emotion on the positive side, then this First Cause must also possess hate, because hate is the highest emotion on the negative side and is equally powerful. Why must this First Cause only have positive as opposed to negative traits? Morris and Clark even stated earlier that the First Cause must have "at least all the characteristics which are seen in the universe which has been produced by it" and that would include the 7 deadly sins. Moreover, if the First Cause must possess Love because love is present in the world, then the car analogy comes into play again.

Eighth, and finally they say in regard to this First Cause concept, "The Second Law of Thermodynamics is that of Increasing Disorder, and it says that the universe is running down and wearing out. All processes tend toward a state of decay and ultimate death. Eventually, if present processes continue, the universe will die. And, since it has not yet died, it cannot be infinitely old and must have had a beginning at some time in the past." Morris and Clark are masters of the non sequitur. They constantly draw conclusions that do not logically follow from their premises. What does the eventual death or nondedeth of the universe have to do with how it was created or not created? Even if we assumed it were going to die, why couldn't it still have never had a beginning? Their book is a veritable cornucopia of barren conclusions resting upon fanciful foundations.

And while we are on the subject, no religionist has ever rationally explained to me why God, who is not known to exist, does not have to have a cause, while matter, which is known to exist, requires a creator. If God's existence can have an infinite retrogression, why can't that apply to the existence of matter as well? Why does matter have to have a creator while God doesn't? Why couldn't it always have been?

(To be Continued Next Month)

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #712 from MJ of Andover, Mass. (Part a)

(The following letter is from MJ who spends a lot of time discussing and debating religion and the bible with biblicists and distributing audio recordings of the encounters. He meets them in all sorts of locations and dialogue flows. He wrote us the following letter entitled "Why I Am Not a Liberal Christian"--Ed.)

Dear Dennis. I think your viewpoint is that if one wants to refute Christianity, you need to refute conservative Christianity, because that is essentially what Christianity is. My viewpoint is that since the majority of Christians are actually LIBERAL Christians, it is equally important to try to refute liberal Christianity, even though that job is akin to nailing jello to the wall.

At any rate, here is my effort to do so. You may want to take a section or two to comment upon in BE.

Let's say a man, such as myself, has been taught from a young age that the Bible is God's Word. And that this man, as an honest seeker of Truth, is determined to find out if this received wisdom, is really true.

He studies the Bible, listens to every teacher, respects every viewpoint, broods over every issue.

He wants to believe. But some passages make no sense. Some of the teachings miss the mark. Some of the theology is irrational. And some of God's behavior is very questionable. After many years, he knows that he can no longer in good conscience commit to Christianity.

He re-reads the Bible, only this time not through the lens of faith, but with a critical eye; and he finds that the book contradicts science and itself; its ethics are immoral; it is filled with God-directed cruelty and barbarism; its prophecies are not only unimpressive but demonstrably phony, and the problem of evil is not dealt with adequately.

He concludes that the Bible cannot be God's Word, and that orthodox Christianity is false. But because he has always seen the Jesus story as a powerful revelation of wisdom and love, he looks--with all his heart, soul, and will--for a way of understanding the Bible so that its central underlying message is still valid, still viable.

He becomes a liberal Christian. He adopts more sophisticated ways of interpreting. He no longer sees the Bible as God's directly inspired Word, but as man's flawed interpretation of his relationship with God, which interpretation, nonetheless, contains inspired messages, particularly in the person of Jesus.

He no longer sees Jesus as literally God on earth, omniscient, a miracle-worker, a perfect human being. Instead, Jesus is quite human, vulnerable, and flawed. Yet he is still the Son of God, in the sense that he best represented what God wants. He correctly presented God's essential message--that God cares about us, that everyone has worth, that man should love his neighbor. By his exemplary life, Jesus affirmed the fatherhood of God, and the brotherhood of man.

At the same time, his wisdom was not infallible. He was actually wrong in some of his beliefs - like expecting the world to end in his generation, or thinking that demons caused illness.

And some of his teachings may have been overstated by the writers. Did Jesus really say that he, rather than his message is "the only way"? That seems oddly ego-centric for one thing, and fundamentally unfair for another. To say he is the only way, is to exclude all those who have never heard of him, as well as all sincere and decent followers of other religions. A fair God would not condemn such people.

Clearly, what writers say Jesus said, is not necessarily what he did say. Possibly he was both wiser and more careful in his actual statements than what he is reported to have said.

Such overstated passages, as well as folkloric miracle stories, and contradictory narratives, and muddled advice, and irrational theology, could all be the product of flawed writers; yet Jesus could still be the primary source of divine wisdom in human history. The seeker

continually looks for the kernel of truth behind the alleged words of Jesus.

He discounts much of John's later, longer, and theologically developed gospel, and tends to look at Mark's earlier, shorter, and more straightforward gospel as the most reliable.

But...even here, he finds disturbing and wrong-headed ideas, which, in the final analysis, he cannot put under the category of things Jesus didn't really say. Because if he did, the Biblical Jesus would be gutted; and all that would be left is a white-washed Hollywood movie version of Jesus.

It seems the only way to salvage an acceptable Jesus is indeed to ignore the Biblical Jesus, and go with the white-washed, idealized version, the version that most people in fact harbor.

But that would not be an honest endeavor - making up your own Jesus. The actual, the historical, the Biblical Jesus, is the Jesus we must deal with.

Once again throwing away all preconceptions, reexamining hundreds of issues, reviewing the entire mass of evidence, our seeker is finally forced to concede that Jesus, despite some revolutionary insights and remarkable courage and conviction, is really...a misguided religious fanatic.

He recognizes this conclusion is at odds with common wisdom. But he sees how Christians, both conservative and liberal, are culturally biased. They are indoctrinated to instinctively give Jesus a positive spin. Every average teaching is a pearl of wisdom, every non-sense saying is somehow an arresting insight. Jesus's faults, fanaticism, and questionable teachings are consistently overlooked.

But this popular conception of Jesus, this idealized version, is not the real Jesus. The real Jesus is the Biblical Jesus. And the Biblical Jesus....

(Stay Tuned. Next month MJ will describe the real biblical Jesus--Ed.)

Editor's Response to Letter #712 (Part a)

Dear MJ. I empathize with the general tenor of your commentary, but by failing to challenge liberal rationalizations at key intersections you appear to be inadvertently promoting liberal Christianity more than criticizing it. You are trying to walk a fine line and in doing so a few comments and omissions pushed you onto the wrong side of the fence.

First, you say "He becomes a liberal Christian. He adopts more sophisticated ways of interpreting." They aren't so much more "sophisticated" as they are unscrupulous. They jettison the clear meaning of the text for an interpretation that is more to their liking psychologically. The fact that their alteration is biblically unsustainable is of less importance to them than emotional contentment.

Second, you say, "He correctly presented God's essential message--that God cares about us, that everyone has worth, that man should love his neighbor." I don't understand why you believe this is God's central message. Are you getting this from the Bible? If so, how do you square that with the fact that God chose the Jews over all others to be his chosen people and allowed babes, infants, and other innocents to be slaughtered? Or maybe you are getting this from the world at large around us? If so, then how can you explain the incredible number of infants, babies, and other innocents who die throughout the world every day because of starvation, malnutrition, disease, neglect, and abandonment? This world reeks with pain and injustice.

Third, you say, "By his exemplary life, Jesus affirmed the fatherhood of God, and the brotherhood of man." As you probably remember, we proved in a series of commentaries that the life of Jesus was far from exemplary in many ways. Instead of providing rectification you defaulted credit to Jesus he never earned.

Fourth, you say, "he has always seen the Jesus story as a powerful revelation of wisdom and love." You should make it unmistakably clear that this is the viewpoint of liberals and not

yourself, because the message of Jesus is far from wise and loving in too many instances. Indeed, at this point you would have done well to have provided some examples to the contrary.

Fifth, you say, "Did Jesus really say that he, rather than his message is 'the only way'? That seems oddly ego-centric for one thing, and fundamentally unfair for another." True, but that is what he said in John 14:6 and elsewhere, whether it is ego-centric and unfair or not. You say "a fair god would not condemn people" who have not heard of him or people in other religions. But, again, looking at the world today what leads you to believe this alleged God even exists or is fair if he does? I see virtually no evidence of divine justice or concern ruling the roost. Indeed, the world is absolutely inundated with inequities in practically every aspect and location imaginable. It is truly staggering. In any event, I look forward to your description of Jesus as I know from past experience it will be well considered.

Sixth, you say the Bible contains inspired messages according to the liberal. I would have quickly followed that up with a comment along the lines of what Robert Ingersoll said on page 233 of Vol. 11 of his Works. "...if the Bible is true, it needs no inspiration, and...if not true, inspiration can do it no good."

Seventh, you say, "Clearly, what writers say Jesus said, is not necessarily what he did say. Possibly he was both wiser and more careful in his actual statements than what he is reported to have said." This comes precariously close to a defense of Jesus in light of the fact that you provide no contradictory data. This, too, like some earlier assertions, should not have been allowed to go unchallenged. All that Christians know about Jesus comes from scripture and all that Jesus is known to have said comes from scripture. So, if you want to know what Jesus said, you will have to go to scripture. Anyone who dislikes or denies what Jesus is alleged to have said will have to take it up with the writers of scripture because they are the source, the only source. And since it is safe to assume the gospels' authors are in a much better position to know what Jesus said, if anything, than modern critics, it is incumbent upon liberals and other dissenters to provide evidence to the contrary. On this point I would agree with the fundamentalists. To merely go through the Bible and say willy nilly that Jesus said this and not that simply because the latter don't seem like the kinds of comments he would have made is not going to fly. If liberals think Jesus is "both wiser and more careful in his actual statements than what he is reported to have said" then they are going to have to come up with something far more substantive than what I have read so far.

And eighth, you relay the liberal position by saying, "Such overstated passages, as well as folkloric miracle stories, and contradictory narratives, and muddled advice, and irrational theology, could all be the product of flawed writers" without asking how a perfect book emanating from a perfect being could have flawed writers. And you add to this by allowing the following liberal defense to also go unchallenged. "Jesus could still be the primary source of divine wisdom in human history. The seeker continually looks for the kernel of truth behind the alleged words of Jesus." Jesus "could" be a lot of things, but the question is what does the evidence show. All we have to go by is the Book. Who says these are the "alleged" words of Jesus? The Bible says these "are" the words of Jesus. There is nothing "alleged" about them. Again who are these sources who claim they know more about what Jesus said than those who wrote the gospels. What are their credentials and from whence comes their evidence?

In essence, the problem I have with your account is that although the summary in the last 5 paragraphs is commendable too many liberal defenses and explanations in the body of your letter were allowed to pass unchallenged and unrefuted. You provided a good synopsis of why the liberal position is without merit but you did not adequately explain why their specific arguments were without substance. If their positions are allowed to pass unchecked or unanswered, that

could very well give readers the impression that you are either implicitly agreeing or you have no effective counteracting response. I hope you take these admonitions in the spirit intended, but I couldn't in good conscience fail to articulate them.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #713 from MJ of Andover, Mass.

Dear Dennis. Just got the December issue of BE and I am glad to see the letter by RH of Dayton, Ohio, addressing the issue of how to deal with slippery LIBERAL Christians. I've found that fundamentalist and liberals are such different animals that they require quite different lines of argument. You can argue about Noah's ark for hours with the former, but the latter will dismiss the issue as irrelevant before you even finish a sentence.

I thought RH's letter (about the limits of broad interpretations of Jesus's promise that prayer will be granted in Matt. 18:19) presented an excellent case against the liberal who tends to accuse critics of Christianity of literalist interpretations, when in fact we are simply trying to hold the passage within the range of what it was intended to mean.

I'm guessing the liberal's response to RH's letter would be that Jesus did not necessarily say that: Matthew said that Jesus said it; and we must make allowances for Matthew's understandably excessive zeal. At that point I would press the concept that if the bulk of Jesus's key teachings are not what Jesus actually said, if the Biblical Jesus as understood by the writers is not the "real" Jesus, then they are making up their own Jesus and creating their own theology. Call it something else, but don't call it Christianity.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Two Important Announcements.

(a) Thanks to the generous help of a loyal supporter we now have an HP Scanjet 5p Scanner which will allow us to scan documents right onto the computer screen without typing in all the details. We are now asking everyone who wants their letters or other material to be included in BE to send them to us in typewritten form only. The scanner will not pick up handwritten information reliably.

(b) Thanks to the devoted assistance and hard work of Charlie Kluepfel in New Jersey the first 127 issues of BE are now available on a web site. We hope to add the others eventually. By agreement with Internet Infidels anyone who goes to them for information exposing the Bible in general and Jesus in particular will automatically be referred to our new web site at:
<http://members.aol.com/ckbloomfld>

Issue #172 Editor: Dennis McKinsey

Apr. 1997

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

COMMENTARY

This month's issue will continue our analysis of the apologetic work entitled *The Bible Has the Answer* by apologists Morris and Clark.

REVIEW

THE BIBLE HAS THE ANSWER (Part 2)--Ninth, while outlining some fundamentalist theology on page 17 Morris and Clark make an unscriptural comment with respect to the Trinity. They say, "The teaching of the Bible concerning the Trinity might be summarized thus. God is a Tri-unity, with each Person of the Godhead equally and fully eternally God. Each is necessary, and each is distinct, and yet all are one.... The Son proceeds from the Father, and the Spirit from the Son." Where does Scripture say the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Son? If anything, it is the other way around according to Matt. 1:18-20 ("When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost...for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost"). According to Matthew the Holy Ghost gave rise to Jesus not vice versa.

Then Morris and Clark proceed to add absurdity to inaccuracy by saying, "Though these relationships seem paradoxical, and to some completely impossible, they are profoundly realistic, and their truth is ingrained deep in man's nature.... Thus, the truth of God's tri-unity is ingrained in man's very nature...." Now our illustrious duo is getting just plain silly! Speaking for myself, and no doubt millions of others, I can say categorically that there is nothing deep, or even shallow for that matter, in my nature telling me that there is a triune God who created the Son, who, in turn, created the Holy Spirit. Their attitude could easily fall under the category of religious arrogance with a liberal sprinkling of narrow mindedness.

Then they say, "the truth of the tri-une nature of the Creator is clearly implied by the profoundly tri-une nature of the Creation. Thus the physical cosmos is clearly a tri-universe of Space, Matter, and Time and each of these is co-extensive with the entire universe." One is tempted to say, "But haven't you heard of the Fifth Dimension." But seriously, this infatuation with the number three is nothing more than superstitious nonsense. Working on that theory I could more accurately say God is a duality since nearly every aspect of life has an opposite. Smart versus stupid, in versus out; up versus down, hot versus cold, tall versus short, rich versus poor, birth and death, cause and effect, growth and decay and so on ad infinitum. In fact, this kind of "logic" could very easily be used to negate the Trinity entirely. One could just as easily argue for strict monotheism by alleging that everything in existence is one of a kind, unique, sui generis, and therefore God must be one of a kind, a unity, sui generis. No two things are identical, if for no other reason than the fact that their locations are different.

One can't help but note another major contradiction in this regard. Fundamentalists and other religionists constantly accuse atheists, agnostics, humanists and other freethinkers of having "bigheads," if you will, but that is exactly what is being displayed so vividly by Morris and Clark. They say, "Thus the physical cosmos is clearly a tri-universe of Space, Matter, and Time and each of these is co-extensive with the entire universe." Talking about believing you know it all! How do they know these are the only three dimensions in the universe? For some serious scholars a Fourth Dimension is a real

possibility. Have Morris and Clark been throughout the entire universe and do they possess infinite knowledge? They have no way of verifying or demonstrating that comment. They are guilty of that which fundamentalists so freely attribute to their detractors.

Tenth, while on this concept of an eternal creator, they state on page 22, "Our minds cannot really grasp the idea of an eternal God, existing independently of the universe which He created.... But what we cannot comprehend, we can believe. Millions of people through the ages have found mental and spiritual rest through simple faith...." They may have found rest but did they find truth. That's the issue. I may find rest, comfort, and solace in believing I will live for centuries or hit the lottery for tens of millions, but that doesn't make it so.

Eleventh, additional evidence that biblicists feel the universe revolves around them comes to the fore on page 24 through Morris and Clark's reliance upon and citation of Psalm 8:6 ("Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet"). While quoting this verse they say, "It was only man who was "created in the image of God" (Gen. 1:27).... All other things were created for man's use and control. We see, therefore, that the physical and biological creations were made for the service of man. It may be noted in passing that this fact points up one of the many absurdities of the evolutionary theory. Since the creation was entirely man's dominion, it is incredible that the Creator would have forced the earth and its other organic inhabitants to endure a five-billion year preamble of confused and meaningless existence before its master was ever to try to comprehend and order it."

In the first place, Morris and Clark are afflicted with philosophical myopia because they are receiving their belief that everything is man's plaything from a book that is itself flawed throughout. How can they be sure this is not another flaw?

But even more importantly, their egocentric version of history has led them to believe that confusion reigned on the earth prior to man's appearance. How so? The laws of nature and the laws of physics worked quite well and life progressed inexorably. So where was the confusion? Life evolved from lower to higher forms and intelligence increased steadily. So where is the meaninglessness? Sounds like progress to me, be it ever so slow. Why must man be present to have meaningful existence and no confusion? In fact, some people feel the opposite is true; confusion only arises with the arrival of man. The problem lies not with any absurdity on the part of evolutionary theory but with the degree to which the warped variation of solipsism exhibited by anti-evolutionists has perverted their thought processes.

Eleventh, while discussing their hero our deceptive duo state on page 28, "He, alone, of all men who ever lived, conquered death itself. By all the rules of evidence, His bodily resurrection from the grave can be proved the best-proved fact of all history." Is there no end to apologetic hyperbole, falsifications, and exaggerations? Their own book, the Bible, shows that he was not only not the only person to conquer death but he wasn't even the first. We made this point years ago and listed many biblical figures who returned to life before him.

And to say that "His bodily resurrection from the grave can be proved the best-proved fact of all history" is too ridiculous to discuss. I have photograph after photograph, artifact after artifact, living witness after living witness, document after document, confession after confession, audio recording after audio recording, video recording after video recording to prove that the Holocaust actually occurred. Christian adherents to belief in a real Jesus and a real Resurrection can only dream about having that much evidence in their favor. Support of that magnitude would be beyond their wildest imaginings. Christians have no living witnesses, no artifacts, no photographs, no video, no audio and their only documents and testimonies are confined to a book that is so obviously prejudiced and tendentious in its portrayal of what allegedly occurred that no one with any real concern for accuracy and objectivity would dare accept it without extra biblical corroboration.

Twelfth, on page 31 Morris and Clark really jumbled their jive when they said regarding the birth of Jesus, "Although He was born in the family of David, it must be remembered that neither of His earthly parents was connected with Him genetically. He was conceived by the Holy Ghost and simply placed in the womb of the Virgin Mary." In effect, our apologetic friends are admitting there is no biological link between Jesus and David. And if Jesus is not a physical descendant of David, then there is no way he could be the messiah. The messiah must come out of the loins of David according to Scripture; that is an absolute requirement. Realizing the seriousness of their admission, Morris and Clark hastened to add the following footnote. "This does not imply that Christ was not born of 'the seed of David' (Romans 1:4), since He was nurtured from the moment of conception until birth in the womb of Mary, who was herself of David's seed." How this explanation reconciles the problem is any-one's guess. Whether or not Mary is genetically connected to David is immaterial. We are concerned with the connection of Jesus to David through her. That's what matters. And Jesus, by their own admission, has no physical connection to her. Mary may have been of David's seed, but Jesus was not, and that's all that counts. In the same footnote they say, "The special formation of His body assured its complete freedom from inherited physical defects as well as from a sin-nature inherited from Mary." It may have freed him from inheriting any sin nature, but it also relieved him of any valid claim to the messiahship. What he gained in the right hand he lost from the left.

And thirteenth, one of the more powerful but rarely noticed aspects of this whole Jesus-is-God-in-the-flesh mythology is the degree to which it turns God into a racist. Morris and Clark state, "One of the most remarkable features of the gospel records is that they give no information whatever about the physical appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ. Whether he was tall or short, lean or heavy, dark or light in complexion, bearded or clean-shaven--no one knows.... We do not even know that His features were 'Jewish' in character." Although all of this is correct, they failed to note that his features are not nearly as important as the fact that he had to have some definite physical characteristics and that generates a major dilemma. No matter what Jesus looked like, he couldn't have looked like Martin Luther King (Negroid), John F. Kennedy (Caucasian) and Mao Tse-tung (mongoloid) at the same time. In order to enter the world as a man, God had to make a racial choice. He had to prefer or select one race over all others.

I have always been intrigued by the fact that blacks in the Catholic Church, for example, will worship before a crucifix with a white man attached. They seem completely oblivious to the fact that they have been acculturated to accept a non-black as their savior without even being aware of the unavoidable racism attached. How many whites would be willing to worship before a cross with a crucified black man nailed thereto? No doubt this consideration contributes in some degree to the transition of so many blacks from Christianity to Islam. They view the former as a white man's religion.

The situation with respect to women is no better. Women have been so accustomed through biblical pronouncements and cultural conditioning to think of men as the superior wing of the species, that it never dawns on millions to ask themselves why God chose a man to be their savior rather than a woman. Any self-respecting woman should find that aspect of Christianity alone to be not only offensive but degrading. It's as if women can't do anything of real significance on their own. They have to have a man to bail them out. One could pose the same question to women that was earlier asked of blacks. How many men would be willing to pray before a crucifix on which a woman is nailed? Regardless of how women view the situation, god had to have made a sexist decision before entering the world. He could not have entered as a man and woman simultaneously, and since he chose to enter as a man, rather than a woman, the conclusion is inescapable. (To Be Continued Next Month)

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #714 from NL of Annapolis, Maryland

...You know that I am an ardent admirer of your great works, including your excellent logic (I always want to incorrectly say "logics"), and I do not wish to appear in agreement with the writer of Letter #693, but I have previously and again now challenge your claim that you do not have to prove it when you say that X contradicts Y, while you CORRECTLY demand HE WHO ALLEGES MUST PROVE.... Now you say that a black white horse is a contradiction. Assuming that you are a white man, and work with your white horse in a coal mine all day and come out on a pitch black night, I believe that you could very well be a black white man riding a black white horse. So much for you not needing to prove a contradiction....

Editor's Response to Letter #714

You have been a loyal supporter of BE for years NL and we have rarely disagreed, but on this point an exception is clearly justified. Your analogy isn't even apropos to the original contradiction All you have is an all black horse coming out of the mine. Where is the white? Your attempted reconciliation of this problem is without substance. Originally the horse was white, and now it's black. That is not only not contradictory, but it is quite possible and has even occurred on occasion. What I want to see is a horse that is all black and all white simultaneously, not sequentially. I want to see white and black at the same time, not one after the other or side by side as on a zebra. You completely missed the dilemma and took out on a tangent

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #712 from MJ Continues from Last Month (Part b)

(Last Month we published the first part of MJ's article entitled Why I Am Not a Liberal Christian. We concluded it by saying, "Next month MJ will describe the real biblical Jesus." He will now proceed as promised--Ed.)

One: He believed fully in the OT and its cruel God. He said "Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). He said "not a jot or tittle" of it would be changed (Matt. 5:18).

Two: Disrespected his parents. He said "Woman, what have I to do with thee?" to his mother (John 2:4). He offers no apology whatever after disappearing from his parents for three days when he was 12 (Luke 2:50).

Three: Was ethnocentric. He said he was "not sent except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 15:24). He said it is not good "to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs" (Matt. 15:26).

Four: Accepted slavery. He relates a parable in which he supports a servant being "beaten with many stripes" (Luke 12:47). He implicitly supports the institution of slavery in Luke 17:7-10.

Five: Supported an ascetic view of life. He praises self-made eunuchs (Matt. 19:12). He said "he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternity" (John 12:25).

Six: Supported wishful thinking over hard work. He claims you can receive whatever you pray for (Mark 11:20-24). That is simply not true. He claims you can literally move mountains by faith (Matt. 21:17-22). Virtually every liberal Christian assumes the moving of mountains passage is figurative; but it's not. Read the context. He was NOT speaking figuratively, any more than he was in Luke 17:6 when he speaks of removing "this mulberry tree" by faith.

Christians are brainwashed to selectively ignore context, and to interpret figuratively with no justification. The proper line of reasoning is not the Christian mind-set of: "it's obviously not true literally, so therefore it must be figurative." Rather, the honest line of reasoning is: "the context is literal, so therefore this is, in fact, nonsense, mere rhetoric unworthy of someone claiming to speak for God." You cannot literally move a mountain by faith. Jesus is just selling dreams.

Seven: he believed in a utopian world, one very much at odds with reality. He claims in Matt. 6:26 and 6:34 that God will feed you just as he feeds the birds, when in fact God frequently does neither! Starving Somalians would hardly find Jesus's discourse here edifying. And Jesus obviously did not know that the actual starvation rate of sparrows is often 50%.

The Encyclopedia Americana, 1992, Vol. 3, p. 795 says, "The first year is the most difficult one in the life of a bird. In most species the mortality rate for young birds during the first year is about 50%, but in some species it may reach as high as 80% to 90%."

New Scientist, Jan., 1969, pp. 121-122, reports that one third of adult birds and four fifths of their offspring die of starvation every year.

An honest seeker must worship only the Real God, not some product of wishful thinking that doesn't square with the harsher aspects of reality. As soon as you deny reality, you are no longer worshiping the Real God. It's His world. He created it, and He is clearly not omnibenevolent, only, in this seeker's conviction, ultimately benevolent.

Eight: Contradicted himself. He said "all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matt. 26:52), yet he tells his apostles "he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one" (Luke 22:36).

He says not to call people fools (Matt. 5:22) yet he himself does so in Matt. 23:17.

Nine: Constantly overstated things. He claims lust is as bad as adultery (Matt. 5:28). He claims anger is as bad as killing (Matt. 5:21-22). First John 3:15 says, "Whoever hates his brother is a murderer." That is hardly true; there is a major difference.

The Christian would claim that Jesus is using hyperbole to point out that what is in your heart is what counts. Agreed, but in making that point any valid teacher of morality would not so carelessly jettison the critical distinction between a murderous thought and a murderous deed.

Ten: Gave bad advice. He advises forgiving 70 times 7 times (Matt. 18:22), which makes repentance a joke and forgiveness meaningless.

He claims remarriage is equivalent to adultery (Matt. 5:22). Yet this claim does not seem to stop many liberal Christian ministers from justifying second marriages, either their own or their parishioners'.

Eleven: Was intolerant. He ends a parable with, "But bring here those enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, and slay them before me" (Luke 19:27). Note well that the purpose of a parable is to teach proper insights and attitudes and note that the nobleman in the parable represents Jesus.

In Luke 10:14-16 he equates rejecting him to rejecting God.

Twelve: Lastly, and probably worst of all, Jesus taught Hell. In Matt. 25:41 he says, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." And in verse 46 "these will go away into everlasting punishment...."

There you have the biblical Jesus. Instead of being someone who inspires the seeker's respect or affection, he's a religious fanatic.

The seeker also becomes convinced that what goes on in liberal seminaries - putting a positive spin on any dubious passage about Jesus - is a pervasive rationalization process. Because the Christian structure is there and well-established, everyone is locked into an ultimately positive assessment of Jesus and Christianity.

Christian hermeneutics always asks, "How do we make sense of this passage?" and never asks "Does this passage make sense?" A verdict of nonsense is the consistently overlooked option. Divine wisdom is presumed erroneously.

And even when the liberal does agree to a verdict of nonsense or error, he claims it made sense in the cultural context of that time, and therefore somehow has some validity. The seeker, on the other hand, claims that divine wisdom must transcend culture and that no cultural context justifies Old Testament immoralities such as concubines, genocides, and burning witches. What is spiritual error today was spiritual error then, it's just the same!

Another maneuver dear to the hearts of liberals involves redefining the meaning of words in order to make concepts more palatable to modern sensibilities. For example, the word "dragons" become "jackals"; "everlasting fire" becomes "separation from God"; "castration" becomes "celibacy", etc.

Our seeker decides that the liberals may be interpreting the Bible more sensibly, but not correctly or honestly. And he concludes that liberal Christianity is not

a valid option. (Next Month MJ will conclude his critique of liberal Christianity--Ed.).

Editor's Response to Letter #712 (Part b)

Your analysis is quite good and often poignant, MJ. I especially like your comment that "Christian hermeneutics always asks, 'How do we make sense of this passage?' and never asks 'Does this passage make sense?' A verdict of nonsense is the consistently overlooked option." How right you are!

Another astute observation on your part is found in #6 where you say, "The proper line of reasoning is not the Christian mind-set of: 'it's obviously not true literally, so therefore it must be figurative.' Rather, the honest line of reasoning is: 'the context is literal, so therefore this is, in fact, nonsense, mere rhetoric unworthy of someone claiming to speak for God.'" Excellent point! You are quite adept at encapsulating rather broad issues in relatively terse and accurate summations.

Nevertheless, I still have a reservation and an augmentation. My reservation pertains to your comments in point #7 that "an honest seeker must worship only the Real God and as soon as you deny reality, you are no longer worshiping the Real God. It's His world. He created it, and He is clearly not omnibenevolent, only, in this seeker's conviction, ultimately benevolent." I realize your theistic philosophy is very much in the tradition of the deist Thomas Paine who also rejected the Bible, Jesus, and Scripture's presentation of "God" while believing in an ultimately benevolent supreme being, but I would only again ask that you provide some corroboration for your beliefs. I see no evidence of divine benevolence, ultimate or otherwise.

My augmentation pertains to your statement that a seeker "becomes convinced that what goes on in liberal seminaries - putting a positive spin on any dubious passage about Jesus - is a pervasive rationalization process." Based upon my experience, this is no less true of fundamentalist seminaries. Indeed, rationalizing, justifying, and obfuscating lie at the core of their strategy as well.

Letter #716 from RH of Hubbard, Ohio

Dear Dennis.... In talking with a local minister, I got bogged down on the Graf-Wellhausen Theory. I forgot your admonition to stick with the biblical text. In the end I did, but I don't believe I was too convincing.... My wife is on the pulpit committee of the First Baptist Church. She is sworn to secrecy and I

am in the dark as to what is going on, but the trend is to more radical, rightwing, thinkers. Our best seminaries (?--Ed.) are suffering from too few students. The very conservative ones are enjoying full student bodies.....

Editor's Response to Letter #716

You might want to keep in mind what I said about repeatedly returning to encounters with additional information each time. As I have often said, don't expect

to convert somebody in 30 minutes from something they have believed for 30 years.

I must say, however, that in recent years I have been steadily approaching the conclusion that your biggest problem is going to be one of getting religionists in general and biblicists in particular to listen to anything of a critical nature, whether it be on the Bible, atheism, agnosticism, Jesus, science, Creationism, history or whatever. As I have often said, there is none so deaf as he who won't hear and nowhere is this more evident than in regard to religion. Fortunately not all biblicists are that way but there can be no doubt it applies to far too many.

Letter #717 from Norman Slocum, 308 McColsky Ave., Brandon, Florida 33510

Dear Mr. McKinsey. I was wondering if any readers could help me find information on the following organizations: Walk Away and Fundamentalists Anonymous. I recently found information on the Internet about Walk Away but I was unable to find any addresses or

subscription or membership information. Fundamentalists Anonymous distributed tapes through AHA (American Humanist Association) two years ago, which I purchased. But I've seen no further publicity on it since then. Is it defunct? Any assistance given by you or your readers will be appreciated.

Editor's Response to Letter #717

Dear Norman. I know very little about FA and even less about Walk Away. I contacted FA years ago but was disappointed with their response, perhaps I should say lack thereof, to my inquiries, as well as my offers to work in concert. So they went their way and I went mine and never have the twain met. Others may be able to provide you with some information and for that reason we included your full name and address.

We have always been much more concerned with creating and fostering an informed group of dedicated, motivated fighters and communicators than promoting support groups to not only hold our hand and provide comfort in a religiously-dominated society but provide assurance that our anti-Bible and/or anti-religious philosophy is justified. The absence of qualms, reservations, and insecurities allows me to proceed on a for more rational, effective, and proactive basis.

Letter #718 from AH of Chicago, Illinois

(In the 711th letter in the Feb. 1997 issue TS from Prescott, Arizona, noted that our tapes were not coming through very well on the local channel and was suspicious of foul play. The director of that station learned about his letter in BE and wrote us the following reply which we are publishing in the interest of evenhandedness--Ed.)

Mr. McKinsey: A member of the Prescott Access Center informed me of a complaint against the center published in your most recent newsletter. This particular complaint suggested that staff members at this facility were involved in censoring programs from the Biblical Errancy series. I want to assure you that is not the case. The situation in question involved an episode that was pulled from one tape machine and placed into another due to technical trouble with the tape playback. The episode was interrupted only for a minute or two. However, viewers of your series have probably noticed that several episodes have experienced video difficulties. Those difficulties are primarily the result of tapes sent to us for playback -- I understand that episode's copies are third generation and copied on home video equipment. I also understand that copies are not made from the master due to the cost of tapes used to create the masters. I would be happy to discuss your options in recording masters and making copies, so that you might make higher quality copies for channels cablecasting your series. You can reach me during regular business hours Monday through Friday. In the meantime, episodes from your series that meet technical requirements will continue to be cablecast on Prescott Access Channel 13. The program content of your series is not now nor has it ever been an issue, and censorship will not be tolerated while I manage the Prescott Access Center.

Editor's Response to Letter #718

Dear Director. I have no way of knowing the facts of the situation but as far as the technical production aspects are concerned your understanding is essentially correct. We use cable access equipment and all recordings occur in their cable access studio. All programs are recorded on SVHS tapes (Super VHS) of broadcast quality. We then record regular tapes from these Supers in the studio because the only VCR's we have access to that will play Supers are in the studio. We then use these regular tapes in home video equipment as masters for copying tapes we send out. In effect, you are correct. Those receiving programs are viewing 3rd generation tapes. That

is the only way we could operate. The station mandates that all tapes be recorded with Supers and we do not have any equipment that will play Supers. This, in turn, forces us to record a regular tape from the Super in the studio in order to get an original to take home and use as a master. We knew from the beginning that that would adversely affect the clarity of the programs, but we were not sure how much. Apparently it is more than we anticipated in some instances. What we need is a VCR that will play and record Super VHS tapes and this kind of unit costs between \$600 and \$700. Then we could take the Supers home immediately after the programs are recorded and use them as our masters. That would mean those purchasing tapes would be receiving 2nd generation tapes rather than 3rd generation and they would be getting programs recorded from higher quality SVHS tapes rather than regular tapes. In the meantime, could you give me some idea of the programs, if any, that need to be recopied and what changes you would suggest? Making TV programs is not the easiest activity in which I have been involved. Technical problems, financial considerations, scheduling conflicts, enlisting volunteers, finding time, and writing scripts are taxing to say the least.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Although additional assistance has come on board a couple of volunteers playing our programs have failed to proceed beyond the first few programs without explaining why. We are extremely interested in knowing why these individuals stopped playing our programs in their areas and if they would contact us in order to clarify the situation it would be greatly appreciated. I don't know if it was because of intimidation, quality, time, or what, but I'd sure like to know. To those who ceased playing our programs I say, please contact us ASAP. There is no way we can rectify a situation without first discovering the nature of the problem. As you know, I place a very high priority on playing these programs throughout the nation and any obstacles need to be overcome with all due haste.

Issue #173 Editor: Dennis McKinsey

May 1997

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

COMMENTARY

This month's issue will conclude our analysis of the apologetic work entitled *The Bible Has the Answer* by apologists Morris and Clark.

REVIEWS

THE BIBLE HAS THE ANSWER (Part 3) Fourteenth, On page 35 the authors got carried away in their admiration for Jesus by saying, "Thus the perfect holiness of Jesus Christ was openly demonstrated to men and angels and devils, when he was tempted in all things, yet without sin. Furthermore, because he has personally experienced the whole gamut of Satan testing, He perfectly understands every temptation and trial to which we may ever be subject." To this one can only say, Where on earth are they getting all this? Where does the Bible say that Jesus "was tempted in all things" and "experienced the whole gamut of Satan testing"? It never ceases to amaze me how often biblicists get enwrapped by their own exuberance and embellish the text.

Fifteenth, on the next page Morris and Clark add to their excessive zeal by saying, "The Virgin Birth, of course, in addition to requiring a biological miracle, would also imply that Jesus Christ was absolutely unique among men..." In light of the fact that a virgin birth is not miraculous, it could not possibly provide any evidence that "Jesus Christ was absolutely unique among men." Thousands of women routinely visit sperm banks and later deliver children without having had sexual contact with a male. Indeed, many have had no contact with the donor whatever, and would not recognize him if he walked through the doorway. This constant infatuation with a virgin birth by Christians is indicative of a mentality from a by-gone era in which scientific advancements were crude at best.

On the next page Morris and Clark state, "The objection of the modern liberal that such an event would be impossible because it is contrary to biological law is quite vacuous. This is the whole point--the Virgin Birth was a mighty miracle..." This argument is something of a straw man in light of the fact that any reasonably informed liberal knows that virgin births are not only possible but quite common. Virgin births are by no means miraculous.

In regard to this same subject, Morris and Clark state on page 37, "There are many other references in the gospels and epistles from which the Virgin Birth, even though not explicitly mentioned, is clearly inferred. For example, Paul says, "When the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman" (Gal. 4:4). How this substantiates a virgin birth is something of a quandary in view of the fact that it does not rule out the presence of a sperm. What does "made of a woman" mean precisely? It does not say the son was made only from a woman, nor does it exclude prior fertilization by a male. And what does "sent forth" mean? In a

religious context it can be interpreted in several ways. People occasionally say a child was sent to them by god or was a gift from god or could not have been had without god's help. But none of them are claiming coitus never occurred.

Sixteenth, on page 43 the authors utter that old hype that "Christ suffered and died, 'more than any man'." No, he didn't. Many people have suffered longer and more agonizing deaths.

Seventeenth, on the same page they state, "The crucifixion of Jesus Christ, by normal human standards of right and wrong, seems to have been the greatest miscarriage of justice in all the history of the world." Fortunately for them they qualified their remarks with the subjective word "seems," because I know of no objective evidence that would authenticate that comment. The killing of approximately 6,000,000 innocent Jewish civilians in WWII, alone, would seem to be a little more appalling than the death of a single individual.

Eighteenth, on page 45 they utter an odd variation on a kind of ex post facto law by stating, "Thus it finally comes to this: each one of us, individually, is responsible for the death of Christ. It was the sins of each man that nailed Him to the cross." How the sins of people who lived long after the crucifixion could be responsible for the crucifixion itself is an enigma to say the least. According to Morris and Clark Jesus is allegedly being punished for the acts of people yet to live. As if it was not bad enough having children punished for the sins of their father (Adam) under Original Sin, now, in effect, we have a kind of father (Jesus) being punished for the sins of children yet to be born. Is there no end to biblical injustices?

Nineteenth, on page 64 Morris and Clark employ the old switcheroo trick in which the burden of truth is insidiously shifted, in this case to justify miracles. They state, "To say that miracles are impossible is actually to deny that God exists." Who said miracles are impossible? This publication certainly never has. All we have ever done is ask for evidence for their existence, and since none has ever been forthcoming, the conclusion is inescapable. Since miracles can not be proven or verified, one would be foolish, indeed, to believe in something for which no corroboration can be provided, other than personal testimony. If the latter is their sole means of support, then miracles have no viable foundation. And if proof for the existence of God rests on proof for the existence of miracles, then so much for theism. Based upon the amount of miraculous data provided to-date, that pretty well disposes of any reliable belief in a supreme being.

As proof they say, "Providential miracles still occur today. Every believing and practicing Christian knows from personal experience that God does answer prayer...." They do? How? If only they would be as forthcoming with evidence as they are with unsubstantiated assertions! They may feel it; they may believe it; they may wish it; they may even crave it with every fiber of their being, but that does not prove it's real any more than my believing I am the reincarnation of Abe Lincoln is proven by mere assertion and intense belief on my part. In order to provide an argument of substance, they'll have to produce something more heady than personal testimonies, which seem to form the foundation of their theology.

Twentieth. In their never-ending quest to portray science as either an ally or a deferential protagonist of religion in general and the Bible in particular, the authors state on page 62, "The fact is, however, that true science has always confirmed the Bible." Now they are being just plain silly, because facts are very much to the contrary. Not only has BE discussed this issue in some detail, but the 11th chapter of our book clearly describes numerous clashes between science and the Bible.

As a specific example of cooperation, they say in regard to the long day of Joshua, "That the earth should stop rotating on its axis for a time is no more inexplicable than that it should start rotating in the beginning." Leaving aside the fact that there is absolutely no credible scientific evidence, whatever, that the earth ever stopped rotating on its axis, the critical point to note is that biblicists appear to be wholly incapable of understanding what this would have entailed. Although not a scientist by trade, I can say with a high degree of confidence that if the centrifugal force caused by the earth's rotation at approximately 1,000 miles an hour were to cease, the results would be incalculable and result in the death of virtually every living organism on the planet. The power of gravity would take quantum leaps, causing every living thing to be pulled downward with horrendous force. Imagine what that would do to pumping hearts, expanding lungs, flowing blood, moving legs, flapping wings, swimming fins, undulating tails, and atmospheric/oceanographic pressures!

Twenty-first, on page 80 Morris and Clark say, "The God of the Bible is a God of order and of grace, not a God of confusion and cruelty." Too bad they didn't read Issues 115-120 of BE before making this inane comment, because evidence to the contrary is overwhelming. Indeed, the God of the OT not only exhibits cruelty on a regular basis but many other negative traits as well.

Twenty-second, interesting enough, on page 137 we have one of the few valid and substantive admissions by Morris and Clark. They state, "It is in the Bible, and the Bible alone, that we have any real information about Christ or his teachings." If only they had been around to back me up when I confronted biblicists alleging Josephus, Tacitus, Suetonius, Pliny the Younger, and others provide extrabiblical evidence for the existence of Jesus Christ 2,000 years ago.

Twenty-third. On page 153 they say, "While some modern errorists present Christ going to the cross under protest against the unthinkable cruel Father, Scripture shows the Father and son in perfect harmony throughout redemption." Since these alleged errorists have interpreted Scripture correctly, there is no error on their part. If there is any error, it lies in Morris and Clark's determination to present the relationship between God and Jesus as harmonious throughout, when it was by no means one of "perfect harmony." In Matt. 27:46 Jesus said on the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" According to some, these words actually mean in Hebrew: "My God, my God why hast thou sacrificed me?" Prior to the crucifixion Jesus fell on his face in the Garden of Gethsemane and said, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." The word "cup" in this instance comes from a Hebrew word which means "fate" or in this instance "death." If there is anything these verses do not demonstrate it is a harmony of wills and views between Jesus and God.

Twenty-fourth, on page 167 we are told that, "The Bible claims, many hundreds of time, to be the written Word of God." To that one can only say: It does? Where? Except possibly for 2 Tim. 3:16 ("All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness") and 2 Peter 1:21 ("For the prophecy came not in old times by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost"), one would be hard pressed to find any verses of this nature. John 10:35 ("If he called them gods, unto whom the word of God came, and the scripture cannot be broken..."), 1 Cor. 2:13 ("Which things also we speak, not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth: comparing spiritual things with spiritual"), and John 16:13 ("Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come") are quite weak and could hardly be used to make a strong case.

The comments in Timothy and Peter also conflict with verses such as 1 Cor. 7:6 ("But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment"), 7:12 ("But to the rest speak I, not the Lord..."),

7:25 ("Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgment, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful") and 2 Cor. 11:17 ("That which I speak, I speak, it not after the Lord, but as it were foolishly, in this confidence of boasting") which all but state some of Scripture is not divinely inspired. Any assertion to the effect that the Bible says hundreds of times that it is divinely inspired is a gross exaggeration to say the least.

Twenty-fifth, while confronting the problem of how evil emerged and why God created Satan, Morris and Clark state on page 307, "God did not create Satan as an evil being. However, the angels, like man, were created as free spirits, not as unthinking machines. They were fully able to reject God's will if they should choose to do so." How could they be "fully able to reject God's will," if God created them. If they were God's creation, then every aspect of their being had to have been correctly formed, in which case they could not have chosen to do the wrong. This is nothing more than a variation on the "Adam was created perfect so how could he have sinned" problem which we have discussed on several occasions. No matter how much biblicists may worm and squirm, they will never be able to escape this fundamental dilemma in their theology. Morris and Clark say they were "fully able to reject God's will if they should choose to do so." But how could they choose to do so when a perfect being created them. Are they trying to tell us that the omniscient, perfect Almighty created a being that chose to do evil? God created something that was not perfect? God created something that chose to reject perfection? The perfect being made something that was either flawed or chose to do a flawed act, which, in turn, only proves it was flawed? The perfect being created the imperfect? If the perfect being created the imperfect, then he only proved he isn't perfect and couldn't be god. And if the perfectly created being chose to do the imperfect, then it only proved it wasn't perfect to begin with and couldn't have been created by God because everything God does by definition is perfect.

Twenty-sixth. In recent years increasing numbers of biblicists have been soft-peddling the whole idea of hell and what it entails. In order to keep church pews more occupied and scare as few as possible, many ministers and priests have chosen to replace hellfire and damnation with something more amenable and less frightening. To alienate as few as possible, they have projected an image of hell that is more in keeping with polish than perdition. The idea of "burning in hell" has been superseded by the more acceptable "separation from God" concept. On page 311 Morris and Clark are asked how a loving God can send anyone to eternal punishment in hell and they reply by saying, "God will not force people into heaven against their wills. Such people will actually be less miserable in hell than they would be in heaven." Not if they are burning they won't! They state, "Essentially hell is the place where all aspects of the presence of God will be completely withdrawn forever. Hell is thus eternal separation from God. As the Scripture says, it is a place where men shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power (2 Thess. 1:9). Unfortunately for them, hell involves much more than mere separation from God as is shown by: Matt. 3:12 ("His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the granary, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire"), Matt. 18:8-9 ("...it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire"), Mark 9:44 ("Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched"), Rev. 20:10 ("And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever"), Rev. 14:11 ("And the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day or night"), and Matt 25:46 ("And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal") The original concept of hell as a place of eternal torture by fire and brimstone is far more Scripturally sustainable than much of what they are trying to pawn off today, and all

attempts to make it more palatable are biblically unsound. When it comes to permanent punishment, the hellfire and damnation preachers had it right from the beginning.

Twenty-seventh, on page 317 Morris and Clark return us once again to that old nemesis of "judging the already saved." They state, "There is only one thing in life about which each man can be absolutely certain--and that is that he must eventually come before God in judgment." But why he must appear is never explained. According to fundamentalist theology you are saved the moment you accept Jesus Christ as your personal savior. And if that's true, then why come before God for judgment to begin with? What is there to judge? It's all over. Sentence was pronounced and your destiny eternally fixed the day you died, based upon whether or not you accepted Jesus prior to your death. If you did, you are in; if you did not, you're out. Works and deeds are relevant, but immaterial.

Twenty-eighth and lastly, on page 335 Morris and Clark leap into a contradiction they would have done well to have fled. They are asked if the end of the world is near and respond by saying, "According to Scripture, the earth as such will endure forever. For example, Psalm 104:5 says: 'He (meaning God--Ed.) laid the foundation of the earth, that it should not be removed forever'." But they immediately follow this up by quoting verses saying the opposite such as: 'The earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up' (2 Peter 3:10) and (Matt. 24:35) in which Jesus said: 'Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away' "... Reconciliation of this dichotomy according to them lies in the fact that "the earth will some day be drastically changed and renovated....The earth and its atmospheric heavens will thus not be annihilated but will be completely purged by fire, cleansing it of all age-long effects of sin, decay and death...." Our illustrious duo appear to have difficulty understanding simple English. The text says the earth shall be "burned up" and that entails far more than mere purification and cleansing. When your house is burned up or down, that means your house is no more. It was totally destroyed and has ceased to exist. Our apologetic authors, on the other hand, would apparently have us believe that your house was merely cleansed of impurities by fire. Hardly! Your house is not "renovated" or "purged" by fire when it is burned up; it's annihilated. Why should the words mean anything less with respect to the earth itself, especially when Matt. 24:35 says the earth will "pass away"?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #712 from MJ Concludes from Last Month (Part c)

(Last Month we published the second part of MJ's article entitled Why I Am Not a Liberal Christian. We will now conclude MJ's assault upon liberal Christianity--Ed.).

You--the LIBERAL CHRISTIAN--cannot legitimately accept Jesus as a source of divine wisdom, if you disagree with so much of his basic teachings:

1. The liberal Christian believes in tolerance, but Jesus was intolerant towards unbelievers.
2. The liberal Christian does not accept the inconceivably cruel concept of Hell, yet Jesus believed in it and taught it.
3. The liberal Christian believes there are many ways to God, but Jesus says he is the only way.
4. The liberal Christian sees the God-directed barbarism of the Old Testament as repugnant, yet Jesus accepted the Old Testament with reverence.

5. The liberal Christian sees many stories in the Bible as instructive myths, but, as a matter of course, overlooks the malignant lessons inherent in those very stories!

The flood story warns us against immorality in general, yes, but it also teaches that, except for Noah and his family, every other person in the world, every sweetheart, every best friend, every mother's beloved child, every child's beloved parent, all deserved to drown.

That's a judgment, and a god, that I for one do not accept.

The flood story also conveys a total disregard for animal suffering. Who among us, if we see a dog drowning, is not distraught with compassion? Yet a peripheral lesson of the flood story is that animal suffering, even on a massive scale, is irrelevant, hardly worth mentioning.

Are these valid lessons!? Is this a valid God!?

Take the Adam and Eve story. It warns us against pride, yet, but it also pushes blind obedience as a primary virtue. Curiosity, asking questions, seeking knowledge, are discouraged. Dialogue is discouraged.

The God of Genesis wants undiscerning obedience, the same thing, coincidentally, that oppressive rulers want, which suggests to me that oppressive rulers are behind this story, not God.

In fact, I think the underlying purpose of the Adam and Eve story, is not to teach about the sin of pride, but is to teach obedience. The writer is presenting a mythological tale that encourages people to obey authority without questioning. It's the original propaganda story from those in charge.

It teaches that if you don't do as God wants, your lives will be immeasurably worse off. And it sneaks in the presumption that WE, the writers for the powers that be, will be the ones, of course, to let you know just what God wants.

Fallible human beings claiming to speak for God. It's the oldest trick in the book.

Also contained in the Adam and Eve story is the lesson that women are inferior and subservient. Genesis 2:18 refers to Eve as a "helper comparable" to man, not a companion equal to him. And Genesis 3:16 is very clear as to who is in charge: Your desire is very clear as to who is in charge: "Your desire shall be for your husband, And he shall rule over you."

Is this a valid lesson? I can hear liberal Christian women hemming and hawing right now.

Then there's Abraham's willingness to senselessly kill his son in order to be obedient to God. Abraham did not ask any questions; and for this he is highly praised. Blind obedience is presented as "great faith."

You and I both know that if someone told you today that he was going to sacrifice his son to God, you would call the police and a mental hospital, not praise his "great faith."

I think the real purpose of many Bible stories is not the overt lesson about human nature, but is a subliminal call to group obedience.

Solomon and the cutting in half of the disputed baby story, is not so much a lesson in the nature of a mother's genuine love, as it is an encouragement to trust and follow leadership.

When you think about it, this story, as an insight into human nature, is preposterous - what woman in real life would be both so mean, and so stupid, as to say, "Go ahead, cut the baby in half, Solomon"? The characterization here is at the comic book level.

And upon rereading the story I see that the message is not as subliminal as I thought. First Kings 3:28 is fairly explicit: "And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had rendered; and they feared the king, for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him to administer justice."

Again, in my opinion, the real reason these stories are presented is for control, to validate the authority of those in charge, to claim divine sanction for human agendas, and not for the intrinsic value of the story's wisdom, or the presence of any real divine intention behind it.

But, whether or not Bible stories are used as a control mechanism, my point here is that they contain profoundly harmful adjunct lessons, which liberal Christianity blithely ignores.

6. Most liberal Christians regard one's actual behavior as more important than one's beliefs. Yet a major theme of the Bible is its emphasis not on behavior, but on belief.

The heroes of the Bible include: Abraham the liar, Lot the incest commiter, Moses the murderer, David the adulterer, Solomon the fornicator, Paul the bigot (Titus 1:12). These are all faithful believers rather than men of righteous behavior. The God of the Bible favors the "believer," or groveler to Him, over the man of good character.

The liberal Christian is not justified in embracing a book that emphasizes a type of "righteousness" he himself would find repugnant.

7. A problem the liberal Christian has, is how, if he rejects certain passages, will he decide which passages to reject, which passages to accept? The answer, I think, is the general guideline of accepting those passages which are reasonable, compassionate, and just.

Yet, if he is honest, and does not distort the plain meaning of words in normal discourse, he will find there is too much that is not reasonable, compassionate or just.

The liberal Christian is not justified selecting passages he likes, and ignoring ones he doesn't like (such as the God-directed atrocities in the Old Testament, or Jesus's teachings on remarriage or Hell).

Ambiguity, complexity, and shades of gray in evaluating passages, are a given to the liberal Christian. And so each liberal makes his own judgments by his own lights, which is fine, except that it defeats in large part the presumed purpose of a book of God in the first place, which is to give some clear answers and to reduce ambiguity!

If the liberal's own judgment is the ultimate authority, then he cannot pretend that Jesus is the ultimate source of wisdom.

8. And lastly, the resurrection is presented as real in the Bible, not as a story or myth.

Mark 16:4 says, "He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after he had risen."

In John 20:27, Jesus tells doubting Thomas, "Reach your finger here."

In Luke 24:37 it says, "But they were terrified...and supposed they had seen a spirit." Then verse 39: "Handle me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have."

The writers were presenting an actual physical resurrection, not a "resurrection of the spirit," as the liberal would interpret it.

If the writers meant what they wrote in the way they wrote it, and denied they were presenting myths ("For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty"--2 Peter 1:16), then you are putting your trust and faith into people who are in fact...liars.

Real wisdom does not come from such men.

A seeker concludes that the liberal Christian interprets the Bible more sensibly, but not correctly or honestly.

The conservative Christian interprets the Bible more correctly, but that correct interpretation shows that the Bible is a spiritually false document, written by fallible, foolish, immoral men, and is in no way God's word.

Letter #719 from AL of Aurora, Colorado

Dear Dennis. I have received sample issues of BE from you with appreciation and thanks. This world, darkened by superstitious, imbalanced, controlled information, needs severely people like you who are selfless, brave, and wise enough to stand against the fast stream of ignorance. Our children are brainwashed from a very young age. They don't have an opportunity to learn and investigate what is right and what is wrong? Their parents are frightened by a false doctrine of rewards and punishments. The people who speak thousands of times, even millions of times, of love do everything they can to blind their loved-ones, to nullify their ability to think, reason, investigate, and discover the facts. I don't see any love in their hearts.

So please keep doing what you are doing now. A lot of people have the same ideas and feelings as you. Your labor is honored by those who have had their eyes opened. Don't be suppressed by the selfish and ignorant ones who haven't had their eyes opened.

Editor's Response to Letter #719

Dear AL. Suppression by my opponents doesn't hinder my agenda as much as apathy, timidity, and lethargy on the part of too many critics of religion in general and scripture in particular.

Letter #720 from AH of Chicago, Illinois

Dear Mr. McKinsey. A few weeks ago a friend of mine took all of my back issues of Biblical Errancy to use as sources for the final exam in his religion class. When he got them back, I think they had more red ink than black, but he got an "A". I'd like to start a subscription for him, so I can keep my issues a little longer!

Editor's Response to Letter #720

Dear AH. Sounds like your friend is using BE in one of the ways intended. May more "A's" follow!

Letter #721 from JW of Palm Springs, Florida

Dennis. I have the prior issues of BE from #1 thru #156 and need to complete my collection of them all. Please send the remaining back issues and also a Word and Verse Index. I can't begin to tell you how much I appreciate your work. Webster's Dictionary doesn't provide the words of my gratitude to you and your wife for all your efforts. Thank you, Thank you!

EDITOR'S NOTE: As you probably already know the imperious trio who ruled the American Atheist Center in Austin, Texas, M.M. O'Hair, her son, John, and her granddaughter, Robin, disappeared over 18 months ago under very mysterious circumstances and have not been seen since. Speculation has run wild as to what happened. I have been told foul play has been ruled out, despite the fact that they left suddenly without their passports and killing people by bombings, etc., doesn't seem to bother some right-wingers and/or fundamentalist ideologues. I wonder!

In any event, a new leadership has assumed the helm and I have found its membership to be far more amenable to cooperation, sensitivity, teamwork, and affinity than ever existed in the past. Others might want to test the new waters as well. One of the leadership's most intelligent decisions was to appoint Frank Zindler as the new Editor/Managing Editor and his wife Ann as the Associate Editor of their magazine. Although I don't know others in position of authority, I have known Frank for over a decade and have found him to be intelligent, highly informed with respect to languages, science, and religion, and accommodating. He has been the only leader the Ohio Atheists have ever had in so far as I am aware and we have been able to converse on many occasions, since he only lives a few miles from my home. Frank's wisdom is further accentuated by the fact that he has seen fit to include one of my articles in the Spring 1997 issue of the American Atheist, something which would have been unthinkable under Madalyn O'Hair with whom I had less than cordial relations to say the least. My article starts on page 20 and is essentially a synopsis of that part of chapter 25 in my book pertaining to Apologetic Defenses. I am most appreciative of the gracious invitation by Frank to write an article. Submission of the text was, indeed, a unique opportunity to tear down walls and build bridges. I would encourage everyone to obtain a copy, especially if you have not read the pertinent part in my book or this publication.

Issue #174 June 1997, Editor: Dennis McKinsey

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists .

COMMENTARY

This months issue will open with a review of our Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy by the editor of a British publication and conclude with some letters from our readers

REVIEW

Peter Brearey, editor of The Freethinker in Britain, wrote the following article on page 2 of his December 1996 issue. He entitled it "Stand by Holy Writ!" and said,

"I do not allow Christians to treat their Bible like an elderly sack of potatoes from which they may select the more edible spuds while disregarding the rotten ones. They must be made to stand by each fetid jot, not to mention every absurd tittle, of the Scriptures - otherwise it is too easy for all those nice religionists as well as the horrid fundamentalists to perpetuate their ghastly myths. Fortunately, I have Professor Charles Ryrie, of the Dallas Theological Seminary, on my team: *'Can one be a biblicist and deny inerrancy? Not if the Bible teaches its own inerrancy ... If the Bible contains some errors, no matter how few or many, how can one be sure that his understanding of Christ is correct? ... Even if the errors are in supposedly minor matters, any error opens the Bible to suspicion on other points that may not be so minor. If inerrancy falls, other doctrines will fall, too.'* In other words, if Adam and the sin of man are denied by the liberals, then the matter of why Jesus died on the cross - the cornerstone of Christian belief - is brought into question, if not actually proven to be useless.

Ryrie is quoted in The Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy, almost 600 pages of information, comment and live ammunition for people of our sort, which has been published by Prometheus at £42 (well, what do you think Christmas-present book tokens are for?); it is the work of Dennis McKinsey.

Mr. McKinsey quotes many contemporary Christian writers only to drown them in a potent brew of erudition, irony, and just a hint of cruelty: The Freethinker style, exactly.

But for those of us involved in the day-to-day battle against superstition, the Encyclopedia's real strength is its index: at a glance it is possible to select a matter of current moment and show the Christians what they must believe about it if they are not to reject Holy Writ and thus lay themselves open to the threat of their Jesus' dearly beloved Hell.

Slavery, for example, is still a live issue (it is a way of life in Pakistan and many other Islamic lands, as well as in areas of India), and in seconds we can prove New Testament support for that venerable institution. There are many references, but Titus 2:9-10 is a goodie: *'Bid slaves to be submissive to their masters and to give satisfaction in every respect; they are not to be refractory, nor to pilfer, but to show entire and true fidelity, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God.'*

We might also use Mr. McKinsey's work to help those homosexuals who imagine - who pathetically insist - that there is a place for them in the Church. Again, there are several references, but the unequivocal Leviticus 20:13 is probably the most effective, for it specifically states that any male who lies with another male as with a woman has committed an abomination and should be killed. So - how can gays who give natural expression to their feelings be valid priests, ... 'marry' in church, ... legitimately take Communion?

And what of those sad women who labor under the illusion that they are valid priests (even bishops!) of the Church? Paul is, of course, notorious for his order that *'women keep silent in the churches, for it is not permitted them to speak,'* and Peter insisted: *'Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands.'*

Most non-RC Christians are sniffy about the Vatican's ban on divorce, but Rome's stand is entirely biblical. Protestants - not excluding our at-it-like-knives Royals - should note what Jesus says in Luke 16:18: *'Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, commiteth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband commiteth adultery.'*

Think of a subject, and it's there: long hair (men can't have it: 1 Cor. 11:14); planning for the future (don't do it: Matt. 6:25-34), and the pious Mr. Blair's family values: *'If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple'--*Luke 14:26.

God's cruelties are cataloged - *'Slay utterly old and young, both maids and little children, and women'* Ezek. 9:6 - and we have the many, many biblical contradictions: was the color of Our Lord's crucifixion robe scarlet (Matthew) or purple (Mark and John)? A small matter? Not really - for, as the conservative Christian Professor Ryrice avers, *'any error opens the Bible to suspicion on other points that may not be so minor'*

Some Humanists believe that the war for which this Encyclopedia provides such excellent ordnance has been won. They must be deceiving themselves over the number of believing Christians in the world - and, sadly, some are so intellectually dishonest as to collude with the liberal superstitionists by allowing them to snatch the less corrupt vegetables from the bag of nastiness.

Do, please, get this Encyclopedia. It is obtainable on order from all book shops: ISBN 0-87975-926-7. In case of difficulty, contact Prometheus UK at 10 Crescent View,

Loughton, Essex IG I 0 4PZ (telephone 0 1 81 5082989). Certainly your public library should be asked to order a copy. (It can also be obtained at our address on page 6 for \$52.20--Ed.).

All the big issues are dealt with - the false science of the Scriptures ... the empty prophecies ... the foolishness surrounding the alleged life, death, and resurrection of Jesus ... all are taken apart, with the Bible itself as the principal tool of destruction. Equally fascinating are the smaller, sharper barbs: Matthew 13:31-32 (RSV) says: *'The kingdom of heaven is like a grain of mustard seed which ... is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree.'* In fact, as Mr. McKinsey points out: "The mustard seed is not only not the smallest of all seeds, because the orchid seed, for example, is much smaller, but young trees are not shrubs and shrubs don't grow into trees. You would have expected the Creator of all things to have known that."

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #722 from CK of New Jersey (Part a)

Dear Dennis. As mentioned in the past, I think it behooves us who criticize the absurdities found in the Bible to be accurate in our own statements of fact, lest we be dismissed as ignorant ourselves. A couple of points come up in regard to issue 173: You say that *"any reasonably informed liberal knows that virgin births are not only possible but quite common."* While in vitro fertilization and artificial insemination certainly allow for virgin births, one wonders how common they are. Of course, you may have a different definition, but I would think that a "virgin birth" can only be one in which the mother is a virgin, that is, NEVER had sex, rather than merely that this pregnancy was not the result of sex. I would think that most women who go through the high-tech stuff had tried the normal way to become pregnant, and when this failed, went the high-tech route. Even if this is not the case, I don't imagine a large percentage of the population remaining virgins in any case. The Biblicists will also raise an uproar over the fact that it would be a miracle if 2000 years ago a virgin birth took place, lacking today's technology.

Editors Response to Letter #722 (Part a)

Dear CK. Your conception of this matter takes us back to the point I raised in an issue long ago. What is a Virgin Birth? To you it can only mean a birth emanating from one who has never engaged in coitus. To me it means a birth emanating from one who did not engage in coitus at the time, although that person may have engaged in coitus previously. With respect to the birth at issue, it was virginal. Under your definition what would you call a birth emanating from a prostitute who had no contact with a male in the instance being considered. To you that is not a virgin birth, while to me it is. The birth was virginal, even if the person yielding the baby was not. We are talking about a virgin birth, not a birth from a virgin. It is the birth that matters, not the person yielding the birth. Remember, its known as the Virgin Birth, not the Virgin Conceiver.

Second you say, *"I would think that most women who go through the high-tech stuff had tried the normal way to become pregnant, and when this failed, went the high-tech route. Even if this is not the case, I don't imagine a large percentage of the population remaining virgins in any case."* We are not dealing in percentages. If virgin births are physically and scientifically possible, then they are not miracles.

Third, you say, *"Biblicists will also raise an uproar over the fact that it would be a miracle if 2000 years ago a virgin birth took place, lacking today's technology."* What people thought then or think now is immaterial. The fact is that a virgin birth is not a miracle because it does not violate any scientific laws. Thousands of years ago people thought an eclipse was a miracle and according to your thinking it must have been because that is the way they perceived it.

Letter #722 Concludes (Part b)

More substantive: As a nonscientist you should not have a *"high degree of confidence that if the centrifugal force caused by the earth's rotation at approximately 1,000 miles an hour were to cease, the results would be incalculable and result in the death of virtually every living organism on the planet. The power of gravity would take quantum leaps, causing every living thing to be pulled downward with horrendous force."* No such thing would happen, as evidenced by the fact that people can travel to the north or south pole, where there is no centrifugal counteraction to gravity. At that point people don't collapse to the ground. The rotation of the earth there is merely like being on a turntable rotating at 1 rev per day. People weigh under an ounce more at the poles than at the equator. Of course if the Earth stopped rotating all of a sudden, by some miraculous intervention that affected only the solid body of the earth, then anything not fastened down would indeed find itself shooting eastward at 1000 miles per hour at the equator relative to the earth's surface, or over 700 miles per hour at the latitudes of the 48-states, not to mention the 1000 mile-per-hour (or 700-mph at our latitudes) winds. But gravity would not be hugely increased nor would huge downward pressures result.

Editors Response to Letter #722 (Part b)

We have been contacted by several people who appear to be well informed on this topic judging by the number of computations, equations, and statistics accompanying their depiction of the physics involved. They assure me, and have provided sufficient information to confirm their assertion, that there would be no appreciable increase in gravity if the earth were to cease rotating and all centrifugal force ended as well. Not being a physicist I will defer to their judgment and write off the source from which I obtained the idea that the results would be dramatic as ill-informed. This is purely a scientific question and I am more than willing to accept whatever informed scientists conclude. Your simple but poignant reference to what does not happen at the North Pole is enough to convince me that although the earth is rotating at 1,000 miles per hour its not as important as I thought because of the sheer magnitude of the planet.

There are times to hold them and times to fold them and this issue belongs in the latter category as far as I am concerned. Anyone who lets his ego supersede compelling evidence and good judgment is guilty of the very shortcoming we so often attribute to biblicists. The only person who never errs verbally is one who never speaks at all. I remember quite well my voice of the turtle faux pas many years ago in which I interpreted the word turtle as referring to the reptile rather than a turtle dove. As I have said before, I may not be perfect, but I'm light years ahead of my opposition.

Letter #723 from JS of Grosse Pointe Farms, Michigan (Part a)

Dear Dennis: Letters #707 (Issue #170) and #371 (Issue #90) are probably my two most favorite letters ever to have appeared in BE. Both letters compliment you on your exquisite logic and on your role as a model thinker for others. I love BE precisely because I have always believed such letters to be true. For instance, your remarks over the years about the likes of Madalyn O'Hair "prove" to me that you are above petty, cliquish politics and "tell it like it is" no matter whom you might offend. I admire that.

How utterly disappointed and depressed I am, therefore, at your response to my own Letter #709 (Issue #170). I stated that Unitarians believe whatever they want to and expend enormous amounts of energy justifying their beliefs. Your response was lame when you said many Unitarians *"are not going to be very happy with your comparison between them and fundamentalist Christians"*! No kidding. But so what? Does this now suggest that Dennis McKinsey is afraid of offending the Unitarians?

Editors Response to Letter #723 (Part a)

Dear JS. I don't see how my response can be considered lame, when all I was doing was relating what I think the Unitarian view of your reply would be. How is that lame? That is probably how they would feel if you equated them to fundamentalists.

You say, *"Does this now suggest that Dennis McKinsey is afraid of offending the Unitarians?"* I didn't say anything in regard to the Unitarians one way or the other. How did I get drawn into this? Sounds like you are trying to get me to criticize the Unitarians for something or other and attacking me for timidity if I don't.

Letter #723 Continues (Part b)

I want you to state, on the record, what you think of Unitarians. A few months ago, their national magazine carried an article asserting that people should believe whatever is "useful" to them emotionally. People should believe whatever helps them get through the day. Unitarian preachers quote from the Bible regularly, picking out those parts that appeal to them, and ever-so-piously "explaining" those parts that do not. And funny thing, a lot of the "bad" portions of the Bible (such as Matthew 5s "turn the other cheek," which Thomas Paine derides in Part II of *The Age of Reason*) the Unitarians preach as appropriate modes of conduct!

Editors Response to Letter #723 (Part b)

As was stated some time ago, particular denominations are not a concern of ours, since their positions vary so widely, and few churchgoers have a wider variance of internal beliefs than the Unitarians. They range all over the spectrum. If we proceed to critique their beliefs and behavior, we might as well focus on the others as well. And that is not what biblical criticism in general and BE in particular is all about.

Letter #723 Concludes (Part c)

A new book, just published by Beacon Press (their publishing arm), teaches children about "all the creation myths of the world, including the "scientific" myth of the big bang. An advertisement for the book says that each myth is "true" in the appropriate circumstance. For example, in church the religious myths are "true," but in school the scientific myths are "true." And no myth is inherently superior to any other. To assert one over the other would be arrogant!

To be totally honest with you, Dennis, I have had an easier time reasoning (Isaiah 1:18) with fundamentalist Christians than I have had with Unitarians. The Unitarians are, in my opinion, messed up in their brains. They deny the validity of logic itself, whereas fundamentalists (with a few exceptions) think logically. The fundamentalists merely ignore evidence which would, logically, lead to conclusions they dislike. The Unitarians are the flip-side of the fundamentalists: they accept all the evidence (they preach from science books equally as often as the Bible, the Mishnah, etc.), but they refuse to accept the conclusions to which the evidence logically leads!

I think BE should take a bold stand against all unreasonableness, not just that of fundamentalist Christians.

Editors Concluding Response to Letter #723 (Part c)

Are you sure you want to say Fundamentalists (with a few exceptions) think logically? I have no doubt some of our readers will take exception to that observation, JS. Although I certainly agree with your last sentence, we should still stay reasonably close to the Bible, since that's our primary area of interest.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #724 from KF of Lancaster, Pennsylvania

This is my Easter Message. I am sorry to inform all of you gullible Christians, that despite what preachers, popes, and pastors have been yammering about for years, Jesus Christ is still dead and buried, and Christianity is a fraud.

Jesus, of course, was said to be the "Lord" and most every Christian believes this still. Jesus said, "*For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*" (Matt 12:40). Jesus could not have lied, because Christians insist he was sinless and lying is

a sin. But, unfortunately, both he and the church forgot that according to biblical truth, a day to the Lord is 1000 years. As 2 Peter 3:8 says, *"But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."* When Jesus said he would be in the heart of the earth for 3 days, he meant it. And since 3 days is 3000 years to the Lord, he's still there. Happy Easter!

Editors Response to Letter #724

I see you are operating on the premise that if biblicists can repeatedly use 2 Peter 3:8 to expediently escape from a dilemma, you can use it to create one. Interesting point! Touché!

Letter #725 from RH of Dayton, Ohio

On my Dayton Freenet Chat board, there is a young man, Michael, who usually posts "Today's Bible Verse," to which I try to respond if there is a reason to believe the verse needs clarification from a nonbeliever's point of view. Here is an example of this sort of exchange.

One of my constant themes on the chat board is that hell represents a great moral void in New Testament teachings, so I was recently surprised to see Michael post as "Today's Bible Verse," Matthew 18:34-35 which says, *"Then in anger his master handed him over to the torturers until he should pay back the whole debt. So will my heavenly Father do to you, unless each of you forgives his brother from his heart."*

To this I replied,

Jesus here speaks about how the master of the story makes a "just" punishment and yet Jesus doesn't condemn the master. The method is torture! Does Jesus speak out against this form of discipline? Not at all! He tells us that his heavenly father is going to torture those who are not able to forgive. Maybe I am interpreting too much here, but I suspect any god like the one in the Bible is going to develop tortures much deeper and more heinous than any human slave master.

Moreover, it does not end there! I do not think people should be tortured for mistreating other people (Jesus here shows that he disagrees with me). I do not think people should be tortured for failing to forgive one another (Jesus is saying the god of the Bible disagrees with me).

In fact, I think torture is never right. I don't care if it does have Biblical support. Any god who thinks it is dandy to torture other creatures is not entitled to belief by me.

Even if one forgives others, but still has the "wrong" religion, he gets tortured forever. Live a good life? Very nice. Forgive your neighbors? OK, that's good too. But you were raised in the Muslim faith? Eternal torture for you, pal. This system is based on ancient human ideas of vengeance and cruelty. It stinks.

I have been making this sort of argument for months and inviting people to tell me their views on torture in hell. (One liberal Christian did say she didn't believe the hell parts of the Bible.)

After a day of silence following my above post, I wrote the following message:

Well, I am a little disappointed in my Biblicist chat board friends, but I am not surprised that no one wanted to discuss yesterday's verses. There was vigorous discussion back and forth the day before, with good clarity and good will (at least from the pro-Bible side), on the issue of how well or poorly Jesus got along with his mom and pop. But this is, I think even my loyal opponents will agree, a minor topic when compared with the one ignored yesterday, which has to do with what the Bible's god has arranged for the dead. In the verses posted by Michael, Jesus seems to accept the use of torture on earth and support the torture his father has arranged in the hereafter.

I have heard from other discussants about how hell is not really going to be a blazing place and how we all have the opportunity to avoid it. I understand that this is a topic that makes some believers feel uncomfortable, especially in view of the uncompromising tone of the verses Michael supplied us with yesterday. (Once again, Michael, you have my thanks for your work.) It is obvious from those verses that Jesus wants us to know that the Bible's god thinks that torturing some people after death is just the way to handle things. The conclusion that this is so and the connected conclusion, which I drew, that those who believe in the "wrong" faith are to be among the tortured is also inescapable, if you accept the Bible as true.

So, by your silence, my friends, are you showing your support for such a system of torture? I know that none of you would torture anyone yourself, and that you would recommend that I and everyone believing religions other than yours should reform, adopt Christianity, and thus avoid the torture which your Bible says is in store for us if we do not. I take all this for granted, and I thank you heartily for your good will. But do you feel that the god described in the Bible, who is supposed to be just and loving, would set up a system of torture for any reason? Torture for having the wrong religion? What comfort is there for you in holding this idea? I assume that you do not see yourselves as liable for torture, but you only feel you are going to gain infinite happiness. But how will you ever be able to be infinitely happy if you know such a cruel system has barbarically been imposed on others simply because they believed the wrong way? The system sounds disgusting to me. Doesn't it disgust you?

I am not at all saying that your silence indicates consent with my ideas; indeed, I will completely understand if the enormity of the injustice (at least, I see it as an injustice) reflected in this system makes it impossible to discuss it with me. If you would rather not address this, I can understand why. I think, quite frankly, it is the strongest argument I have against the metaphysics and the eschatology proclaimed by the Bible. In my opinion, any god who plans the torture of humans, for any reason, is no god but a monster. Such a "god" is the product of ancient ignorance and cruelty, unworthy of belief from modern thinking humans. I am glad that there is no scientific evidence that

such a thing exists. I do not know how those whose faith tells them it does exist can find this sort of monster to be a comfort.

A few days after saying this I received some verses assuring me that God is love, and so on, But in my opinion they had little to do with the moral problem posed by a god who arranges torture for humans.

Letter #726 from GN of Scottsdale, Arizona

I received your latest newsletter today and I think there is a scripture that states Jesus was "tempted in all things." However, the part about experiencing the "whole gamut of Satan testing" is an addition. (Hebrews 4:15). One might assume that if Jesus was tempted in all things that he endured the whole gamut of Satan testing, but the whole idea is absurd anyway. Jesus was not married; therefore, he could not have been tempted in the way of adultery, or have been tempted to commit spousal abuse. He did not have children; therefore, he did not face the temptation of incest or child abuse. He did not live to an old age or suffer the aches and pains that would tempt him in the way of euthanasia. He was not born in poverty; therefore, he was not tempted to steal. Since he was supposedly an only child, he would not have been tempted to sibling jealousy and perhaps even hatred. There is not one shred of evidence that Jesus was tempted in "all" ways. How about drug abuse? Abortion?

Thanks for all your information over the years. I love every issue.

Editors Response to Letter #726

Dear GN. You say, "I think there is a scripture that states Jesus was 'tempted in all things'" which is an accurate reference to Heb. 4:15 (*"but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin"*). But I interpreted that as meaning the Bible actually related instances of Jesus being tempted in everything while I am aware of little in this regard.

Although I agree with the general thrust of your argument, GN, you might want to modify or replace a few of your points. Jesus did have siblings according to some verses in the gospels (Matt. 13:55, Mark 6:3) and some would say you do not have to be married to be an adulterer. As long as one of the parties involved is married that is sufficient. And his birth in a manger allegedly among animals would imply being born into poverty to some.

But be that as it may, the central thrust of your message remains valid. There is no way Jesus could have been tempted in all things. As you say, he couldn't very well have been tempted to beat his wife when he had none.

Letter #727 from JK of Lynn, Indiana

Hi Dennis. Enclosed is the March issue of Biblical Errancy. I sent it to you to show you the condition of it when I received it. (The issue was torn up and tracked over

pretty bad.--Ed). This is not the first time that this kind of thing has happened. Several weeks ago I received a post card and someone peeled a layer right across the message on the card so that it could not be deciphered. It appears to me that there is some sort of brain-damaged fundamentalist who has access to the Post Office mail room and when any mail that's not oriented to his mind-warped religion comes by, he attempts to destroy it. None of the junk mail that I have received so far has had so much as a bent corner, but mail from you and several others that I receive that appear to be anti-Christian seems to get damaged in some way. Now, you might say that I should report this type of vandalism to the Post Office. I have tried that gimmick and you either get a brush off or they give you a bunch of forms to fill out, and that's the last you hear of it. If you follow up on it, they will tell you it's still under investigation and eventually the complaint fades away into the wind. Usually your newsletter arrives between the 5th or 10th of the month, but this one arrived on the 25th. The others arrive anywhere from 10 to 15 days late also, so I surmise that there must be a skunk in the wood pile, to use an apt phrase. But maybe I'm insulting a poor defenseless animal so I apologize to the skunk. I would appreciate it if you would send me a replacement and should there be a charge let me know and I will reimburse the cost. Thank you.

Editors Response to Letter #727

Dear JK. I have had the same kind of experiences and feelings over the years but nothing has been definitely proven. So I have been compelled to reluctantly accept whatever occurs. There really isn't much you can do other than filling out some forms which seem to accomplish little or nothing. I don't know if I am being sabotaged, some equipment malfunctioned, or someone just goofed, and I can't remember ever having received a definitive reply. Some postal employees did manage to retrieve one of two lost tapes several years ago; however, I recently sent a video tape to New York for viewing by a prominent anti-religious organization and all I got back from the post office was its shredded wrapper and some apologies with the usual forms to complete.

As far as your personal plight is concerned, we will certainly send you a replacement at no charge with our condolences. Having been in the same predicament I know how you feel. But, unfortunately, there is nothing I can do. My position is no more secure than yours. About the only thing we can both do is grin and bear it, while carrying on.

Letter #728 from LR of Toledo, Ohio

Dear Dennis McKinsey. After reading your thought-provoking, stimulating and wonderful publication, I have decided to subscribe immediately, for the intelligence and perception that you offer to one who, long ago, gave up on supernatural beliefs in spooks, angels, demons, and apocalyptic gobbledygook.

Issue #175 July 1997, Editor: Dennis McKinsey

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

COMMENTARY

This months issue will open, as did last months, with a review of our Encyclopedia by an editor with his own publication followed by letters from our readers.

REVIEW

One of our long-term subscribers, RH, sent us the following message written by a fundamentalist who publishes a small but thick periodical entitled The Tentmaker and with whom I have had lengthy telephone conversations. RH prefaced his letter to me by saying, I found a relatively complimentary review of your book on a Biblicist's web page. Maybe people will buy by his recommendation! (The highly religious author of the message said,--Ed.)

"The first two books we will briefly talk about come from the publisher Prometheus Books. This company specializes in books most Christians would categorize as 'secular humanist'.... I have read some of the books from their catalog. I have discovered that many of those writing for this publisher have been deeply burned by the Christian religion. Much of what they write against Christianity is true! They expose many of the charismatic faith healers as frauds. Randy the Magician, exposed Peter Popoff by showing his so-called word of knowledge was nothing more than a radio receiver implanted in his ear. Gerard Straub, a former producer for the 700 Club reveals what life is like in this evangelical empire. There are several books on the subject of the horrors perpetrated upon mankind by the institution of religion. Several books deal with the subject of the Bible, its contradictions, errors, and its ill effects upon reasonable people. I am probably going to get some flack from some Christians for what I am about to recommend. So be it. Much of what these writers have to say about the church past and present is true. These writers have looked at church history and many have participated as active members in mainstream churches and walked away disgusted or hurt. We should have a heart to hear their cry. We should have the willingness to correct those things clearly wrong, and most of all, we should be humble enough to admit when we are wrong and change. But when I was in the mainstream church, we read books by so-called cult experts who would read these books for us so that we could know what they believe without getting our little minds dirty. These cult expert writers and ministries will one day be exposed for being cults themselves! It is time for us to grow up. We must be accountable for our own actions, and we must see if these things be so ourselves.

The books I am reviewing from Prometheus Books are entitled The Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy by C. Dennis McKinsey and The Bad News Bible by David Voas.

These two books are new additions to the several books Prometheus Books publishes which are aimed at discrediting the Bible as the word of God. Now, listen to me very carefully, especially those of the fundamentalist persuasion. Don't twist my words. Hear my heart. There are some in our readership that should go to the library and check out these books if available. There are some of you who should purchase these books, read them, and wrestle with the contents until you can give a reasonable explanation or answer to the things contained in these books. You should then minister to these people in love showing them where they are correct and incorrect. The trouble with this is that most Christians do not know the Bible or church history well enough to do so. I am not exaggerating when I say that many of these anti-Bible books writers know the Scriptures better than most pastors.

The Bad News Bible is written from a fictional viewpoint of Jesus' brother James. James, when he is through commenting on what is today incorrectly called the 'New Testament,' shows that the words of Jesus (or his ghostwriters) specifically deny much of Sunday School theology, and only the most selective quotations can give anyone confidence in salvation. Jesus doesn't live up to the Good Shepherd reputation. The promise of a heavenly afterlife comes from Paul, whose views on sex, women, and the family do little for his credibility. Judgment Day could come at any moment. While David Voas is very incorrect about who Jesus Christ is, he makes some very keen observations about much of what is taught as Biblical truths which are nothing but the traditions of men.

The Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy was written by a high school counselor (a position I have not held for many years--Ed.). He has appeared on many radio and television programs in debates. McKinsey *'thinks the Bible is a deceptively inaccurate conglomeration of mythology and folklore masquerading as a valid picture of historical reality.'* According to the publishers the book *'vividly proves the Bible to be its own worst enemy.'*

I have been in correspondence with Mr. McKinsey over the last few months and I would like to make a few comments. This man knows the Bible as well as any fundamentalist preacher, probably better. He certainly knows church history better. One night we spent over 2 hours debating over the telephone on my nickel, or should I say on some of those nickels some of you have sent in. (Thanks) He has combed the Bible very thoroughly. Let me tell you; those of you who really want to be able to share scripturally the hope within you, who want to truly understand the scriptures, who want to test your faith without hiding your head in the sand should purchase this book and spend several weeks wrestling with some of the points he makes. My heart goes out to this man and to many like him who have not received good answers from Christians. Shut off the TV and get knowledgeable enough about the things of God to be able to talk to this man and millions like him who are not satisfied with lazy superficial answers!

The famous atheist, Bertrand Russell, rejected Christianity not because it was not true, but because he read the Bible through the eyes of modern traditional teaching. The orthodox view of things does make the Bible contradict itself in many ways. We need

to acknowledge our errors. We need to fess up about our faulty 'inerrancy' doctrine and admit our English translations are not as pure as we have said they were. In short, we need to get honest. I believe when we do, people like David Voas and Dennis McKinsey will see the light and will be a very valuable part of the body of Christ. While both books are overpriced, (as are many Christian books) I recommend those who are not afraid to have their foundations tested or who have a heart to reach those who can argue and reason well, to purchase these books, especially McKinsey's. They will greatly sharpen your skills and probably rearrange some of your theological furniture. It is time to put off our stupidity and put on the mind of Christ. These books will force you to press much deeper than perhaps you have in the past. To order, call or write: Prometheus Books 59 John Glenn Dr. Amherst, New York 14228 1-800-421-0351 Bad News Bible-\$25.95; The Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy-\$49.95 (or contact me at my address on page 6--Ed.).

We appreciate the considerate observations from the author of The Tentmaker and only wish more biblicists were as forthright and perceptive. I would, however, enter a significant caveat. There is a far greater possibility of Christians seeing the fraudulent nature of the Bible and coming to their senses than me "seeing the light" and "becoming part of the body of Christ," especially in view of the fact that the Bible and Jesus have little light to shed.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #729 from NB of Tucson, Arizona

Dear Dennis. Regarding your reply to Ken Bonnell (BE #169, page 4), you say that you were correct in asserting "defraud not" is not a commandment.... But Jesus doesn't say "the ten commandments. Indeed, he omits the commandments" about "graven images," taking the Lords name in vain, and coveting. Are we then free to disregard those just because Jesus didn't mention them?

In the OT outside of the Torah, the word "commandment(s)" is found only in Psalm 119, and there four times (verses 73, 127, 143, and 151), referring to Gods commandments. Esther is the only book in the Bible that doesn't once mention the name of God. Verse 3:3 refers to "the kings commandment." If you know of any version in which Jesus specifically says the "ten Commandments," please cite it.

Editors Response to Letter #729

Dear NB. Don't you do any research before firing off a letter? Apparently not! Not only are some of your comments erroneous but I am having difficulty even seeing the relevance of others.

First, you say "In the OT outside of the Torah, the word 'commandment(s)' is found only in Psalm 119, and there four times (verses 73, 127, 143, and 151), referring to Gods commandments." Did you make any attempt whatever to check this out? Obviously not, for if you had gone to page 210 in Strongs Exhaustive Concordance,

you would have seen literally scores of instances in which the word "commandments" is employed outside the Torah throughout the OT.

Second, you say "He omits the 'commandments' about 'graven images,' taking the Lords name in vain, and coveting. Are we then free to disregard those just because Jesus didn't mention them?" Who said anything about disregarding anything? That's not even the issue. Our basic disagreement is one of determining whether or not Jesus was referring to the "Ten Commandments" when he included "Defraud not" in a list of commandments. You say he was not, while I say he was. I said in the January issue and will repeat again, *"In Mark 10:19 and Matt. 19:18-19 Jesus lists the commands that were written on stone and are specifically referred to as the Ten Commandments in Ex. 34:28, Deut. 4:13, and Deut. 10:4. So we are only talking about THE Ten Commandments, not commandments in general."*

Third, how is the fact that the Book of Esther does not mention the name of God even relevant to what we are discussing?

Fourth, are you saying Jesus was referring to OT commandments in general when he said *"Thou knowest the commandments?"* If so, then why did he start listing those in Exodus 20 and Deut. 5 which are associated with the Ten Commandments?

Fifth, why did he start listing them at all, since he would have had to enumerate over 600 commandments?

Sixth, why would he say "thou knowest the commandments" when he was referring to over 600 rather than 10? Do you think he actually expected the person to whom he was talking to know more than 600 statutes?

Seventh, just because he failed to list 5 of the ten does not mean he was not referring to what people regard as the Ten Commandments. Are you saying he had to list them all in order for you to be convinced he was referring to the Ten Commandments?

And finally, according to you Jesus was not referring to the Ten Commandments in Mark 10 and Matt. 19. Both say *"Do not commit adultery, do not kill, do not steal, do not bear false witness, and honor thy father and thy mother."* Are you really trying to tell me we are not dealing with the Ten Commandments and Jesus was not referring to the Ten commandments? Who are you trying to delude? If Jesus was not referring to the Ten Commandments but only to some OT commandments in general, then would you be so kind as to give me a list of what you consider to be THE Ten Commandments and back it up with chapter and verse? Apparently you have a new list of THE Ten Commandments and I eagerly look forward to reading them, as, no doubt, does most of Christendom.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #730 from JN of Lancaster, Pennsylvania

Much earlier in this ongoing saga of Biblical errancy I presented some simple numerical problems found in the Bible. Here's another. In Ezra 2 (KJV) there is a long list of the number of people in the sub clans who returned from a captivity. The total is listed as 42,360, but when you add up the actual enumerated sub clans, the total is really 29,818. In comparison the same story in Nehemiah 7 also lists the total as 42,360, but when these are added up, the total is actually 31,089. This is yet another obvious example of a mathematical error in the Wholly Babble which cannot be dismissed by fundamentalist apologists. Regarding this problem a critic of mine on the Internet, RPHL, replied to me by citing Norman Geisler who said on page 214 in his book "When Critics Ask: A Popular Handbook of Biblical Difficulties."

"First, it is possible that each of these is a copyist error. One of the most problematic areas of transcription for the Jewish scribe was copying numbers. It is certainly conceivable that out of these rather large lists of names and numbers there would be a number of copyist errors."

I replied by saying that this is just a convenient assumption based on zero evidence. No "original" manuscripts are available with which to make a comparison with the copies. Moreover there is no problem in transcribing numbers for the Jewish scribes because, contrary to often heard assumptions, numbers were written out as words instead of numerical figures. The fact that contradictory numbers exist in the copies is strong evidence that the originals had them too. I can see contradictions in the copies, but you cant see the originals. I have positive evidence; Geisler has none.

Moreover, apologists brag that there was extreme fidelity in the copying of "scripture" citing, for example, the ancient manuscripts of Isaiah found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. But when challenged with actual discrepancies and errors in various texts, these same apologists blurt out, "problematic areas" and "copyist errors."

RPHL continued to quote Geisler who says, "Second, it is also possible that Ezra and Nehemiah compiled their lists at different times. Ezra may have compiled a list of those who left Babylon with Zerubbabel, while Nehemiah compiled his list of those who actually made it to Jerusalem."

I told the desperate RPHL that he was resorting to BLATANT LYING about the text by quoting Geisler. (Is anybody surprised?) Here's what Ezra and Nehemiah ACTUALLY say: Ezra 2:1 says, "*Now these are the people of the province who came up from the captivity of the exiles, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had taken captive to Babylon (they returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his own town...*" Neh. 7:6 says,..."*These are the people of the province who came up from the captivity of the exiles whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had taken captive (they returned to Jerusalem and Judah, each to his own town...*"

The language is practically identical. BOTH say "these are the people...who came up..." BOTH say nothing whatever about those "who left" or those "who actually made it." I told RPHL that he was INVENTING a text, a sin!

If one reads further, BOTH texts, not just Ezra, mention the people leaving Babylon with Zerubbabel. I told RPHL that he was resorting to a misleading statement, incomplete facts, and frank LYING.

RPHL said, "In some cases, people who left Babylon with the intention of going back to rebuild Jerusalem may have turned back or died along the way. In other cases, a family may have enlisted recruits to bolster their numbers. Perhaps family members in other lands got word of the migration and rendezvoused with their relatives along the way from Babylon to Jerusalem."

To this I said, you and Geisler are idiots as well as liars. Ezra and Nehemiah BOTH HAVE THE SAME TOTALS, so even if they are writing at different times, which is not true as I explained above, IT CANNOT EXPLAIN THE ERROR WHICH CONSISTS OF THE SUBTOTALS NOT ADDING UP TO THE TOTALS GIVEN!!! The error consists in Ezra and Nehemiah's ADDITIONS. It doesn't make any difference as to WHEN they did their estimates.

For your benefit, I'll repeat the mistakes to you and EXPLAIN the mistakes which you and Geisler FAILED to see: In Ezra 2 there is a long list of the number of people in the sub clans who returned from a captivity. The total is listed as 42,360 (Ezra 2:64-*"The whole company numbered 42,360"* --NIV), but when you add up the actual enumerated listed sub clans of the whole company, the total is really 29,818. There is a shortage of 12,542 (42,360 minus 29,818).

In comparison, the same story in Nehemiah 7 lists the same total, 42,360, (Nehemiah 7:66-*"The whole company numbered 42,360"* --NIV), but when the enumerated sub clans of the whole company are added up, the total is actually 31,089. There is a shortage of 11,271 (42,360 minus 31,089).

RPHL replied that if one takes the time to study how Hebrew numbers were written by ancient scribes, it is easy to see how copying errors could have crept into the text.

I said those numbers were written out as words, viz, forty two thousand, three hundred and sixty, NOT 42,360. So it's NOT easy to see how a copyist error was made.

RPHL said in reply, "The appearance of numerical copying errors does not falsify the inspiration of the Bible, or prove that it is unworthy or unreliable in what it teaches concerning spiritual matters. Critics such as you fatally assume that since there are copying errors in the manuscript copy, there are errors in the original as well."

To this I said, "It's YOU who are fatally ASSUMING that the originals are error free when not only do you NOT have any evidence for it (you have no originals) but you have NEGATIVE EVIDENCE for it in the form of the copies that are available for all to inspect. In contrast I have POSITIVE EVIDENCE for my position that the Bible is ERRANT because I have written texts in front of me that DO CONTAIN NUMEROUS ERRORS, not only in numerical instances but in nearly every other sphere of discourse--scientific, social, political, and theological.

It is well known that most if not all human documents contain errors of one sort or another. It is unusual for a writing, particularly a writing as long as the Bible to contain absolutely no errors whatsoever. That would be an unusual or extraordinary condition. **THE ONUS OF PROOF IS ON THE PERSON CLAIMING THE EXTRAORDINARY.** Yet, you have zero evidence for your position.

The principle of *falsus in uno, falsus in omnibus* (false in one thing, false in everything) is certainly applicable to the errors under discussion. This rule of evidence recognizes that testimony found to be false in one matter should be considered unreliable in other matters. If you insist the claim of inerrancy is true, then please come up with a truly inerrant Bible. As far as I know, no such item has ever been published.

RPHL replied by saying, "Inspiration does not guarantee that every copy of the original is without error. We can expect minor errors to make their way into copies."

My response was that this whole idea of inspiration only in the originals but not the copies is frankly stupid. Not only is it stupid--it is really an ad hoc alibi on the part of inerrantists because they have no **EVIDENCE** whatsoever to support their idiotic claim.

Imagine: The almighty "God" dictates his "word" to ancient shepherders while ensuring it is written down precisely and correctly, and then goes on vacation or dozes off, forgetting to ensure that the copies are precise and correct too. He is supposed to be **OMNIPOTENT**, meaning he can do **ANYTHING**, in which case it should be **EASY** for him to ensure good copies. But he doesn't. God is supposed to be **GOOD** also. It would be **GOOD** for him to make sure all humans get his holy word intact. But he fails at this task too.

How utterly silly and stupid. You, RPHL, and Geisler are wasting your lives at this pathetic enterprise!

RPHL then said, "Minor errors do not change the meaning of the text, or the spiritual message behind it."

To that I said, "Now you are suggesting there **ARE** errors in the original, but they don't make any difference. Your little charade is exposed...."

We can **EASILY** detect errors in mathematics because the rules of math are precise and errors of addition, for example, like those we are discussing here, are **OBJECTIVELY** quite noticeable. The same goes for scientific errors....

The alleged almighty good "God" has utterly failed at his job of transmitting his intentions to his creation.

RPHL concluded by saying, "If you received a letter in the mail that you had won a sweepstakes, and the sentence saying-"**OU HAVE WON THE FIVE MILLION**

DOLLAR READER'S DIGEST SWEEPSTAKES"-had one typo would you be able to understand the sentence? Of course. And if you received another letter the next day with another typo-"Y#U HAVE WON THE FIVE MILLION DOLLAR READER'S DIGEST SWEEPSTAKES,"-you'd be even more sure, despite the minor typo. It is the same with minor errors in the bible... the manuscripts may be imperfect in their copies, but they contain the complete truth of the original Word of God. This complete truth is the message of salvation through Jesus Christ.

And I concluded by telling RPHL that he had to get this little tag line in at the end in order to assure a brownie point or two from his almighty imaginary guru. The sweepstakes analogy fails because we KNOW what sweepstakes letters are like, having numerous ORIGINALS of them with which comparisons can be made. As I told him earlier, he has NO ORIGINALS of the Bible and in that regard he is just whistling in the dark.

Letter #731 from M.J of Andover, Mass.

(The March, April and May issues had 3 parts of a lengthy article by MJ in which he explained why he was not a liberal Christian and why he supported a deistic philosophy very similar to that propounded by Thomas Paine--Ed.).

Dear Dennis. The middle section of my essay/letter "Why I Am Not a Liberal Christian" is a description of the liberal position, a position I tentatively held at that phase of my philosophical journey. I trust that the last part of the essay makes it perfectly clear that I do not hold that position today. I intentionally structured the essay in that way, presenting the liberal position in an ostensibly positive light, in order to refute it in the last part of the essay. Your criticisms of that section are for the most part the same conclusions I eventually came to.

One comment I would make is that claiming "*but that is what Jesus said,*" holds no water for liberal Christians. Their position is that one does not know just what Jesus actually said. The "Jesus Seminar" enterprise was all about that - liberal theologians voting on what he most likely actually said. The text is not sacred to liberals; the Bible is not a perfect book. To them it's a flawed account of man's relationship with God, and every individual has to interpret it, and pick and choose, according to his own lights. For me that liberal position initially seems plausible, IF "problem" passages are minor. But a fair-minded examination shows it's not just minor passages (that plague the Bible--Ed.); its major issues also (Jesus teaching Hell, Jesus teaching the end of the world in his generation, etc.). If the main thrust of Jesus' teaching can be discarded, ignored, or easily revised by liberals, then you do not have an honest endeavor. And, as I've said, liberals are just making up their own theology and religion. The Hollywood movie version of Jesus, with no scenes of Jesus thundering on about Hell, or praising eunuchs, or prohibiting remarriage, but only being Mr. Wonderful, is really the theology of the average liberal Christian. And the theology of the professional liberal Christians (ministers) is built on, as you say, "unscrupulous" interpretations under the guise of "sophisticated" hermeneutics.

P.S. I've had to take another detour from working directly on my tapes. I've been spending time reading, thinking, writing, about the existence of God, in general. I'm just about done with that. I'll send you a copy in a week or so. Best wishes.

Editors Response to Letter #731

Dear MJ. The tapes you send me get better and better with each group, as does your entire approach to interaction with religionists and biblicists. I would like to make a few observations with respect to your accurate comments regarding liberals.

First, you say the liberal position "*is that one does not know just what Jesus actually said.*" I beg to differ with the liberals in this regard because all we know about what Jesus said is in scripture. Far be it from me to agree with the fundamentalists on much of anything, but their rejection of the general approach exhibited by those in what is known as the Jesus Seminar is justified. To the latter I would utter my old refrain: How do you know what is true once you begin to admit certain parts are false.

Second, this kind of a la carte approach to biblical research on the part of the Seminar participants is naturally going to gravitate toward expunging comments by Jesus that put Christianity in general and Jesus in particular in a bad light. There is a kind of sleight-of-hand from the other end of the spectrum. Instead of stoutly defending questionable, if not outlandish comments by Jesus, as is practiced by fundamentalists, participants in the Seminar have opted to either expunge, abandon, or radically reinterpret what is being said by Jesus.

Third, if votes by scholars are going to determine what Jesus did and did not say, then, in effect, only that part of the Bible approved by them is divinely inspired. That's only another way of saying man wrote the Bible rather than God. It's man's book, not God's. They are gratuitously rejecting manuscript evidence not in accord with their preferences and predilections.

And lastly, you say that according to the liberals every individual has to interpret it, and pick and choose, according to his own lights. If that is true, then you will have as many Bibles as you have readers, because one interpretation will be as valid as another. In any event, judging from the general tenor of your comments, I would say we have come to essentially the same conclusions.

Letter #732 from DS of Tustin, California

Dear Dennis....I get tired of being serious with the fundamentalists and most often try a little humor. In Matt. 9:13 and Mark 2:17 Jesus said, "*those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick do; I came not to call the righteous but the sinners.*" I tell them with a straight face that I don't have to believe in Jesus because he did not come for me. They always reply that he came to save all because we are all sinners. I quote the above to show that there must be some righteous or else Jesus wouldn't have mentioned them. I then say that I am one of the righteous and assert

that if he came for them, they must be the sinners. That anyone could think that way usually leaves them stunned and I, in turn, have a big smile.

Letter #733 Via email from MKU

Your web site is by far the most remarkable commentary on the factual accuracy of the Bible I have ever seen..... and....it is unbelievably BIG. The material has genuine depth. In making this information easily available online, you are doing an immense service. Thank you.

Letter #734 from JW of Palm Springs, Florida

I don't believe in reincarnation but if there were such then Thomas Paine would reside at 2500 Punderson Drive in Ohio. Man, you are something else. I've read most of your last delivery of issues and cant put you down. So right, so comical, so on the money. You are a breath of fresh air. I wish my Father could have shared your philosophy. He passed away. Will write later.

Editors Response to Letter #734

Your compliments JW, like those of MKU, are most appreciated. Although there is an obvious self-serving aspect to all letters of this kind I can't help but feel a need to include them because they not only elevate my spirits but those of everyone sympathetic to our cause. Goodness knows, with the smothering influence of religious and biblical propaganda in this country, there is precious little else to improve our morale.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

(a) HEAR YE HEAR YE: Our old provider increased his rates and reduced even further the small number of newsgroups to which he furnished access. Consequently **ON JULY 1, 1997, OUR NEW EMAIL ADDRESS WITH OUR NEW PROVIDER WILL BE:** klomckin@infinet.com (all in lower case).

(b) We plan to complete our recording of 100 half hour TV programs by the end of this summer and so far we have received sufficient assistance from some unsung heroes to buy all of our original tapes from the station. However, we still need an additional \$600 to purchase the sophisticated recorder that is needed to play and record from our better quality Super VHS originals. Any assistance that can be rendered by our readership in this regard would be greatly appreciated. The station has the option of recording over our originals any time they so choose and the sooner we obtain them the safer. We know the quality and clarity of the programs we distribute can be significantly improved with better equipment and better originals and the quicker this becomes operational the better. But the outlook in this regard remains in the hands of our supporters.

When it comes to critical issues of this nature I am reminded of an interesting story regarding four people named Everybody, Somebody, Anybody and Nobody. There was an important job to be done and Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that, because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it, but Nobody realized that Everybody wouldn't do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done.

Unfortunately, when it comes to playing our programs on public access TV throughout the nation or rendering financial assistance, many, but not all, have chosen to remain on the sidelines. Hopefully those to whom this applies will now alter their philosophy and choose not only to participate but contribute.

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

COMMENTARY

This month's issue will begin with a review of an apologetic work produced by the collaborative work of three apologists followed by several pieces of correspondence from some of our readers.

REVIEW

In 1989 the televangelist, John Ankerberg, Dr. John Weldon, and Dr. Walter Kaiser, Professor of OT and Semitic languages at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, teamed up to publish a book entitled The Case of Jesus the Messiah. In which they sought to prove that Jesus fulfilled the OT messianic requirements. Although most of the work is the standard apologetic fare, some of the more egregious comments contained therein are worthy of comment and one would be remiss were they allowed to pass unchallenged.

First, on page 22 they quote Gen. 3:14-15 ("*So the Lord God said to the serpent, Because you have done this... will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He will bruise your head, and you will bruise his head*") and then say, "The context of this passage is the temptation and Fall of Adam and Eve by the deception of the 'serpent.' Who is the serpent? Revelation 12:9 (*And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast with him*) and Rev. 20:2 (*And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years*) identify him as the serpent of old, who is the devil or Satan. Yes, it says he is the serpent of old but nowhere does Revelation say it was the serpent who tempted Eve in Genesis. Our illustrious authors are engaged in one of the most subtle sleight-of-thought maneuvers endemic to Christian theology. Where does the Bible say that Eve was tempted by the Devil or Satan? It says she was tempted by a serpent; but nowhere does it say that serpent was the Devil or Satan. The words Devil and Satan never even appear in the Book of Genesis. In order to circumvent this major roadblock to Christian exegesis, these apologists latched onto the two passages just quoted from Revelation. But where does scripture equate the serpent in Gen. 3 with the serpent in Rev. 12 and 20? In order to keep the minds of critics off this major stumbling stone, the authors focus on a secondary issue by saying, "For those who accept only the Hebrew Scriptures as authoritative, the serpent in Genesis 3:14 cannot be just an animal. The serpent must be a person. The word 'enmity' in the Hebrew Scriptures always refers to hatred between persons. It is never used between an animal and a person." But whether the serpent in Gen. 3 is an animal or a person is of far less importance than whether or not

the serpent in Revelation is the one who acted in Genesis. Just because the Bible talks about a serpent in Genesis and a serpent in Revelation and the latter is called the Devil, that old serpent, and Satan, does not mean they are identical. That leap in logic is textually unsupported. It has always been assumed by apologists that they are the same, but nowhere does the Bible clearly and unmistakably equate the two. That is a concession biblical critics would do well to abandon.

Second, on page 30 they contend that the messiah must come "from Bethlehem" according to Micah 5:2. But as we showed in our issues on prophecy, 1 Chron. 4:4 shows there is a far greater possibility of Bethlehem referring to an individual than a town because it says 'Bethlehem Ephratah.' Not only is Bethlehem the name of a man whose father is Ephratah but Micah 5:6 shows Micah is referring to someone who delivered people from the Assyrians, a group of people whose empire disappeared 600 years before Jesus was even born.

Third, in their pronounced attempt to set Moses and Jesus off from the crowd they state on page 32, "Until Jesus came, no one was superior to Moses, for it was only said of Moses and Jesus that they knew the Lord and spoke to Him 'face to face.'" (Deut. 34:10, Matt. 3:17, Mark 9:7, and others). If it was said, then it was said erroneously, because other biblical figures saw God as well.

It is interesting to note that our authors are only making this claim indirectly through the alleged claims of others because they are probably aware of the fact that Moses and Jesus are by no means the only ones who spoke to God face to face. In Job 42:5 Job said, *"I have heard thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee."* In Gen. 32:30 Jacob says, *"I have seen God face to face and my life is preserved."* Num. 14:14 says, *"...they have heard that thou Lord art among this people, that thou Lord art seen face to face...."* Isaiah 6:1 says, *"In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up...."* Psalm 63:2 says, *"To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary."* And in Amos 7:7-8 Amos says, *"...the Lord stood upon a wall made by a plumb line, with a plumb line in his hand. And the Lord said unto me, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A plumb line...."* So obviously Moses and Jesus were not the only biblical figures to have seen God face to face.

Fourth, on page 32 the authors state, "The following parallels and contrasts will show that only Jesus completely fulfilled and went beyond Moses prophetic office and is the unique One God promised would come.... Moses was a great worker of miracles.... But Jesus did greater works than Moses." Then they quote Acts 2:22 which says, *"Men of Israel, listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst...."* Our authors failed to remember or are apparently unaware of the fact that the ability to do miracles does not prove one is from God, is God, or represents God. In fact, the Bible specifically states in Matt. 24:23-24 and Mark 13:21-22, *"Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect."* Second Thess. 2:9

says, "Even him whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders...." And Rev. 16:14 says, "For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles...." In effect, miracles are not to be used to prove one is from God because false Christs, false prophets and even the devil can work miracles. Jesus himself says as much in Matt. 24:23-24.

Fifth, on page 38 they state, "When 'blood and water' came forth from Jesus pierced side (John 19:34), this was medical proof that His heart had literally burst fulfilling David's words, 'My heart has turned to wax. It has melted away within me'" (Psalm 22:14, 33:99, 96:129-147). This would be far more indicative of someone who has been stabbed in the side after having drunk a lot of water than one who was stabbed in the heart? Why would blood and water gush forth from a heart that burst? We can all understand a profuse amount of blood, but water is another matter.

Sixth, while discussing the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 they state, "Who else but Jesus Christ ever claimed He was the Messiah?" One can only conclude that the training in religious history of our illustrious trio has been sadly neglected because anyone acquainted with messianism knows that hundreds have made this claim and many have been taken seriously.

Seventh, while trying to equate that same Suffering Servant with Jesus, the authors quote Matt. 27:12-14 ("*When he was accused by the chief priests and the elders, he gave no answer. Then Pilate asked him, Don't you hear the testimony they are bringing against you? but Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge--to the great amazement of the governor*") and then they allege this is a fulfillment of Isa. 53:8 ("*He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before his shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth*"). The obvious problem with this rendition of what occurred is that Jesus not only opened his mouth and replied to his accusers but engaged in verbal repartee. John 18:33-37 says, "*Then Pilate entered into the judgment hall again, and called Jesus, and said unto him. Art thou the King of the Jews? Jesus answered him, Sayest thou this thing of thyself, or did others tell it thee of me? Pilate answered, Am I a Jew? Thine own nation and the chief priests have delivered thee unto me; what hast thou done? Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence. Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that am a king. To this end was born, and for this cause came into the world, that should bear witness unto the truth....*" So clearly Jesus was not silent at his trial by any stretch of the imagination.

Eighth, while discussing clues as to who is the true messiah they state on page 60 that "He must fit the following descriptions," the seventh one listed by them being that he will be smitten and spit upon, killed with thieves, be buried in a rich mans tomb, and come back to life after death. Unfortunately they neglected to provide chapter and verse to verify these assertions.

Ninth, while discussing Zechariah 12:10 (*"And will pour on the house of David, and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of prayers. And they shall look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for Him, as one mourns for an only son..."*) they state on page 81, "This prophecy only fits Jesus Christ. Why? Because Jesus Christ is the only One who ever claimed to be God, claimed to be the Messiah, and was crucified by the inhabitants of Jerusalem. Wrong on all three counts! Many have claimed to be God and the messiah and Jesus was not the only person executed by crucifixion in Jerusalem.

Tenth, on page 91 they state, "The messianic prophecies are minute and specific in detail." No they certainly are not, especially when it comes to any kind of direct application to Jesus Christ. Far too many are too vague and ambiguous to be clearly applied to any one individual; far too many are clearly inapplicable to Jesus, and far too much evidence proving Jesus could not be the messiah is totally ignored.

Eleventh, on page 91 they state, "The prophecies do exist, and even skeptics (whether or not they accept Him, as Messiah) admit that they remarkably fit the life of Jesus." I don't know what skeptics our notable crew is referring to but I certainly would not include myself among them. When the prophecies which apologists so freely rip out of context are restored to their proper milieu the conclusion is inescapable. They can almost never be applied to Jesus Christ in particular. Even broad and nebulous generalizations that are applicable to him can simultaneously be applied to thousands of others.

Twelfth, on pages 103-105 they make a few more observations worthy of note. They begin by saying, "The NT writers were so convinced that the Hebrew Scriptures had miraculously and clearly predicted the birth, life, and death of Jesus Christ that they preached this at the daily risk of losing their lives. History records they eventually were martyred because of their belief." Aside from the fact that the Roman Empire had hundreds of cults and sects making all kinds of challenging and potentially serious claims with impunity, one can't help but wonder why our authors failed to cite even one historical source to corroborate all this alleged martyrdom on the part of Christianity's earliest protagonists. Certainly there is nothing in the Bible to justify such assertions.

Thirteenth, they allege that "The great bulk of the NT quotations are careful reproductions or translations of the original Scripture. In most instances the historical sense is carefully preserved.... Careful examination of the evidence (comparing the NT passages quoting Hebrew passages) reveals there can be no doubt that the NT writers fairly quoted the Hebrew Scriptures." One need only read our issues on misquotations and misinterpretations to see the inaccuracy of this comment. Misinterpretations, misquotations, and manufactured quotes abound.

Fourteenth, on page 107 they correctly state that "For Jewish scholars the idea of the resurrection was not connected with the Messianic expectations of salvation." But in an attempt to prove the OT predicted a future resurrection of the messiah they state, Isaiah 53:10--11, without specifically using the word resurrection, certainly calls for

it. It does? Where? The verses in question state verbatim, "*Yet, it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.*" These verses not only don't refer directly to a resurrection; it is not even implied, unless one stretches his imagination beyond the limits of reasonable interpretation in order to gain the meaning desired. At best they merely relate to a sacrifice for others but that by no means necessarily entails a resurrection.

Fifteenth, on page 112 they state, "It is true that not all of the Jews during Jesus time accepted Him as the Messiah. Because of this, there are some today who claim there is no reason why anyone ought to believe Jesus was the Messiah. But such persons have a hard time explaining why literally thousands of Jews did accept Jesus as their Messiah." What kind of comment is that! Literally scores of alleged messiahs had thousands of followers during that day and age. Does that, therefore, substantiate their claims? Jesus was only one among many. Since when did the number of followers correlate with the truthfulness of the message. Thousands of people have ardently accepted all kinds of fallacious and ephemeral concepts and beliefs throughout history. Hitler had millions of devoted followers and Santa Claus has millions of believers, but that hardly eradicates the lies of one and the fictitious nature of the other. This constant appeal to numbers by apologists as a justification for accuracy and truthfulness is no more valid now than when first submitted centuries ago.

Sixteenth and lastly, on page 120 they state, "If Jesus Christ did, in fact, rise from the dead, then one must accept the claims about Himself as being true--that He was in fact God Incarnate. No one else of an estimated 100 billion persons who have ever lived in human history has ever risen from the dead." If there is any instance in which these authors failed to do their homework it lies in the inaccuracy exposed by this poorly-researched comment. One does not need to study history to refute this assertion because their own book provides numerous examples of people rising from the dead prior to Jesus. Lazarus, the Widow at Nain's son, Elisha, Samuel, Jairus's daughter, and some saints all rose before Jesus. As have said on several occasions: By the time Jesus rose from the dead this was actually a rather common occurrence. would think it would have been met by a resounding yawn followed by, so what else can you do, rather than astonishment.

The most reasonable conclusion to be garnered from a careful analysis of this book is that it is not only tendentious and biased in its portrayal of scripture but not to be viewed as a valid depiction of messianic prophecies and fulfillments.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #735 from FA of Santa Rosa, California.

Dear Dennis. In your response to GN in letter #726 you said Jesus birth in a manger would imply to some that he was born into poverty. But Luke 2:7 gives the

impression that Joseph and Mary intended to stay at the inn, and since it was full, they had no choice but to stay in the stable.

Since Jesus was born as Christ and King of the Jews, Matthew 2:2-4, I believe his family was well-to-do. The wise men merely added to the family wealth, when they opened their treasures and gave him gold, frankincense and myrrh, Matthew 2:11.

It is my understanding that Jesus was King of the Jews by virtue of his birth into the Hasmonean Royal Family. This would make him pretender to the throne of Israel. Rome killed Jesus because he was King of the Jews as is clear by the writing on the cross.

Jesus was not born into poverty and at no time in his life did he ever miss a meal--except by his own choice. Jesus fared more sumptuously than even the rich man in the parable. The gospels tell us Jesus attended feasts and banquets one after another. The only thing Jesus missed was the opportunity to sit on the throne of Israel and wear the crown as King, as his forebears the Hasmoneans did.

Editors Response to Letter #735

Dear FA. You began rather well. I can understand your assumption that since they only stayed in the manger because they were denied lodging in the inn they would appear to have been reasonably well off. But you went downhill from there.

You say, "*Since Jesus was born as Christ and King of the Jews, Matthew 2:2-4, I believe his family was well-to-do.*" But that is merely a belief. Do you have any textual support for it. And what leads you to believe he was the expected savior predicted by the Jews, especially in light of the fact that nearly all Jews rejected him as their Messiah and their King. Just because people make claims does not mean they are valid. He certainly did not fulfill the OT messianic prophecies as we showed in several issues.

You say, "*It is my understanding that Jesus was King of the Jews by virtue of his birth into the Hasmonean Royal Family.*" And later you state, "*The only thing Jesus missed was the opportunity to sit on the throne of Israel and wear the crown as King as his forebears the Hasmoneans did.*" Do you have any support for your belief that he was of Hasmonean descent? From whence comes that belief, since there is nothing of a scriptural nature to buttress your contention. In fact, the word "Hasmonean" doesn't even appear in the Bible.

You say, "*Rome put Jesus to death because he was King of the Jews as is clear by the writing on the cross.*" One can assert that he was put to death for claiming to be King of the Jews; that is biblically sustainable. But there is nothing of substance to actually prove he was the King of the Jews. What would lead you to believe that he was put to death for being King of the Jews, in fact, rather than in mere acclamation? You are alleging he actually was King of the Jews which is not verifiable from Scripture.

Moving on, you state, "Jesus was not born into poverty and at no time in his life did he ever miss a meal--except by his own choice." I cant help but wonder where you obtained that piece of information as well. Would you cite chapter and verse to prove that Jesus never missed a meal. That could be true, but I know of nothing in scripture that will corroborate it.

You state, "*Jesus fared more sumptuously than even the rich man in the parable. The gospels tell us Jesus attended feasts and banquets one after another.*" He attended a few that is true, but one after another? Hardly! have never been a fan, proponent, supporter, or propagandist for Jesus Christ, as you well know, but I would not go so far as to make the kinds of disparaging claims you are uttering. Again I would pose the question: Where on earth are you getting all this? With all due respect FA you are engaging in the same kind of enterprise to which apologists are so addicted and love to wander--embellishing the text--adding material that is nowhere to be found in scripture.

Letter #736 from DS of Tustin, California

Dear Dennis.... enjoy your newsletters very much, BUT you sometimes become more sarcastic than I am, and can really get heavy. And although most writers deserve it, I think you might turn them off.

Editors Response to Letter #736

Dear DS. I can understand your concern and that is the chance one takes in every exchange of that nature. But I have always operated on the premise that people will accept poignant comments as long as you are being truthful or are sincerely trying to be truthful. People are generally able to set aside their feelings if the topic is of such importance that they are motivated to put truth and accuracy above self-image. I cant help but think of the people who call radio programs for advice on a wide variety of topics knowing full well that the host of the program is probably going to be anything but sympathetic, cordial, or even civil. Then, again, maybe they are just masochists.

It might interest you to know that a few people have told me that should be more assertive. So I have people on one side urging me to be more forceful, while some on the opposite are nudging me to be more reticent. So far, I have confined most of my acerbity to the Internet where many people seem to have a strong proclivity toward sarcasm, pejoratives, and egotism.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #737 from JN of Pennsylvania

(JN, a longtime supporter of BE, found himself involved in a discussion with a biblicist who said, "You say the bible is full of contradictions but I will tell you why you think the bible is full of contradictions. First Corinthians 2:14 says, '*the natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of god: for they are foolishness to him:*

neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.' You can not find any contradictions in the holy bible if you are a spiritual man of GOD." JN sent the following reply to his critic--Ed.).

Paul wrote Corinthians, and he was once a "natural man"--he was not only a "natural man," but a Jew who actively persecuted Christians. Although Paul does not explicitly define the term "natural man," he alludes to it in 1 Cor 15:45-46 which says, "*So it is written: 'The first man Adam became a living being', the last Adam, a life-giving spirit.. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual.*" Paul suggests all men are born natural, since he says, "*the spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual.*" If this is true, how on earth did this "natural man," Paul, ever get to be a Christian who could write his precept concerning the "natural man." In order to write this inspired scriptural precept, i.e. "divine truth," he FIRST had to be inspired by "God." But how could he EVER have been so inspired, if the "natural man receiveth not the things of the spirit of god"?

Of course this applies to every person, unless it can be proven that some are born Christians from the very first minute of life. However this seems biologically unlikely or impossible and Paul himself rules this out in 1 Corinthians. It would appear that ALL PEOPLE WERE OR ARE NATURAL MEN initially, and thus, being so, could NEVER BECOME CHRISTIANS, since the natural man can not receive the things of the spirit of god, for they are foolishness unto him.

CONCLUSION: There are no Christians and never were any. Paul could not have become a Christian or written any inspired "scripture." If what Paul says is true, 'all' Biblical authors started out as natural men, and were thus prevented from discerning spiritual things. Thus, the Bible couldn't be inspired by "God."

Editors Response to Letter #737

You raise an interesting point, JN. How could the natural man, Paul, have ever converted and become a spiritual man to begin with, since the natural man understands not the things of the spirit? I see you are again operating on the premise that if apologists can repeatedly use a verse to expediently escape a dilemma you can use it to create one. Judging from your prior writings, this appears to be one of your favorite stratagems. Good approach!

Letter #738 from GH of Okemos, Michigan

Dear Dennis: Thank you for sending me your listing of materials! I am attempting to order (purchase) some audio tapes from you. Therefore, you may be contacted by the following company....

Please allow me to explain the situation. We prisoners are ONLY allowed to purchase audio cassette tapes from the officially designated ("approved vendor") for tapes.... Mostly, they sell all kinds of music from major companies. As for educational and/or religious tapes,.... we must first place the order with this company and give them the

full name & address of the primary vendor. Then., if this company fails to provide the tapes ordered, we can go to the Chaplain, show him the documented proof that we first attempted the order via this company without success.... THEN we are allowed to order those religious tapes directly from the primary vendor.

When I attempted to send a prepaid order directly to you, for \$42.00 worth of tapes, it was NOT processed, and I was advised of the above. In compliance with Policy & Procedure, I have this day placed the tape order with the company and given them your name & address, as the primary vendor. Thus, sometime within the next couple of weeks the company may contact you in regard to obtaining the tapes from you. If they choose to not fill the order, then I'll be able to go to the Chaplain, and order them directly from you. But we are not allowed to order anything from a private party. So, if I do end-up being able to order your tapes directly from you, I'll have to address the check to "McKinsey Biblical Tapes or such, so that it sounds like I am contacting a company rather than a private party. And you shouldn't have a problem cashing a check made payable to "McKinsey Biblical Tapes." If there is or would be a problem, please advise.

Editors Response to Letter #738

Dear GH. What bothers me most about your letter is that you have to have the chaplain approve purchases of material focusing on religion and the Bible whenever this company you are required to go through fails to act. Isn't that analogous to putting the lion in charge of the sheep? Doesn't your prison have a librarian who routinely orders books, magazines, and periodicals? Why can't that person be be your go-between. Surely someone connected with the prison has to regularly order a lot of forms and other papers. Why couldn't that person be in charge of ordering this kind of material, since it is in their bailiwick, so to speak? The implication is very strong that a religious figure has intentionally been placed in charge of all religious censorship. What perks do you receive if you show up for Sunday services? I repeatedly receive letters from prisoners outlining how religion is imposed on them by one means or another while they are incarcerated. I cant help but feel that if American prisons were as concerned with teaching people trades and useful skills as they are with religious indoctrination, this country would be much better off. But one is considerably less expensive than the other, isn't it.

You might be interested in knowing that we have not yet been contacted by either the company or the Chaplain. I wonder why!

Letter #739 from DC of Evanston, Wyoming

Dear Mr. McKinsey. Please send me information on how I may begin receiving your newsletter. I am in desperate need of any information on Bible errancy. My wife and are recovering fundamentalists after suffering 30 years of indoctrination. We are new subscribers to the Skeptical Review and have found it to be wonderful medicine.

Letter #740 from TW of Springfield, Ohio

Love the TV show. Tape it as often as can, much to the dismay of various family members who don't like to rock the boat. Please send me the free list of materials as advertised at the end of each show....

Question: if valuables (such as gold, silver, gems, etc.) aren't to be envied and are the root of all evil (as God claims), then why are the streets of Heaven paved with gold? While gold is fairly flexible, cant see it as being a competent building material.

Anyway, keep up the fine work. Your last show on biblical number implausibilities was dead-on.

Letter #741 from JK of Leawood, Kansas

Dennis. First of all many thanks for all of your years of hard work debunking the Holy word. am going to start buying a collection of your works beginning with the years of 1983 in order to create a library for other nonbelievers in the Kansas City area. If you happen to know of other subscribers in the area, would appreciate knowing their names.

Editors Response to Letter #741

Dear JK. We have had a long standing policy of inserting the names, addresses, and phone numbers of anyone who wishes to be contacted by any of our readers. Just send me this information and will include it at the end of a future issue.

Letter #742 from JW of Palm Springs, Florida

Cant say enough about how much enjoy your work, so wont even try. Please send me issues 85 through 156.

EDITORS NOTE:

(a) In last months issue JN of Lancaster, Pennsylvania had a long letter in which he employed some rather acerbic language to criticize RPHL and the latter's quotations from Geislers book. JN would now like to make the following comment in that regard:

CORRECTION: I would like to retract any and all ad hominems ("idiots," "liars," etc.) in my submitted material, and apologize to all concerned.

(b) We, too, would like to make an apology. Our audio duplicating machine recently began to perform improperly without our knowledge. If you have received audio tapes from us in which the sound is too low and/or seems muffled, please return them to us and we will send you a new and improved version of the contents. The machine has been repaired. We just exhausted the poor thing. Again, we would like to apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused anyone.

(c) We would like to thank those who submitted contributions to assist our effort to buy a Super VHS recorder and all our original tapes. Now we can purchase the SVHS recorder and our original tapes and use the latter as originals when we send our supporters tapes of our programs.

Issue #177 September 1997, Editor: Dennis McKinsey

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

COMMENTARY

This months issue will focus on letters from our readers.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #743 from NB of Tucson, Arizona

Regarding your comments on the final part of my letter #690 in BE #166, I have a few (a very few) comments:.... Second, you refer to countries where freedom from religion doesn't exist, although interestingly, the three countries you specify happen to be Muslim countries. You made no mention, for example, of the Republic of Ireland, where the Roman Catholic Church functions as a "fourth branch" of the government, and where abortion is still illegal and until recently divorce was illegal; or Northern Ireland, where Protestants have been oppressing Catholics for decades, or even Mexico, where the President and Vice President must belong to the Roman Catholic Church.

You may be too young to remember it, but I remember only too well when the words "under God" were interpolated into the Pledge of Allegiance--Congress did that in 1954, at the height of Sen. Joe McCarthy's reign of Terror. "In God We Trust" got on our coins because a Protestant minister in 1861 (when the Union forces were losing early battles of the Civil War) wrote to Treasury Secretary Salmon P. Chase suggesting that there be some sort of acknowledgment of Almighty God on our coins. A year later Chase ordered a phrase slightly modified from the fourth stanza of the "Star Spangled Banner" (which didn't become the national anthem until 1931): "In God We Trust" was put on coins to be issued in 1864. Legend has it that Chase, who was deeply suspicious of President Lincoln, chose that phrase to imply that in Lincoln he did not trust. In any case, coins with that phrase did appear in 1864, and from time to time after that. In 1902, President Teddy Roosevelt asked Congress to take them off our coins for good, but Congress told T.R. to stuff it. Finally in 1955, just after Joe McCarthy's fall, Congress ordered In God We Trust to be on all future coins and currency.

You may not be aware that until 1914 the "Establishment of Religion" clause of the First Amendment was construed to apply to Congress, not the states, and until the 1820s several states, including Connecticut and Virginia, did have "state churches" and believers and nonbelievers alike were required to pay taxes to support them. In 1914, the Supreme court held that the Fourteenth Amendment applies the same

restrictions to the states as the Bill of Rights applies to Congress. This ended the concept of "state churches", but hardly ended the controversy, as witness the so-called "Religious Freedom Restoration Act", which is now being challenged in the Supreme Court, the case before the Court concerning whether or not a Roman Catholic Church can build an "extension" into an area zoned for commerce.

Finally, you refer to my "gratuitous" observation that the only dissenter in the Tennessee State resolution was a Jew. In my Random House Unabridged Dictionary, "gratuitous" is defined as *"given, bestowed, or obtained without charge or payment; free, voluntary; being without apparent reason, cause, or justification: a gratuitous insult."* I assume that it is the latter definition to which you refer; but there was a palpable reason; Tennessee (where I did a lot of my growing up) is in the heart of the "Bible Belt", where all non-Christians are viewed as "strange", so it took quite a bit of courage for a Jew to vote against posting part of the law of Moses. Anyway, you say that you couldn't help but draw a "subtle suspicion", from that reference, without specifying what that suspicion was. I assure you that I am not Jewish, if that is what you meant, nor am I a fundamentalist, nor am I a "biblicist", if by that you mean that think that the Bible is literal, inert truth. often disagree with your interpretations of the Bible, but it can hardly be said that you haven't had "a fair and impartial hearing".

Editors Response to Letter #743

Dear NB. Although you are focusing on essentially extra biblical information, a few comments are in order.

First, I focused on Muslim countries because their intolerance shows religion at its worse and many countries in which Islam dominates are considerably more oppressive than Christian nations like Ireland, Northern Ireland, and Mexico, although it is more a matter of degree than kind.

Second, I assume your history lesson is as accurate as it is interesting.

And finally, in so far as my reference to the word "gratuitous" is concerned, I tend to suspect anti-Semitism when I see a Jew or Jews being singled out in what could be construed as a negative or critical manner. Apparently that was not the intent of your letter judging by your comment that it took quite a bit of courage for a Jew to vote against posting part of the law of Moses. That is not the kind of comment that would normally be associated with an anti-Semite and for that you are to be complimented rather than faulted. Your motives were ambiguous and for that reason I made no direct accusation.

Letter #744 from PW via Email (Part a)

(I pondered for some time whether or not the following email exchange should even be included in a reputable publication in light of the fact that more acidity than sagacity was created. It is indicative of the kind of dialogues that occasionally occur

on the Internet and the depths to which conversations can descend and ego tripping can supplant intelligent discourse--Ed.)

Dear Mr. McKinsey, First of all, note that it is I who am browsing, not my software. The reaction comes from me, not from Netscape Navigator. You have no reason to trust me, nor to take my opinion as meaningful. As far as you're concerned, I'm just another 'net bum'. Yet I offer you this: I've just browsed a couple of your articles regarding the character of Jesus and of Paul, and have to say that I haven't seen a more confused analysis of the scriptures since I first encountered Mormon missionaries. In the dozen or more complaints about Jesus and Paul which I read, I found perhaps only one question which even raised an eyebrow; the rest were simply nonsense. I'm disappointed. Usually, when I read the questions bright atheists or agnostics pose, I find a few which stimulate my thinking, some reasonable observation which leads me to seek new light on some theological topic. I found nothing of this sort in your writing. Bummer.

Editors Response to Letter #744 (Part a)

You might be interested in knowing that I am wholly unimpressed with your criticisms, since they are so obviously lacking in specifics and clearly wedded to glittering generalities. Like so many Christian apologists you employ the nebulous to fool the credulous. Since you proved nothing whatever, there is no reason for me to even move an eyebrow much less raise one.

You say, "You have no reason to trust me, nor to take my opinion as meaningful" and with that I could not agree more. With an analysis as anemic as yours, one would hardly be reasonable to proceed any other way.

You refer to yourself as "just another 'net bum.'" I don't know about the "net" aspect but I have every reason to accept the rest. For someone so unwilling to discuss specifics and apparently unable to present a case, to use the word "nonsense" in regard to those of the opposite persuasion is the height of duplicity, not to mention ideological irrelevance and impotence.

Letter #744 Continues (Part b)

I am impressed, however, with the sheer volume of your writings. You clearly take religion seriously if it absorbs so much of your physical and emotional energy. I wonder if you know why you spend so much energy refuting something you consider worthless.

Editors Response to Letter #744 (Part b)

Because it needs to be done, that's why! That should be obvious to anyone who has not been indoctrinated, if not brainwashed, from infancy. If you had read all of my issues as well as my book, you would not have asked such an inane question.

Letter #744 Continues (Part c)

I don't for a second buy your explanation that the topic is unbalanced. Christian pulpits and seminaries are full of men and women who detract from the veracity of the Bible, the historicity of Jesus and the integrity of Paul and the other apostles. One needs to choose carefully to find a corner of Christianity in which these things are NOT defamed.

Editors Response to Letter #744 (Part c)

You don't watch TV or listen to the radio very much do you. You appear to be completely oblivious to the influence of the religious right in this country and the amount of one-sided propaganda that is being disseminated throughout the land to influence the masses. For every one who mirrors your description, hundreds do not. I assume you are some kind of latter-day pseudo-intellectual troglodyte.

And if you had bothered to read all of my issues you would know that they concentrate on biblical inerrancy and fundamentalism. I don't think you even managed to read the title of the publication, let alone the sub caption.

I am going to do you the favor of forgetting that you even made a statement so ignorant as, "I don't for a second buy your explanation that the topic is unbalanced." When is the last time you heard someone on the national or local media make the kinds of statements found in this publication? In fact, I'm tempted to go even further and not let others know you uttered a comment that detached from reality. But, alas, my conscience, convictions, clarity, and clobber-them-as-necessary commitments won't let me.

Letter #744 Continues (Part d)

You've got some other agenda cooking, probably somewhere in your past. Do you know what it is?

Editors Response to Letter #744 (Part d)

Yes, indeed; it is called the "Let sanity reign" agenda.

Letter #744 Continues (Part e)

In response, it would be perfectly legitimate for you to ask why I should take the time to tell you I don't find your writing helpful. I don't know the answer, but am considering the question.

In case you're interested in whom it is that chides you, I'm a 42-year-old Jewish American male who believed the gospel at the age of 19. I have a graduate degree in business. I've studied the scriptures and theology seriously, for a layman. I describe myself as "an Evangelical with footnotes," because there are several positions held by Evangelicals which I don't believe hold water, strict inerrancy among them. My IQ is

high but falls short of genius; however, I scored in the 99th percentile in analytical reasoning on the GRE. I know soundly reasoned analysis when I read it. Yours ain't.

Editors Response to Letter #744 (Part e)

Is all of this supposed to impress me? It don't. Nor does your evolution toward mental decrepitude. Adolph Hitler had a high IQ too and you can see where that got us and what he did to millions. Unless you have some concrete and specific facts to not only present but prove, please don't clutter up my computer screen again with your drivel. There is none so deaf as he who won't hear and you're a quintessential example of same. Come back when you are more qualified, more researched, and more willing to provide details. Right now about all you are capable of doing is regurgitating the excrement you swallowed from childhood.

Letter #744 Concludes (Part f)

(PW ended his attack with the following vacuous quotation--Ed.).

They are asleep; and in their dreams they have made alarm clocks illegal.

Editors Concluding Response to Letter #744 (Part f)

P.S. Your concluding quote is about as coherent and relevant as your entire monologue. If that is the best you can do, then you are in even worse shape than I thought. You need help my friend.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #745 via email from KL

Dear Mr. McKinsey,

I recently came across the web site for your Biblical Errancy newsletters. I downloaded many of the issues and have been browsing them off-line.

I want to congratulate you for the amazing work that you've done. I myself, in relation to a project have been working on, started over a year ago to research and seek out those inconsistencies and factual errors in the Bible that I'd always heard existed. But after spending perhaps 50 or 100 hours on the project--quite fruitful, but tedious-- I thought to myself that surely someone has done all this work before and was simply duplicating labor unnecessarily. So off to the library I went. But even there it was not easy to find a book dedicated to the type of Biblical research I was looking for. And so to the Internet I went where I found your newsletters. I have also since then discovered that Prometheus Books published your Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy, which I have not been able to find anywhere (Just contact me--Ed.) and presume is a compendium of the high points of your newsletters.

I will come out right here at the beginning and say that I am most definitely NOT a Christian, and though I am genetically and culturally Jewish I believe that monotheism in general is one of the greatest tragedies ever to befall mankind. Of the three main branches of monotheism, I'd say that Christianity and Islam are equally heinous, drenched as they are in intolerance, ignorance and blood. Judaism, though it is the parent religion of the other two, is far less noxious because it is not evangelical and has no desire to convert everyone in the world to its beliefs. True, the Jews of the Old Testament waged war and slaughtered their neighbors, but if truth be told they were no worse in their behavior than most ethnic, religious or national groups of that period. Nor was their self-righteous belief system any more extreme than that of other ancient peoples.

The reason I am writing to you is this: I am working on producing a series of anti-propagandistic cartoon booklets, very similar in style to Chick Publications' which are Christian right-wing brainwash tracts (which I'm sure you're familiar with). But instead I will be presenting a sane point of view, that of a rational, humanity-centered realism. The reason I am doing this is that the vast majority of humanist/rationalist knowledge and debunking literature out there is targeted toward intellectuals and already-confirmed nonbelievers. My proposed booklets are meant to be handed out or sent to Christians, especially those who desperately need some enlightenment. (Priests and ministers long ago learned that "preaching to the choir" is ineffectual in winning new converts, and that if one wants to get across one's viewpoint it is best to present it to people who don't already hold one's belief system.)

Some aggressive or inquisitive Christians do read publications like The Biblical Errancy Newsletter or books from the Prometheus catalog, if only at least to get a peek into the enemy's camp. But the truth is, your average American Christian would rather chew glass than expend intellectual effort reading anything antithetical to his beliefs. Most Christians (and most Americans) are semiliterate, uninquisitive, and have absolutely no interest in seeking out any upsetting information. Most Christians have surrounded themselves with a cocoon of brain-numbing Christian propaganda--television, radio, books, magazines, friends, community--and will never even encounter the kind of information presented in Biblical Errancy. They don't argue with you because they don't know you exist, and they never will.

We need to reach these pathetic, deluded people and bring them back in the fold of humanity. But we will not reach them with highfalutin intellectual treatises that require thought on the part of the reader. They've been brainwashed and we need to unbrainwash them.

Consider these very informative quotes from the Chick Publications catalog and web site:

"'This Was Your Life' (the first Chick cartoon tract) was converted to booklet form after Bob Hammond, missionary broadcaster of 'The Voice of China and Asia,' told Chick that the multitudes of Chinese were won to communism through cartoon booklets. Jack Chick decided to try to use the same technique to win souls for Christ."

Very interesting! The ubiquitous Christian evangelical tracts are in fact consciously emulating a successful communist educational device. If the Christians can steal an idea from the communists, we can steal the same idea from the Christians. It must work, or it wouldn't be worth stealing.

"Before you can share the gospel with someone, you must first get their attention. The world knows how to get and hold people's attention...with pictures--television, movies, videos, comics, etc. Chick tracts use the same technique, using irresistible cartoon pictures to grab the reader's attention. Nobody, young or old, can resist cartoons."

These Chick people are not as ignorant as they seem. Many studies have indeed proven that visual images draw attention more quickly and leave a stronger impression than words alone.

Once attracted by the cartoon, people are drawn into Chick tracts by the interesting real-life or dramatic stories. The combination of dramatic stories and cartoons make Chick tracts irresistible. Many Christians who were discouraged because their wordy tracts were rejected or thrown on the ground have been thrilled to see how readily people accept Chick tracts. The devil doesn't mind it when Christians hand out gospel tracts...just as long as nobody reads them. But when Chick tracts are distributed, he blows a fuse, because he knows that nobody can resist them. Chick tracts GET READ!"

If wordy Christian tracts get thrown on the ground, you can imagine what happens to wordier, anti-Christian books: they don't even get picked up in the first place!

"Once hooked by the cartoons and drawn in by the dramatic stories, readers soon learn that woven into each story is a basic gospel message, presented in a way that anyone can understand. No deep theological concepts, no confusion, just a simple gospel message, showing that everyone must be born again through faith in Jesus Christ."

Tempted as I am to do otherwise, I plan to emulate the successful Chick formula here: keep the message of the cartoon booklets as simple as possible. This of course will be a much more difficult task, since Christianity offers a simplified, irrational quick-fix "solution" to complicated real-life problems; whereas the real way to fix society's ills involves deep thought, hard work, and coordinated effort - not a concept that can be easily summarized in a meaningless catch-phrase or in a cartoon picture.

"From a humble beginning on Jack Chick's kitchen table over 35 years ago, Chick Publications has grown to an international ministry, providing soul winners with illustrated gospel literature, including English Chick Tracts, Spanish Chick Tracts, and Chick Tracts in over 60 other languages. Over 400 million have been sold."

Think about it: 400 million Christian propaganda booklets. That's probably more than the sum total of all the book sales of all the humanist, atheist and rationalist publishers in the world this century. And Chick Publications is only one of dozens of Christian

companies putting out these booklets. We're fighting a flood of ignorance with a single sandbag of truth.

The time has come to give the Christians a dose of their own medicine. In the last decade, Christian political activists have co-opted and consciously imitated the social protest techniques pioneered by liberals in the '60s: boycotts, nonviolent picketing, letter-writing campaigns, grassroots organizing. And they've used these techniques to great effect. It's sweet justice to turn the tables on the Christians by co-opting one of their most successful evangelical techniques and using it against them.

I am working with an extremely talented cartoonist whose eye-catching style is perfect for propaganda. I won't go so far as to send you a mockup script for one of the tracts because I don't want to inundate you with information. Besides, I haven't finished writing them yet. But I will say that I am putting a great deal of thought into how to make them the most effective, primarily by debunking fundamentalist Christian claims and showing how rational thought, not blind faith, will solve both the readers' individual problems and society's problems at large.

I am writing to you for two reasons: first to get your overall opinion of this booklet idea--whether or not you think it's a worthwhile project to pursue; second to ask if you have any suggestions as to whom I should approach with the proposal. I don't want to do all the publishing myself - too much of a hassle! I'd like to work with an outside publisher, organization, or interested group, but I don't have the slightest idea where to begin. You've been involved in debunking Christian claims for a long time, and so you know the field much better than me. To whom should propose this idea?

Thanks for your time. You can add me to your list of admirers!

Editors Response to Letter #745

Your idea is interesting and worthy of consideration but I am not sure what kind of cartoons you have in mind. The ideas of rationality and logical thought just don't lend themselves to shocking, jolting, stunning or eye-catching jokes and cartoons. We are more educators than entertainers and for that reason our material is not really conducive to what you are trying to do. I think you exposed the inherent weakness in your own approach when you said, *"This of course will be a much more difficult task, since Christianity offers a simplified, irrational quick-fix solution to complicated real-life problems; whereas the real way to fix society's ills involves deep thought, hard work, and coordinated effort - not a concept that can be easily summarized in a meaningless catch-phrase or in a cartoon picture."* Nevertheless, I am certainly willing to read or view anything you have. By all means send me some examples and I will tell you what I think. As far as getting it published is concerned, first and above all, ask yourself: Is it going to make money. That is far and away the greatest concern of publishers and big profits require a big audience. You have to ask yourself: Is this really going to appeal to a mass audience. If your answer is no, then all I can say is, Good Luck. As many books as you have had published, based upon your bio accompanying this letter, you probably know better than I. I have come to the

conclusion that the best way to get writings out to a sizable audience is through creation of a web site on the Internet. It is far and away the best hope for the little guy who is more interested in telling people what they ought to hear than what they want to hear, and more concerned with accuracy than popularity, profits, and production. With the NET you can tell it like it is, and that is tremendously attractive. For the first time in my life I have actually been able to reach a large audience without going through a battery of censors and a gauntlet of editors. You don't have to cater to the whims, wishes, and all-encompassing concerns for the bottom line of publishers; you can express your real views without being concerned with who will be alienated; you don't have to worry about printings, mailings, postage, advertising, accounting, and deadlines, and you don't have to pander to the LCD in order to even get a hearing. Above all you don't have to put "Will It Make a Buck" in front of every concept, consideration, and conduct. Except for a very few publishers like Prometheus, most are far more concerned with what sells than that which is accurate, truthful, relevant, and non-escapist.

In any event, please keep me posted regarding how things are turning out. If it works, by all means proceed. But in the current anti-intellectual climate of this nation, thought-provoking, stimulating, challenging literature and conversation is not where the masses are. One need only view the TV talk shows that have replaced Phil Donahue or the news programs of Rather, Jennings, and Brokaw which supplanted the Cronkite era to see that.

Letter #746 via email from JN of Pennsylvania.

(Over the years we have occasionally received religious humor and bloopers from various readers and we've decided to lighten up a little by including some for the first time. Our first list is from JN who sent us some choice morsels and stated--Ed.),

These are ACTUAL announcements from ACTUAL church bulletins:

1. Don't let worry kill you -- let the church help.
2. Thursday night - Potluck supper. Prayer and medication to follow.
3. Remember in prayer the many who are sick of our church and community.
4. For those of you who have children and don't know it, we have a nursery downstairs.
5. The rosebud on the alter this morning is to announce the birth of David Belzer, the son of Rev. and Mrs. Julius Belzer.
6. This afternoon there will be a meeting in the South and North ends of the church. Children will be baptized at both ends.
7. Tuesday at 4:00 PM there will be an ice cream social. All ladies giving milk will please come early.

8. Wednesday the ladies liturgy will meet. Mrs. Johnson will sing "Put me in my little bed" accompanied by the pastor.

9. Thursday at 5:00 PM there will be a meeting of the Little Mothers Club. All ladies wishing to be "Little Mothers" will meet with the Pastor in his study.

10. This being Easter Sunday, we will ask Mrs. Lewis to come forward and lay an egg on the altar.

11. The service will close with "Little Drops of Water." One of the ladies will start quietly and the rest of the congregation will join in.

12. Next Sunday a special collection will be taken to defray the cost of the new carpet. All those wishing to do something on the new carpet will come forward and do so.

13. The ladies of the church have cast off clothing of every kind. They can be seen in the church basement Saturday.

14. A bean supper will be held on Tuesday evening in the church hall. Music will follow.

15. At the evening service tonight, the sermon topic will be "What is Hell?" Come early and listen to our choir practice.

(I have always been hesitant about including this kind of material because of the unintended impression it might convey and the questionable taste in some instances--Ed.)

Letter #747 from Anonymous Donor in Ohio

(An anonymous donor in Ohio sent us the following history of the world according to student bloopers. He obtained it from a teacher in what appears to be a religious school named St. Paul's. The teacher entitled his list The World According to Student Bloopers and prefaced his presentation by saying--Ed),

One of the fringe benefits of being an English or History teacher is receiving the occasional jewel of a student blooper in an essay. I have pasted together the following "history" of the world from certifiably genuine student bloopers collected by teachers throughout the United States, from grade eight through college level. Care has been taken to preserve all the misspellings found in the original document. Read carefully, and you will learn a lot.

(We abbreviated the teachers extended list to include only those quotes pertaining to the Bible, religion, and related material--Ed.)

The inhabitants of Egypt were called mummies.

They lived in the Sarah Dessert and traveled by Camelot.

The climate of the Sarah is such that the inhabitants have to live elsewhere, so certain areas of the dessert are cultivated by irritation.

The Egyptians built the Pyramids in the shape of a huge triangular cube.

The Pramids are a range of mountains between France and Spain.

The Bible is full of interesting caricatures.

In the first book of the Bible, Guinnesses, Adam and Eve were created from an apple tree.

One of their children, Cain, asked "Am I my brother's son?"

God asked Abraham to sacrifice Issac on Mount Montezuma.

Jacob, son of Issac, stole his brother's birthmark.

Jacob was a patriarch who brought up his twelve sons to be patriarchs, but they did not take to it.

One of Jacob's sons, Joseph, gave refuse to the Israelites.

Pharaoh forced the Hebrew slaved to make bread without straw.

Moses led them to the Red Sea, where they made unleavened bread, which is bread made without any ingredients.

David was a Hebrew king skilled at playing the liar.

He foughth with the Philatelists, a race of people who lived in biblical times.

Solomon, one of David's sons, had 500 wives and 500 porcupines.

Martin Luther was nailed to the church door at Wittenberg for selling papal indulgences.

He died a horrible death, being excommunicated by a bull.

Gutenberg invented the Bible.

(Some adults actually believe the latter--Ed.).

Editors Response to Letter #747 and its addenda.

The writer of the Student Bloopers said, "Read carefully and you will learn a lot." I am not sure I learned much of anything other than the fact that some students can't spell or write coherently and know little about history or literature. When it comes to

knowledge of the Bible specifically, it is hard to determine if that is a plus or minus, although I suspect the former.

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

REVIEW

One of the most famous apologetic defenses of the Resurrection ever written is a work entitled Who Moved the Stone by Frank Morison. Ever since it first appeared in 1930 biblicists have placed this tendentious masterpiece on virtually every resurrection book list imaginable. Touted as one of the most powerful answers to those doubting Jesus rose from the dead, it is widely distributed, often gratis. But unfortunately for those holding this work in such high esteem, Morison's summa resurrectica is anything but a knockout punch. Indeed, the work is so flawed that it would hardly be worthy of serious consideration were it not for the large number of people who rely upon its contents religiously. The most obvious inadequacy contained therein lies in the extremely large number of suppositions, hypotheses, assumptions, and qualifiers that are submitted as adequate replies, especially at critical junctures. Were all of this speculation to be granted, then Morison could very well have a writing worthy of top billing. But only someone who had taken leave of his senses would be so irresponsible and naive as to be that magnanimous toward Morison's inferences. Some of his conjectures, in no particular order of importance, are as follows:

First, while trying to portray Jesus as an intensely moral man, Morison states on page 22, "No one with an eye for historic truth, flashing out of the ancient pages of His (Jesus--Ed.) record, can fail to see what happened when they brought to Him the woman taken in adultery. He *blushed*." He did? Where does it say that? This is the typical kind of biblical embellishment that I have criticized so often in the past.

Second, more hype is found on page 28 where, while discussing witnesses at the trial, Morison says, "The problem, therefore, was to bring a conclusive case which was not only proof against possible criticism by the Seventy-one, but which also gave indisputable grounds for action under the Roman law. In the search for this formula many witnesses were apparently examined and their testimony rejected as insufficient." Where does Scripture state "many witness were examined?" The very fact that Morison resorts to one his favorite words, "apparently," proves that he is guessing.

Third, in an attempt to buttress belief in Jesus as the messiah and in order to explain the alleged maneuverings with respect to the arrest and trial of Jesus by his opponents under allegedly mysterious and furtive circumstances, Morison says on page 32, "What does all this signify? Personally, I am convinced that beneath the ostensible and acknowledged fear of the people, there was a deeper and more potent fear--a fear which explains all their singular hesitations and vacillations, until a welcome message reached their astonished ears--the fear of Christ himself." Morison adds to this gross

conjecture by saying on the next page, "Personally, I cannot avoid feeling that, in all their dealings with Jesus, these men were apprehensive of something happening which they did not care to define. They seem to have been in some doubt whether even a considerable force would be adequate to take Him, and that in the last resort He might even prove to be unarrestable". To this one can only reply, "Good grief!" What in scripture would corroborate such broad speculation? He says he "cannot avoid feeling," when I'm having great difficulty feeling it at all.

Fourth, on page 36 he says, "Indeed, the probabilities were strongly in favor of that course" and on the next page he says "There seems to be no escaping this inference...." Two pages later he states, "The practical question which arose immediately, therefore, was probably this...." "Seems," "inference," "probably" and "probability" are hardly the words of sound, proven scholarship.

Fifth, while discussing the trial and its alleged behind-the-scenes maneuverings, Morison says on page 39, "Whatever else, therefore, had to be done, some considerable part of those three hours must have been occupied in hurried consultations, in swift passings to and fro between the executive sitting at the High Priests house, and those indispensable leaders of Jewish thought upon whom they must rely for ratification in the Sanhedrin. All this is written plainly between the lines of the narrative." Maybe the prescription for my glasses needs to be changed, but I don't see it plainly written anywhere, between the lines or otherwise.

Apparently aware that his fleeting flights of fancy were something less than ironclad demonstrable proofs and cognizant of the fact that he was vulnerable to criticism, Morison states on the next page, "If anyone feels that the received narrative does not quite carry this conviction...." Now why on earth would anyone think that?

Sixth, on pages 41 and 42 Morison attempts to explain the involvement of Pilate in the trial at so inopportune an hour as late at night by saying, "There was probably only one man in Jerusalem who could seek an audience with Pilate at an hour ordinarily devoted to his private pleasure. That man was Caiaphas, the High Priest, and it was Caiaphas, in all human probability, who went. He alone could present with the full authority of his supreme office the high reasons of state behind the prosecution." The words "probably" and "probability" permeate the allegedly potent scholarship of Morison.

In the very next paragraph he says, "It explains something which on any other supposition is wholly inexplicable," and in so doing is admitting that his thesis rests on supposition.

Seventh, on page 48 he states, "For consider the most likely trend of events upon that memorable night. Pilate was in town, not for a brief flying visit, but for the full ten days ordinarily covered by the Feast. The probability, therefore, that his wife, Claudia, came with him is very strong, even if we had not Matthew's definite statement that such was the case.... We shall not be very wrong if on this particular night we imagine them sitting before the fire in one of the spacious apartments of their private suite in

the Palace, for we know from Peters warming of his hands that the evening was chilly." Constant repetition of words such as "likely," "probability," and "imagine," lead one to the conclusion that Morison might just as well have tossed the Bible aside and written his own script.

Eighth, on page 49 he says, "As I have suggested in a previous chapter, there was probably only one person in Jerusalem who could safely intrude himself upon the privacy of Pilate's household at such a late hour, and... that man was the High Priest himself." This is followed in the next paragraph with, "It would seem, therefore, that we shall be well within the margin of historical probability if we assume that some time between the hours of nine o'clock and eleven, and probably much nearer the latter than the former, a distinguished caller presented himself at the Herodian Palace. Possibly the visitor was shown directly into the private apartment but more probably Pilate went out to an antechamber to meet him." How often do we read so much guesswork in such a small amount of material in what is supposedly a well-researched, powerful, convincing scholarly writing? Not often!

Ninth, while discussing the trial on page 55 Morison states, "With this description now before us we can attempt a reconstruction of an incident which, both historically and psychologically, is probably without precedent in the annals of the world. The first definite act of the drama of which we have historical record is the bringing of Jesus from the place of His confinement (probably the High Priests house) to the place of trial. This occupied, perhaps, 20 minutes, but as it was still quite early probably few people witnessed the little procession as it made its way.... On arrival at the gate of the Palace we must probably allow for a halt of a few moments...."

On page 61 he provides more examples of speculation run rampant by saying, "But it was probably only when Judas arrived with the armed contingent that the dastardly and terrible character of the betrayal came home to them. After a brief and futile attempt at resistance on the part of Peter, the majority of them appear to have fled."

And on the next page he states, "Once inside the city gates they would probably follow the main body to the High Priests house.... With regard to the other nine disciples, I think it is very doubtful whether any of them slept in the city that night." "The women of the party were, therefore, in all human probability, cut off from direct knowledge...." and "The return of the arrest party was probably made by the least frequented route...." "But it seems to be implied in the narratives..." "We shall, therefore, be very near to the real truth in this matter if we assume that the women...or (as is more likely) by a hurried visit from Peter and John." If this be a reasonably accurate estimate of the position,...." The probability, too, that none of these 9 men had yet returned is...." Imagine! All of this guesswork can be found within just a few pages! If Morison had not been allowed to use the word "probably," a sizable portion of his entire book could never have been printed.

Tenth, one of the most disingenuous devices employed by Morison is his repeated attempt to make speculations sound as if they are certainties. For example, on page 39 he states, "Whatever interpretation we put upon the circumstances leading up to the

arrest of Christ it seems to me certain that..." How can something be certain that just seems to be certain?

On page 63 Morison states, "That Jesus Christ died upon the Cross, in the full physical sense of the term, even before the spear wound was inflicted by the Roman soldiery, seems to me to be one of the certainties of history." If it only "seems" to be that way, how could it be a certainty?

On page 76 Morison says in regard to the arrival of the women at the tomb, "The one thing that seems to be certain is that on arrival at the tomb, they received a shock for which they were totally unprepared." Again, if it only seems to be such and such, how could it be a certainty?

Eleventh, on page 65 the text states, "That the mother of Jesus herself collapsed when the end came may be regarded as certain. The Gospel record plainly implies it." Really? Where?

Moreover, how can her collapse be "certain" if its merely regarded as having occurred? How can something be a certainty that's merely regarded as having occurred?

Twelfth, on page 70 he states, "This pointed omission of Salome during the actual interment can hardly have been accidental. It must mean that the writer of Marks Gospel wished to convey that Salome had gone away, presumably upon some pressing business." Again, more extrapolating.

Thirteenth, on page 71 Morison states, "We do not know, we cannot know, what earnest but fruitless attempts were made that day to keep Mary away from the Cross. She was no longer young, and the bloody scene of a triple crucifixion was no sight for an over strained and utterly heartbroken woman." Morison continues by saying, "The woman that John led away from that frightful scene was surely already half-fainting, dazed, and in less than half an hour, as fuller realization came, would surely collapse."

One of the most obvious and egregious failings of this entire book is the almost total lack of specific citations. Morison seems to have gone out of his way to avoid precise references to verses to corroborate his comments. Why he so behaved is not hard to fathom. If Scripture does not support you, then there is obviously much to be gained by avoiding citations. His repeated theoretical concoctions are vivid testimony to the expediency and prudence of such an oversight.

On the same page Morison completely exits reality while describing these same events by saying, "That, I take it, is the true reading of these events. It would have had to be inferred even if the Gospels contained no hint of it." Can you envision that! Apparently we are supposed to accept on his word alone a conclusion he has drawn, even if the Gospels contain no hint of it. Is there no end! And to think apologists accuse biblical critics of taking verses out-of-context and reading between the lines.

Fourteenth, on page 72 Morison says, "Peter overwhelmed with remorse and shame remaining in strict retirement." Scriptural support for this assertion would also be greatly appreciated. I know of nothing that says Peter was in retirement or went into retirement.

Fifteenth, on page 72 Morison addresses the contradiction we mentioned years ago created by the clash between Matthew's statement that the women arrived at the tomb "*as it began to dawn*" and John's assertion that they arrived "*early, while it was yet dark*." He states, "I cannot personally find any grounds, in the slight variation in these statements as to whether the sun had actually risen or not, for doubting the central fact in these quotations. One must not overlook the fact that the sun rises very quickly in the Southern latitudes...." Aside from the fact that there is more than a "slight variation" in the texts, it was all I could do to restrain my laughter when I first read this explanation. So the sun comes up faster in the south than in the north! One can just visualize the sun zipping up over the southern horizon as it creeps up over the northern one. What will apologists conjure up next?

Sixteenth, with respect to this early morning arrival Morison says on page 75, "That moment was undoubtedly at sunrise on Sunday morning. They would clearly choose an early hour to avoid publicity. They could hardly go before sunrise because it would be dark, and possibly also because the city gates would not be open. We are therefore very amply within the field of historic probability when we picture this little party...." Again more supposition and conjecture surreptitiously pawned off as fact.

Seventeenth, with regard to what occurred when the women arrived at the tomb Morison made a surprising admission on page 76 by saying, "It is not as though the different accounts agree. If they did we should have to approach the problem from a different angle. But they make no attempt or pretense of agreeing...." Well, at least we don't have this hurdle to surmount. He concedes the obvious--the accounts disagree.

Eighteenth, on page 80 Morison made another interesting comment when he said, "We must never forget that throughout the troubled five days which preceded the arrest, Jesus and His companions had made their home at Bethany. I have sometimes speculated as to whether the domestic arrangements in the house of the two sisters permitted of accommodating the 13 persons who constituted the party. Probably they did not...." He admits he is speculating, and there's that word "probably" again.

Nineteenth, more guesswork is evident on page 81 in which Morison says, "It seems probable, however....," "it may have been only prudent", and "If this is what happened."

Twentieth, after asking several questions in regard to how the disciples behaved at the time of Jesus' arrest, Morison says on page 82, "No one can possibly answer these questions with full knowledge and certainty, but we can hazard a guess and correct it by our observations later." He might as well adopt this approach, since it's the pattern he has followed throughout most of the book.

Twenty-first, before concluding the last 4 pages of chapter 7 Morison makes the following comments: "Assuming they got so far," "it is conceivable," "the disciples would in all human probability," "That this is what happened seems to be indicated," "this little group of people was probably laboring under the gravest apprehensions," "it is probable," and "Such, as I conceive it, was the most probable situation during those confused and dramatic hours when Jesus paid the great penalty." It goes without saying that all of this is rank speculation of the first magnitude and hardly indicative of proven research.

The only redeeming comment made by Morison in this regard is found at the end of chapter 7 where he admits that he is submitting his ruminations "tentatively and with respect as a possible solution." At least he's willing to make this concession, but unfortunately his supporters depict his work as conclusive, demonstrable and definitive. I don't think so!

Twenty-second, on page 100 Morison says, "Salome was the mother to two of the disciples; Mary of Cleophas, her sister, of two others." Where is textual confirmation of this?

Twenty-third, on page 117 Morison repeats that old refrain that 3 important NT figures died for the cause. He states, "They all suffered the extreme penalty of their convictions after the manner of that barbaric age--James in Jerusalem itself; Peter and Saul in Rome." And we are again compelled to ask where that is to be found in scripture.

Twenty-fourth, it is difficult not to be amazed at the amount of data apologists can glean from scripture that seems to elude biblical exposers. Good examples can be found on page 118 where Morison says with respect to Peter, "We find him on the whole a very lovable person, possessing possibly a rough exterior but an intensely warm and loyal heart; rather impulsive; quickly roused to sudden anger, but as quick to perceive and acknowledge the error of his ways it is the glory of this type of man that he is peculiarly susceptible to reason when the hot rush of some sudden emotion is past." Morison found all that in Scripture? My stars. I must have been reading while asleep.

Twenty-fifth, with respect to James and his witness to the resurrection, Morison says that because the priests could not command his allegiance "they slew him in the end" Where is that in Scripture?

Morison concludes his discussion of James by saying, "It is said that the Christians inscribed upon his monument the words: 'He hath been a true witness both to Jews and Greeks that Jesus is Christ'." So now we are supposed to accept hearsay as proof that Christians inscribed some specific words on a tombstone.

Twenty-sixth, in reference to the title of his book Morison states, "Whoever moved the stone, therefore, had presumably left the vicinity of the grave earlier in the

morning, and while it was still dark." Even the title of the book is entangled in guesswork. "Presumably" is hardly a word emanating from strong data.

Twenty-seventh and lastly, another candid admission by Morison is found on page 169 in which he states with reference to this mystic church of believers, i.e., Christianity, "Why did everybody who caught the infection of this spring madness gravitate to Jerusalem as steel to a magnet? Why should so irrational a doctrine flourish most readily....?" Well, at least he admits the doctrine is irrational. Exposers of the Bible can now add another supportive testimonial to their portfolio.

So, in essence, instead of being a work of substance, Morison's book is actually nothing more than a series of hypotheses of what might have occurred given certain assumptions, presuppositions, and conjectures. That is hardly convincing scholarship, except for those already predisposed toward its predilections. In no way does the book merit the plethora of accolades with which it has been showered through the years, and one would be guilty of a decided disservice to others were he to recommend it to those concerned with serious scholarship and accurate assessments.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #748 from NB of Tucson, Arizona (Part a)

Dear Dennis.... I'll content myself with a few points. First, on the specific Biblical incident you cite (pp. 168:4-5): You note that 2 Kings 8:26 says that Ahaziah was 22 years old when he "began to reign", while 2 Chron. 22:2 says that he was 42 years old. Very well. A contradiction. They cant both be right, though they could both be wrong. You list these as (a) and (b) possibilities with a third possibility (c): both say 42 in the original or both say 22 in the "alleged" original. But there is a fourth possibility: they could both be right. First Kings 8:24 says that Ahaziah was 22 when he "began to reign". It was the custom for sons, at a certain age, to reign as joint rulers with their fathers, taking over as the sole ruler at the latter's death. Second Chronicles 22:2 can readily be interpreted as meaning that he was 42 when his father died and he "began to reign" in his own right.

Note also verse 4 where it is said (KJV) that *"he did evil in the sight of the LORD like the house of Ahab; for they were his counselors after the death of his father to his destruction."* Note that something happened "after the death of his father". It is not claimed that he did not "reign" before the death of his father.

Editors Response to Letter #748 (Part a)

Dear NB. You have provided yet another example of why I hold Christian apologetics in general and biblical apologetics in particular in such low esteem, if not contempt.

First, you say that "Second Chronicles 22:2 can readily be interpreted as meaning that he was 42 when his father died and he 'began to reign' in his own right." What does

the text say? It says he began to reign. Do you see any words that even remotely imply it was done "in his own right"?

Second, you say "It is not claimed that he did not "reign" before the death of his father." How's that again? What does the word "began" mean? When 2 Chron. 22:2 says he began to reign at age 42, that is excellent proof he was not reigning prior to age 42. So how could he have "began" to reign when his father died. Either he was reigning or he wasn't. And if he was, then he could not have begun to reign.

And third, you say, "Note also verse 4 where it is said (KJV) that 'he did evil in the sight of the LORD like the house of Ahab; for they were his counselors after the death of his father to his destruction'. Note that something happened after the death of his father." How does this bear on the issue? What difference does it make what he did after assuming power at age 42?

Letter #748 Continues (Part b)

...Also, I asked you where in the Bible it says that Jesus was crucified on a Friday. You quoted three verses that said that he was crucified on the eve of the "Sabath" (sic). But didn't ask about the Sabbath; said **FRIDAY**.

Editors Response to Letter #748 (Part b)

You don't need to shout. You mean you don't have enough savvy to realize that when I say I mailed a letter on the day before Saturday I was referring to Friday? Unless Scripture actually spoon-feeds you the word "Friday", my comment is to be immediately discarded. You're really desperate for an escape my friend, because that is one of the flimsiest ploys have ever encountered.

Letter #748 Continues (Part c)

I already knew about the "Sabbath" verses, and would have no need to ask you about those.

Editors Response to Letter #748 (Part c)

If you already knew about them, then why did you ask how they pertained to a Friday Crucifixion? Cant you do a simple calculation that would be expected of any third grader?

Letter #748 Continues (Part d)

(After two rambling, disjointed, irrelevant paragraphs that made little sense and weren't worth trying to decipher--Ed.) NB says, Thus, the answer (of course) to my question is that nowhere in the Bible does it say that Jesus was crucified on Friday...

Editors Response to Letter #748 (Part d)

I have already answered this and there is no reason to repeat myself. If you don't know the day before Saturday (the Sabbath) is Friday, then there really isn't much I can do for you. If you wish to write another letter that is abbreviated and considerably more coherent, feel free to do so. But I am not going to waste a lot of time trying to interpret your non sequiturs and irrelevancies. Do you have any idea how disconcerting it is to reply to critical letters that are so poorly written, disconnected, and incoherent that deciphering them is an ordeal beyond the reward. And believe me, I have received some real humdingers over the years. Too often writing a reply has been much easier than clarifying the original message.

Letter #748 Continues (Part e)

Now, to a few topic (sic) we've touched on in previous letters. You belittled my notion of "two-sided triangles." OK, how about "triangles whose sides are infinitely long, never meet, yet enclose only a finite area? Are they in fact triangles? Do they even exist?

Editors Response to Letter #748 (Part e)

What kind of a question is this? It resembles your material I saw no reason to decipher. Now let me get this straight. You're trying to refute my contention that you can't have a two-sided triangle by referring to a figure you are not only unsure is a triangle but are not even sure exists. This is typical of that to which I am referring NB and unshrouds your tangential proclivities. You manufacture a concept ex nihilo and attempt to use that very idea to refute a concept that is more solid than granite.

Letter #748 Concludes (Part f)

You also talk about an "all-white black horse" (or an all black white horse). You might as well have spoken of an all-red green horse, but this would have no meaning to a color blind person, who could see only shades of gray. So your comparison depends on a preconditioned notion of color.

Editors Concluding Response to Letter #748 (Part f)

Earlier I said, "What kind of question is this?" Now feel compelled to say, "What kind of an answer is this?" What does colorblindness have to do with the color of something? You mean color does not exist until people can see it. How silly! How myopic! How solipsistic! That reminds me of a ridiculous discussion we had in a college philosophy class. If a tree falls in the forest and there is no one present to hear the sound, was there, in fact, a sound that occurred? Of course there was. Nature couldn't care less who is present and who isn't. If you hear it, you hear it; if you don't, you don't. But either way it occurred, regardless. Your kind of egocentric thinking is typical of those who believe the world revolves around them and could only have existed if mankind had been in charge from the beginning.

The analogy is no less true of colors. If you see it, you see it; if you don't, you don't. But it's there, regardless. You're forcing reality to conform to people's preconceptions and preconditioning, when reality works in reverse. Ideas don't determine material conditions; material conditions determine ideas. You're viewing life backwards, my friend.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #749 Via Email from EB of Brockton, Mass.

Hi Dennis. I am a subscriber to Biblical Errancy. I have noticed a few times something you do in your writings and I'd like to know why you do this. It is: When you speak of Jesus of Nazareth you sometimes refer to him as Jesus Christ. As we all know this means Jesus the Messiah! I try never to use that term (Christ--Ed.) when write about this man Jesus. I have a tremendous amount of respect for you and the work you do. Please don't take this as some kind of a challenge. I hope I haven't gone over the line in asking this question. I will quote the section I am using for this example. It comes out of the Aug. 1997 issue #176. In the Editor's Response to Letter #735 (Near the end of that response) you say, *"He attended a few that is true, but one after another? Hardly! I have never been a fan, proponent, supporter, or propagandist for Jesus Christ, as you well know, but I would not go so far as to make the kinds of disparaging claims you are uttering."*

In place of "Jesus Christ" I would have loved to see instead, "Jesus of Nazareth". And once again Dennis... I would feel very badly if I have done something that might make you feel that I am criticizing you. I have far too much respect for you and your work. I'm almost afraid to send this note. I only know of two people that stand as tall as you do for Atheism. That is, of course, you and Farrell Till. Where would Atheism be if it weren't for you two gentlemen. It even scares me to think about it.

Editors Response to Letter #749

Dear EB. Don't worry about hurting my feelings. Others have said far worse. Your question, incidentally, is quite good. I was wondering when someone would ask me this. I do it strictly for the sake of convenience because it is the term most familiar to biblicists. If I was only concerned with precision, you are correct. I would never use the phrase Jesus Christ, because scripture, itself, clearly shows that Jesus is not the biblical "Messiah" and the word "Christ" means messiah.

The phrase "Jesus of Nazareth" has its own problems, however. Jesus must have been a real, live, human being in order to have come from Nazareth. And that has been far from conclusively demonstrated, in light of the fact that there is scant extra biblical evidence for his existence.

EDITORS NOTE:

(a) We are again compelled to beseech your assistance. I need aid from biblically informed supporters of our cause who are on the Internet. Because nearly all of our back issues are on a web site (<http://members.aol.com/ckbloomfld>), we occasionally receive attacks, criticisms, questions, and requests for advice which I simply don't have time to address. I need some volunteers who would be willing to step into my shoes and carry on from there. Since there is only one of me, many internetees, and precious little time in which to operate, I simply cant do it alone. If you feel up to the task, sufficiently informed, and committed to the cause, please let me know via email. I will store your address and occasionally forward mail to you as it comes in. It goes without saying that this is a VERY important undertaking because you could very well be the only real critic of the Bible many people will ever encounter.

(b) Few articles have struck more of a chord than that written by KL in last months issue in regard to creating tracts like those of Jack Chick. KL contacted us via email and I did not retain his name or address. If you are listening, KL, would you be so kind as to contact us again, since several people with something to contribute to your enterprise would like to contact you.

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

REVIEW

One of the more prolific apologetic authors, Dr. M.R. DeHaan, published a book in 1962 entitled Genesis and Evolution. In light of the fact that this work was in its 16th printing in 1978 when I purchased a copy, one is tempted to conclude biblicists hold it in rather high regard. That is a judgment with which I cannot concur, however, because it is not only boringly repetitious but sprinkled with assertions that are intellectually deficient, as well as inaccurate. Some of the more prominent examples are the following.

First, almost from the beginning DeHaan tries to beguile the opposition by framing the biblical discussions within parameters of his choosing through focusing upon the very first verse in Scripture. On page 19 under a section entitled 'The Most Important Verse' he states, "...the first verse of the Bible becomes in a certain sense the most important verse in Scripture. The first verse of the Bible determines whether you are a believer or an infidel. What you think of this verse determines your whole attitude toward the rest of Scripture." Later, on the same page he states, "You either believe it or reject it." This is the kind of subtle indoctrination that is indicative of the more crafty apologetic writers because he is putting the entire issue in a context that works to his advantage. In effect, he wants us to think that accepting the Bible is a 50-50 proposition in which you have one out of two chances of being correct. One choice is as viable as the other; one deserves as much credibility as the other, and one is as provable as the other. So you pay your money and take your chances. That's the boundary within which he seeks to formulate the issue. The fatal mistake contained therein lies in the fact that he ignored my oft repeated refrain that the burden of proof lies on he who alleges. When DeHaan said "You either believe it or reject it" he erred egregiously. In truth, you either "prove it or reject it," and since he admitted on page 17 that "the Bible opens with a statement which must be believed. It cannot be understood, explained, or proven--it must be accepted by faith," the conclusion is obvious. He admits it cannot be proven, but we are supposed to believe it, nevertheless. Imagine the incredibly large number of preposterous ideas mankind would have to believe if it came down to someone saying, Admittedly what am contending cannot be proven but you should still believe it. One can say, without fear of exaggeration, that the sky would be the limit.

Second, on page 21 DeHaan resorts to some blatant hyperbole when he says with reference to Gen. 1:1, "If you reject this, you cannot believe anything else in the Bible. If Gen. 1:1 is not true, the Bible is a lie, for it begins with a lie." Even I would not go so far as to say every comment in the Bible is false because its initial assertion is erroneous. You would be hard pressed to find any book in a library that does not

contain some truth, even if it is nothing more than the name of the author or publisher or the date of publication. Why would an entire book have to be erroneous just because the first verse is fallacious?

Third, continuing his ongoing attempt to cause others to accept the first verse on faith alone, DeHaan quotes Gen. 1:1 and then says on page 24, ""No argument is presented for the existence of God. No statement is given as to where He came from.... No details are added, no explanation is given. You are expected to believe it because God says it. Wrong again! You are expected to believe it because the author or authors of Scripture say it. DeHaan is assuming the very point at issue, namely, that the Bible is the perfect word of a perfect being--an assertion disproven by an avalanche of data. Intelligent biblical critics do not concede key points that are in dispute anymore than they accept the oppositions terminology or preferred bounds of discourse. One way or the other DeHaan is determined to cover the ground with fertilizer and seeds of his own choosing so that which grows will be of his own making. He knows that anyone with an agenda could hardly be expected to lose a game in which he wrote the rules.

Fourth, not only does DeHaan place great importance on the first verse in Scripture, but he attempts to encapsulate the entire book in the first three chapters by saying on page 18, "There is not a single doctrine, Revelation, or truth revealed in the rest of the 65 books of the Bible, which is not found in type or figure in the book of Genesis. The seed of every other Revelation is here. In the book of Genesis, and particularly in the first three chapters, we have every Bible doctrine introduced, and the rest of Scripture is but the unfolding of that which is already introduced in capsule form in the first three chapters of Genesis." He follows this up on page 33 by saying, "If the first three chapters of the Bible are merely a parable, or symbolism, a fable, an allegory, or a myth, then the rest of the Revelation of Scripture must also be accepted as a fable, an allegory, or a symbol. If the record of the material creation is not literal, how can we accept the new creation as literal?" And he follows this with, "...the situation is even more serious. If we get rid of the literal account of the fall of man, and Gods curse on creation..., then the necessity of the Cross is destroyed. Then the whole plan of salvation becomes myth, with no more credence than the mythological Pandora's Box. If the first three chapters of Genesis are not a literal account, then let us throw the Bible away and be done forever with the idle superstition and a senseless fetish of faith in a book which is only a collection of ancient fables." Sounds like a good idea to me and one that should be enacted posthaste in view of the fact that biblicists have no more proof for the first three chapters being literally true than they do for the first verse, which DeHaan concedes cannot be proven.

Fifth, DeHaan's biblical exuberance ascends to new heights of irresponsibility when he says on page 38, "The Bible is unique in its content, for it deals with every subject under heaven, and is the final authority on every subject with which it deals. This makes the Bible the most scientific Book under heaven." Aside from the fact that millions of subjects are not discussed in Scripture (football, yellow fever, the Panama Canal, Abraham Lincoln, wind surfing, computers, etc. ad infinitum) one can only shudder at the prospect of using the Bible as the final authority in a subject like chemistry, when none of the chemical elements is mentioned. Imagine studying the

Bible to learn about our solar system when none of the other eight planets is discussed or to learn about cytology when the word cell never appears. If you had to rely upon the Bible to pass algebra or trigonometry, you might as well drop the course. Why go through the agony of preparing to flunk.

Sixth, on page 44 DeHaan states, "Where did the universe come from? What is its origin? How old is it? or is it without beginning? These questions have occupied the minds of men since the dawn of human history." So far so good. He continues, "The answers can be grouped under one of only two heads: Creation or Evolution. It is one or the other." False! These are by no means the only options, since different religions have provided a wide variety of answers as to the origin of the universe.

Seventh, DeHaan continues by accurately stating, "Either the record of Genesis is true, or it is false. Creation and evolution cannot both be true. The claim that theistic evolution is in harmony with the record of the Bible is a totally indefensible claim." But then he makes some flagrant mistakes that are committed by nearly all religionists. He says, "All of it harks back to the authority of that first verse in the Bible.... Right here in the very opening statement, the Bible declares something which science leaves totally untouched, and evolution persistently ignores and evades. And that is the matter of 'ultimate' origin. Where did everything begin? The Bible asserts that the universe was created out of nothing but God Himself. Evolution is defined as a scientific and philosophical effort to explain the origin and development of things in the universe. But this definition is not entirely true, for evolution does not solve the question of ultimate origin. It does not begin with nothing, but assumes there was something to begin with. It may go back and back and back indefinitely, but it must assume there was something from which everything came." Wrong on several counts.

(a) Evolution, or what I would prefer to call the materialist conception of history, accounts for ultimate origins quite easily. There were none, period. Matter is all that exists and it has always been here; it has always existed. It had no point of origin because it was never created to begin with.

(b) The materialist conception assumes there was something--matter--but it does not assume it had a beginning. It does not assume "there was something to begin with" because there was no "to begin with" to begin with.

(c) And since it had no beginning, it is utterly false to say "it must assume there was something from which everything came." That is precisely what it does not assume based on the very fact that it contends there was no beginning.

Eighth, DeHaan continues by saying of evolution that, "It assumes the existence of substances and forces working through successive transformations or evolutions, but it poses or offers no answer to the problem of a first cause." It does not answer the problem of a first cause because with materialists, unlike religionists/idealists, there is no first cause to pose a problem.

Ninth, DeHaan continues, "It begins with lifeless, inert matter or substance already existing, but cannot go back beyond this." No matter is inert in the sense of not moving because the atoms and molecules of which it is composed are constantly in motion. There is no such thing as motionless matter. And just as importantly there is no reason to go back beyond this because, again, there is no back beyond matter to go back to.

Tenth, DeHaan concludes this section by saying, "Here evolution stops, but the Bible goes back to the ultimate beginning and gives the answer in its opening statement, 'In the beginning God created....'" The Bible does not go back to an "ultimate beginning"; it manufactures one out of ethereal imaginings. It assumes, rather than proves, there was a "beginning", and completely evades the most obvious question in this regard, a query that has been asked by rational minds for centuries. If God created the universe, then who or what created God. If the religionist says, No one, God is eternal and was never created, then the sensible mind can easily reply, Then why can't I say that of matter. Why does matter, which is known to exist, have to have a creator, while God, who is not known to exist, does not?

Interestingly enough, DeHaan acknowledges this very problem on page 72 where he says regarding the materialist conception of beginnings, "Of course, we must admit that we are confronted with the same identical problem if we accept the Bible answer, 'In the beginning God.' We are still faced with the questions, How did God begin? Where did God come from? Who made God?"

Eleventh, on page 56 DeHaan made another statement with which I would agree. He stated, "We repeat, that if the evolutionary theory of the origin of man by evolution from lower animals were ever proved true, it would automatically disprove the Bible, and reduce it to an antiquated compilation of superstitions, fables, and fancies unworthy of a place in human history." Well, at least we now know where the Bible is headed.

Twelfth, DeHaan continues his attack on evolution by saying on page 57, Then, too, there is no room for a fall, for evolution teaches a development upward and not a fall downward to total depravity. Evolution has no place for sin and subsequently no place for an atonement, and since there is no need for an atonement, there is no need for a Savior." How right you are DeHaan. Evolution does, indeed, teach there is upward development and something to look forward to in this world.

I have always been amused, if not baffled, by the work of Christian psychologists, psychiatrists, priests, ministers, social workers and others. They can't help but transmit their belief that man is sinful, corrupt, and depraved to those whom they counsel, which can only lower peoples sense of self-esteem and self-worth, when an overwhelming number of those with whom these biblicists interact are in trouble precisely because they have little or no sense of self-worth and self-esteem. In effect, the Bible in general and Paul in particular are telling people they are sinners corrupt to the core and destroying their sense of self worth and self-esteem in the process, while many of Paul's current followers are trying to instill the opposite feelings. Talk about

the left hand not being synchronized with the right hand! How could anyone have feelings of self-worth, self-esteem, pride, and dignity, when the Bible is telling him that he is utterly corrupt and sinful and little more than a piece of dung to quote Martin Luther. Prisons are heavily populated with people who have low self-esteem, and giving them a Bible is far more likely to exacerbate this problem than solve it.

Thirteenth and lastly, on page 92 DeHaan makes a comment that is decidedly at variance with scientific data in so far as am aware. He states, "Modern scholarship prates about the dignity of man and then debases him by tracing his ancestry to a most undignified chimpanzee." This assertion has rung throughout the halls of anti-evolutionism since time immemorial and is no truer now than when first uttered by those opposed to the writings of Darwin over a hundred years ago. Although not a scientist by trade, I know of no reputable scientist who ever said that man descended from apes, monkeys or chimps. Biblicists persist in making this provincial and benighted assertion despite the fact that it demonstrates an abysmal ignorance of basic evolutionary theory. Scientists have never said that man descended from apes or monkeys; they say man and the apes/monkeys descended from a common ancestor. Its like viewing a slingshot. Off a common trunk, one went one way and the other went another, but neither evolved from the other. This point is by no means trivial because it exposes the degree to which anti-evolutionists are unlearned with respect to even the simplest component of evolutionary theory.

In summary, as far as DeHaan's book in general is concerned, it leaves a lot to be desired. All too often faith replaces proof, and constant repetition is used as a primary means by which to inform and convey the authors predilections. Its another one of those apologetic writings I would recommend only to people who are afflicted with insomnia or possessed by pronounced masochistic tendencies.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #750 from DA of La Puente, California (Part a)

(DA insists on sending us letters in which he does not lay any groundwork for his assertions but just leaps right in as if we had all been discussing the issue for the last 2 days. I have repeatedly warned DA about this but he insists on ignoring my remonstrances as often as he ignores my corrections of his inaccuracies. His letters are often too lengthy for inclusion in a mere 6 pages of BE and he leaps from topic to topic according to whatever strikes his fancy. But because his errors are so numerous, I just can't resist the opportunities he provides. Having said that, DA begins his letter by quoting me as having said to him in Issue 168, "I get the last word in an individual issue, since I don't know of any other practical way it can be done, do you?" He replies--Ed.),

Sure. Do it the same way loads of editors have done with my frequently hostile letters to them. Print it and make no response. Highly practical. Not merely as emotionally satisfying or fun, but entirely practical.

Editors Response to Letter #750 (Part a)

Oh! I see. I'm supposed to turn the publication over to you and provide pages of unhindered, uncorrected, unassailed airtime. You'd like that wouldn't you. Well you have come to the wrong forum for that scenario my friend. In case you have not noticed, this periodical is centered around dialogue, debate, correspondence and interaction, not unchecked propaganda. If other editors have given you the kind of hearing you described, which I doubt, then that is their error to make. Perhaps they did not have a reply or did not consider your points worth replying to. In any event, we have no intention of following suit, because we most assuredly do have potent responses to every argument you have submitted.

Imagine what would happen if you gained the kind of access you seek. Every critic would be clamoring for the same treatment and I would end up publishing issue after issue of my critics assertions. In effect, BE would become little more than a platform for the very ideology it is dedicated to exposing and refuting.

You already receive 100 times the amount of exposure I am allotted by all of the Christian (biblical) publications in the nation combined. I would be delighted were I permitted to insert the amount of material in my opponents publications that people like you are allocated in BE. The percentages aren't even remotely comparable. And you have the chutzpah to insidiously attribute restrictions on free speech by me.

You say, "Highly practical." Of course! Highly practical for you. That way you could implant even more inducement while being less concerned with accuracy. Apparently your lethargic propensities have prompted you to favor the simple expedient of co-opting your opponents publication rather than creating one of your own.

Letter #750 Continues (Part b)

When I point out that errors in the KJV have been copied in many successors, you make the extravagant claim that I am saying "...the Greek and Hebraic translators of modern versions agreeing with the KJV are incompetent". Not at all. I am saying they are producing flawed text, which is what you expect of any mortal in any case. They may be incompetent, competent but interested in other goals than a perfect text (cheapness, superior readability..), or other.

Editors Response to Letter #750 (Part b)

The only extravagance involved is your attempt to restrict incompetence to the ability to translate only. You admit they are producing flawed text but say they are competent because they are doing so intentionally in order to make the text cheaper, more readable, etc. Regardless of what their motives are, be they intentional or the result of inadequate mastery of the material, if the text is flawed, if the text is inaccurate, if the text conveys an erroneous impression, then you are saying they are incompetent translators.

The key word is "flawed" and you just admitted, "I am saying they are producing flawed text." Whether it is cheaper or more readable is of no consequence once you admit it is flawed. Cheaper and more readable is not synonymous with being flawed.

Letter #750 Continues (Part c)

(In the same issue said to DA, "To all those inclined to attack future issues of BE say, Please read our back issues first...." DA now replies by saying--Ed.),

Given you are well past 150 issues, that would be difficult, and not cheap either (maybe 1000 pages and \$160). If you expect us to take such advice, you had best start referring to the particular issue(s) that cover the point in question.

Editors Response to Letter #750 (Part c)

Like all those indoctrinated into Christianity, you look for the kind of ulterior motives that are so prominent within those victimized by your own ideology. If I was as mercenary as you imply, do you think I would post all of my back issues on a web site? They are free for all to view and if you are too lazy to learn how to navigate the Internet, then don't come moaning to me, and don't try to con your readers into believing I am purposely restricting your access to information in order to feather my own nest.

As far as reading my back issues is concerned you employed the kind of subtle deception that is so endemic to biblicists in general and your line of argumentation in particular. There were no particular points at issue when I said the following (verbatim), *"I am increasingly encountering defenders of the Bible who have not read BE over the years and are merely revivifying arguments that have long since been buried. To all those inclined to attack future issues of BE I say, Please read our back issues first before you pick up the poisoned pointed pen to ride out and fight for Jesus."* In other words, I was advising you and all of your compatriots to read all of our back issues before embarking upon forays into hinterlands unknown, since a wise program of that nature would forestall hundreds of points you are poised to make or may be so inclined to utter in the future. To me that was excellent advice. Do your homework before you begin to speak about that which you have not properly researched. In other words, read our back issues before you begin to complain about what is contained therein or allege they lack an effective response to your criticisms. If you were really as concerned with finding the truth as you pretend, you would read first and write later.

Even if a particular point had been under discussion, you had no solid grounds for saying, *"you had best start referring to the particular issue(s) that cover the point in question."* In other words, I not only wrote the material for you but now I am supposed to go back through my issues and do your research. You remind me of a student I had years ago. He wanted to know where he could find some information on Egypt. When I said that kind of data can be found in the Encyclopedia, he wanted to know where in the book specifically. He not only wanted me to tell him where the

data could be found but to look it up for him as well. In effect, he wanted me to do some of his basic work.

Even if were willing to do this kind of research, I do not have the time or the staff that would be required. Maybe you'd like to volunteer?

Letter #750 Continues (Part d)

[After citing Ezek. 30:12 ("*And I will make the rivers of Egypt dry*") in the 168th issue, I asked, "What rivers are in Egypt other than the Nile?"--DA now wishes to add to his earlier reply--Ed.],

Ezek. 30:12 says "rivers", or maybe "river", or "streams", or... Then there is the definition of "river" to consider. (By the way, my Webster's main definition of "river" is "*a natural stream of water bigger than a creek and emptying into an ocean...*") which would clearly make each branch of the Nile, or other delta a separate river. Where is the contradiction?

Editors Response to Letter #750 (Part d)

This reply proves that you ignored my advice and did not read our back issues, because this topic was addressed long ago. I am not going to keep reinventing the wheel. As I said before, biblicists are not going to be allowed to have many versions of each verse from which they can draw as expediency dictates. You, not I, are going to have to get anchored on one version of each verse, and if you think I am going to accept scores of versions of each and allow you to leap from one to the other as circumstances require, then you're engaged in reverie.

You stated, "Ezek. 30:12 says rivers, or maybe river, or streams, or..." What kind of a comment is that? You are defending a verse while admitting you don't even know what it says. That's anile! Where did you get these three words? From 3 different manuscripts? So which is correct. What does the real Bible say? You admit you don't know and this situation could be applied to hundreds of verses. Apparently you don't realize you are destroying your own Book. You can't tell me what it says for sure, but you are positive it's not contradictory. How could you possibly know that until you can produce the originals which is impossible. I, on the other hand, have no problem producing contradictions because they are written on the pages before me. You are attributing perfection to a phantom, while I am proving imperfection in a reality.

Moreover, you can't even find an accurate Webster's Dictionary, since it would be ridiculous to define a river as "a natural stream of water bigger than a creek and emptying into an ocean." Where on earth did you find that book? Would you be so gracious as to tell me what oceans the Jordan River, the Saskatchewan River, the Volga, the Don, and the Dnieper empty into. In Europe I could also mention the Po, the Rhone, or the Danube. Do have any idea how many rivers in Canada empty into lakes. I taught geography years ago and I don't think I have to tell you what grade you

would have received if you had made that uneducated (I'm tempted to say ignorant) comment in my class.

Letter #750 Continues (Part e)

(DA quotes me as having said to him in Letter #168, "Are you telling me each branch of that delta is a separate river? If so give me the names of all these rivers. I'm sure people living in the delta would like them as well." DA now replies with--Ed.),

They already have them. Names like West Branch, North Branch, Lower Branch, X City Branch, etc. are common. You would need to go to the delta in question, or to a good mapmaker, to find all these names, but the branches of a river are routinely named, and well known to the locals.

Editors Response to Letter #750 (Part e)

It was all I could do to restrain my laughter with this reply DA. You refuted your own argument. You started out to prove many rivers were involved and then clumsily fell into a tar pit and exposed your own duplicity by stating (verbatim), "the branches of a river." You just admitted only one river is involved. "A" river. So all your talk about branches just fell off the tree.

I don't know of any river in the world with branches of its delta classified as separate rivers, and that includes the Mekong, the Amazon, the Ganges, and the Nile. Branches of a river are no more separate rivers than branches or limbs of my body are separate people. Apparently desperation is setting in because your whole line of defense is vacuous and vividly reveals why I would not want my children getting anywhere near a philosophy that produces such intractable ideologues. (To Be Concluded Next Month)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #751 from DM of Corpus Christi, Texas

Since know you are a busy man, I will keep this letter brief. I am writing to let you know that I am a huge fan of your television show. Finally we have someone who isn't afraid to reveal exactly what the Bible actually does say. I watch your program whenever possible, but unfortunately it doesn't air with any regular consistency in my area.

The other purpose of this letter is to ask if there are any publications interested parties can subscribe to that you publish, or if not, are any that you could recommend? In closing I want to offer you congratulations for a job very well done. Many thanks! Keep up the good work!

Editors Response to Letter #751

You comments are only too kind and clearly demonstrate the importance of having our TV programs played throughout the nation. EB in Corpus Christi, Texas is doing an excellent job of getting them aired on his local station and nothing proves this better than the number of inquiries we are getting from that area of Texas. We will send you a free list of our materials.

Letter #752 from MU of Corpus Christi, Texas

Dear Mr. McKinsey. I have watched with interest your program on the local TV. I am interested in knowing more about your in-depth research for apparent contradictions in the Holy Bible. Please mail me your free literature. Thank you for your cooperation.

Editors Response to Letter #752

Dear MU. Yours is just another letter testifying to the great job EB is doing in getting our programs aired in the Corpus Christ area. I even had a fellow employee tell me her son in the military saw our program while stationed in Corpus Christi. EB is proving it can be done, if the will is there, without negative results.

Letter #753 from Anonymous

I purchased your book quite a while ago, and found it well worth the price tag. It is literally jammed packed with more than enough information to blow away even the Pope!

Anyway, my main point is this. I purchased an expensive \$55 NIV study bible. As I was reading it, a thought hit me. What a great idea it would be to have an 'Atheist Study Bible'; a standard issue KJV bible with running side bar commentary. I next thought, what better man to write it than Mr. McKinsey! Imagine the debating power one would possess with arguments and cross-references attached to each objectionable quote! Well, it's a suggestion anyway.

Editors Response to Letter #753

Thanks for your compliment. As far as issuing a critical study Bible from BE's perspective is concerned, I have pondered that idea on several occasions, but each quickly faded when I contemplated the problems associated with having it published.

In fact, I have considered even more often the possibility of publishing all five of my voluminous and exhaustive notebooks in one single tome. It would be an invaluable aid to those seeking a ready source of reference material for quick queries, replies, and refutations during biblical encounters. Instead of being in narrative form, which involves some digging, it would be organized in a manner similar to that of a dictionary. The plot would be thin but the facts thick. You would only have to look up any topic that interests you and all of the needed verses would be at your fingertips.

The contents could even be arranged in order of potency which would be of tremendous aid to biblical critics and freethinkers.

EDITORS NOTE:

One of our subscribers, John van Keppel, in the metro Kansas City area can be contacted at 13741 Pembroke Cr., Leawood, Kansas 66224. Johns phone number and email are: 913-685-3430 and rabo@kcnet.com, respectively.

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

REVIEW

THE CHRIST (Part 1)

One of the most potent antibiblical books in the pantheon of anti-religious literature, one to which we have referred on numerous occasions, is entitled The Christ by John Remsberg. Besides exposing a vast array of errors, contradictions and fallacies in the books of the NT, another section devoted to an analysis of the parallels between the lives of Jesus and other religious figures in history is included as well. Two of the most intriguing, if not revealing, comparisons are those between Jesus on the one hand and Krishna and Buddha on the other. Although we do not normally focus on extrabiblical material, digressions are occasionally in order, as we noted in our discussions of the Koran and the Book of Mormon. In addition to the prodigious quantity of internal biblical conflicts, the following extrabiblical historical considerations should also give biblicists strong reason to pause and think. Parallels between the lives of Krishna, Buddha, and Jesus are strong testimony, indeed, to the effect that Jesus is nothing more than another pseudo-savior, deserving no more respect than his predecessors.

Beginning on page 500 Remsberg says that according to mythology, "*Krishna was the eighth Vatar or incarnation of the god Vishnu, one of the Hindoo Trinity. In this incarnation Vishnu, it is said, appeared in all the fullness of his power and glory. His mother was Devaki. He is believed to be an historical character, but his real history, like that of Jesus, is almost entirely obscured by myths. He lived from 900 to 1,200 years before the Christian era. The story of his life is to be found in the Bhagavat.....*

The points of resemblance between Krishna and Christ that have been printed would fill a volume. Some of these are apocryphal, and not confirmed by the canonical scriptures of India. The limits of this chapter preclude an extended list even of the undoubtedly genuine. I shall confine myself chiefly to a presentation of the most important ones relating to their births.

These, according to the Christian translator of the Bhagavat, Rev. Thomas Maurice, are as follows:

- (1) Both were miraculously conceived;*
- (2) Both were divine incarnations;*
- (3) Both were of royal descent;*

- (4) *Devatas or angels sang songs of praise at the birth of each;*
- (5) *Both were visited by neighboring shepherds;*
- (6) *In both cases the reigning monarch, fearing he would be supplanted in his kingdom by the divine child, sought to destroy him;*
- (7) *Both were saved by friends who fled with them in the night to distant countries;*
- (8) *And foiled in their attempts to discover the babes, both of the babes kings issued decrees that all the infants should be put to death."*

Remsberg goes on to say that, *"The subsequent careers of these deities are also analogous in many respects. Their missions were the same--the salvation of mankind. Both performed miracles--healed the sick and raised the dead. Both died for man by man. There is a tradition, though not to be found in the Hindoo scriptures, that Krishna, like Christ, was crucified.*

Various incidents recorded in the life of Christ were doubtless suggested by similar incidents in the life of Krishna. He washed the feet of his disciples because Krishna had washed the feet of the Brahmins. He taught his disciples the possibility of moving a mountain, because Krishna, to protect his worshipers from the wrath of Indra, raised Mount Goverdhen above them...."

Remsberg continues on page 502 by saying, *"McClintock and Strongs Cyclopedia notes the following events in the history of Krishna which correspond with those related of Christ: That he was miraculously born at midnight of a human mother, and saluted by a chorus of Devatas (angels); that he was cradled among cowherds,...he was persecuted by the giant Kansa, and saved by his mothers flight; the miracles with which his life abounds, among which were the raising of the dead and the cleansing of the leprous.*

The celebrated missionary and traveler, Pere Huc, who made a journey of several thousand miles through China and Thibet, says: 'If we addressed a Mogul or Thibetan with this question, Who is Krishna? The reply was instantly, The savior of men.'

'All that converting the Hindus to Christianity does for them, says Robert Cheyne, is to change the object of worship from Krishna to Christ.'

Of Krishna's gospel, the Bhagavad-Gita, Appleton's Cyclopedia says, 'Its correspondence with the New Testament is indeed striking'."

Remsberg continues by saying, *"Its admitted by Christian scholars that Krishna lived many centuries before Christ. To admit the priority of the Krishna legends is to deny, to this extent, the originality of the Gospels. In order to break the force of the logical conclusion to be drawn from this, some argue that while Krishna himself antedated Christ, the legends concerning him are of later origin and borrowed from the Evangelists. Regarding this contention Judge Waite, in his History of the Christian*

Religion says, 'Here then, we have the older religion and the older god. This, in the absence of any evidence on the other side, ought to settle the question. To assume without evidence that the older religion has been interpolated from the later, and that the legends of the older hero have been made to conform to the history of a later character, is worse than illogical--it is absurd'."

Remsberg continues by quoting Sir William Jones, one of the best Christian authorities on Sanskrit literature, and the translator of the Bhagavad-Gita who says, *"That the name of Krishna, and the general outline of his history were long anterior to the birth of our Savior, and probably to the time of Homer, we know very certainly."* (Asiatic Researches, Vol. 1, page 254).

And Remsberg concludes by saying, *"The parallels between Krishna and Christ to be found in the Hindoo scriptures and the Christian gospels are too numerous and too exact to be accidental. The legends of the one were borrowed from the other."* And it does not require vast intellect to determine who borrowed from whom. Next months issue will conclude our discussion of the striking similarity between the lives of Jesus and prior alleged religious saviors.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #750 from DA Continues from last month. (Part f)

The essential of a contradiction is A, Not A. But if you cant say what A is, how can you expose any contradictions? So you are under the burden of proving that Ezek. 30:12 says rivers, and that rivers can not be used to describe the branches in a major river delta.

Editors Response to Letter #750 (Part f)

You state, *"If you can't say what A is, how can you expose any contradictions?"* Now lets don't be coy by trying to shift the burden of proof with respect to all of scripture, DA, because that is the import of your contention. It's your book not mine. You and your compatriots present me with a version of an original writing, which no one has ever seen and many doubt ever existed, and then ask me to prove it has errors and contradictions. When I provide literally thousands of contradictions and fallacies, such as your rivers situation, which was addressed last month, you say that can not prove that that is what the original says. But I am under no obligation to do so. Quite the contrary, you are the one required to prove the original has something else. And until you do, the dilemmas remain. How do you know that that is not what the alleged original says? That's what the manuscripts have. Certainly that's what is to be found in the King James Version of Ezek. 30:12. You say, *"But if you cant say what A is..."* I am not the one who can't say what A is; you are. You are the one casting doubt on what lies in front of us, not I. You are the one insinuating there has been an inaccurate translation. You are the one implying that a more accurate translation could have been made. You are the one implying the manuscripts from which the version in front of us

were derived are inaccurate and that scholars didn't translate correctly, you who admit you can't even read or write either Hebrew or Greek.

Those who adopt your defense can't seem to realize that in their irrational exuberance to save the Bible they have only succeeded in destroying its credibility by bringing into question all of scripture. Operating according to your theory biblicalists can never be sure any verse is an accurate translation of the alleged original. And if that can't be known for certain, how can they be sure they are reading God's word. The answer is that they can't.

Yet, despite these considerations you try to assure believers that there is nothing to worry about with respect to scripture by saying in the next part,

Letter #750 Continues (Part g)

Everybody agrees on 99% of the text. Only nit pickers (like us) worry about the rest.

Editors Response to Letter #750 (Part g)

Now, wait a minute! You just stated in regard to our rivers contradiction, which represents thousands of contradictions, that a contradiction can't be proven because the original might have said something else and eliminated the contradiction. Don't you realize that that is only another way of saying the entire book is suspect because there is no way of knowing for sure what the original says.

Now you are reversing thrusts and saying "*Everybody agrees on 99% of the text.*" What text? The text to be found in the various manuscripts? Hardly! The text to be found in the various versions? Don't be absurd. You obviously did not read all of the clashes between versions noted in some of my earlier issues, especially issues 66 through 70.

If, on the other hand, you are alleging the originals are without contradictions, then your dilemma becomes even more pronounced. How can you possibly be sure of what the alleged original said when you have never seen it and the original no longer exists, assuming it ever did. Moreover, you stated earlier, "*If you cant say what A is,*" and you are alleging you can't. Remember, A can represent any verse in scripture.

If Scripture could speak it would no doubt say, "With friends like you who needs enemies?" In an attempt to make it look as if critics like me can't pin anything down with certainty because the original is unavailable, apologists like you don't realize you have unwittingly turned all of scripture into a nebulous mush that is about as solid as jello in an earthquake. If can't be sure of the word "rivers" and thousands of other words and phrases, then you can't be sure of Scripture, period. Your loss is greater than mine, because I lost an argument while you lost the Bible. Your attempt to salvage Scripture reminds me of what they said regarding the village of Ben Suc in Vietnam. It had to be destroyed in order to be saved.

Letter #750 Continues (Part h)

(Continuing to reply to my comments on his letter in Issue #168 DA says--Ed),

Amazing how you can misquote me right after quoting me correctly. I make the obvious statement that the Septuagint is an eyewitness to Biblical events BY COMPARISON to the KJV, which you quote and then you start accusing me of saying the Septuagint was an eyewitness. Simple nonsense. The Septuagint was a, say, 5th hand witness while the KJV was 10th hand. & by comparison to the KJV, the Septuagint is an eyewitness. That the Septuagint concerned events centuries or millennium before it is irrelevant here. Obvious logic that even you ought to see....

Editors Response to Letter #750 (Part h)

You ought to play poker DA, since you can engage in more bluffs than any biblicist I know. You work on the theory that if you talk definitively and authoritatively with intimidating terminology, the opposition will back down under the mistaken assumption that they are in over their heads and you are more knowledgeable than they. Whenever your ego is involved you frenetically rustle up a ruse internally, while trying to maintain an aura of confidence, serenity, and control externally.

Lets get the facts straight. In Issue #168 you stated (verbatim), *"The Septuagint is, however, over 1500 years older than the KJV (maybe 250 B.C.), making it an eyewitness by comparison."* To that I replied, *"You refer to the Septuagint as being an eyewitness by comparison. Oh my goodness! Have you no sense of historical perspective and contemporaneous events? There are more years between the Septuagint and the events related by it in Genesis than there are between the Septuagint and the King James Version. You want people to believe the Septuagint is nearly an eyewitness to the The Creation Myth, the Adam and Eve tale, the Flood, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, etc.? Where on earth did you learn your biblical history? I don't even know of any fundamentalist seminaries that are that far off base."*

This reply instigated your above comment in which you allege that was accusing you of *"saying the Septuagint was an eyewitness,"* which you characterize as engaging in "Simple nonsense." For you, of all people, to make reference to simple nonsense is vapid, indeed, in light of the fact that you are the one who could do with some assistance in the logic department! What did I say? Did you read closely or with your usual superficial glance? I said (verbatim) *"You want people to believe the Septuagint is nearly an eyewitness...."* Notice I said NEARLY. did not say you claimed the Septuagint was an eyewitness.

Secondly, you say, *"The Septuagint was a, say, 5th hand witness while the KJV was 10th hand. & by comparison to the KJV, the Septuagint is an eyewitness."* The Septuagint was not an eyewitness, either directly or indirectly, or by comparison to anything. It either was an eyewitness or it wasn't. And the fact is that it was not. Its analogous to being pregnant. You either are or you aren't; you cant be partially

pregnant. You are trying to surreptitiously attribute an eyewitness stature to the Septuagint that it simply does not merit.

Thirdly, you say, *"That the Septuagint concerned events centuries or millennium before it is irrelevant here."* Wrong again! It certainly is relevant. You only wish it weren't. Time frames are quite relevant because they demonstrate conclusively that the the Septuagint does not have this quasi-eyewitness status which you feel its due.

Letter #750 Continues (Part i)

(In the 168th issue I said to DA, *"You say 'The Septuagint is, however, over 1500 years older than the KJV.' That's supposed to prove it is more accurate? Following that logic the King James Version should blow away all these modern versions because its over 300 years older than they are. It is over 300 years closer to the actual events."* DA now says--Ed.),

Nor will it do to try to say that since the Septuagint is superior to the KJV for being closer to the event, the KJV ought to be superior to modern versions since it is older than they are. The modern versions are based on 6th and 7th hand witnesses and are thus in effect perhaps a thousand years older than the KJV we had described as a 10th hand witness.

Editors Response to Letter #750 (Part i)

First, you say "we" had described the KJV "as a 10th hand witness" Other than yourself, who is this we to whom you are referring? I certainly hope you are not including me. From whence came that bizarre figure? Some esoteric tome?

Second, how do you know modern versions are based on 6th and 7th hand witnesses and where did you get those numbers? I have never seen them in the literature either.

Third, the word "perhaps" shows you are guessing and remember what I said recently about the book Who Moved the Stone regarding employment of words like "probably" and "perhaps"?

Fourth and finally, you act as if the KJV is self-contained and derived from nothing. In fact, it is based upon prior manuscripts. And how do you know those OT writings upon which it is based are not older than the manuscripts upon which the modern versions are founded? In fact, how do you know they are not older than the Septuagint and the manuscripts from which it is derived, which would all but decimate your entire theory.

Letter #750 Concludes (Part i)

(In the 168th issue I noted the contradiction between 2 Kings 8:26 which says Ahaziah began to rule at age 22 and 2 Chron. 22:2 which says he was 42. DA now says--Ed.),

You run through some possibilities a) 42 correct and 22 wrong, b) 22 correct and 44 (sic) wrong, and c) both say 22 or 42 in the original, to which you say I have no way to prove either figure. Quite the contrary. Second Chron. 21:5 and 20 both say Joram, Ahaziahs father died at age 40, as does 2 Kings 8:17. A son older than the father is something we can best reserve for science fiction, so we can throw out 42.

Jacob Myers in the 2 Chronicles volume of the Anchor Bible (p. 125) tells us "*The chief LXX witnesses have '20', while there is some minor support for '22', which may be due to the influence of the Masoretic Text (MT) of 2 Kings 8:26. The MT of Chronicles may represent the conflation of two traditions and exhibits a striking example of the effort to preserve two divergent traditions. Originally the numbers were kept separate, e.g., 20 or 22, and only later added together.*" Which meant that the correct answer was d) and that 2 Chronicles 22:2 did not say 42 in the original. 42 is an error in the translation, not in the bible.

Editors Concluding Response to Letter #750 (Part j)

The major error involved would not be with the translation but with those who actually took your rationalizations to heart.

First, since when did Jacob Myers and the Anchor Bible become the final authority? Just because Myers says it, that is sufficient? Apparently you have more than one god.

Second, Myers admits he is guessing because he says, "*The MT of Chronicles may represent the conflation of two traditions.*" Use of the word "may" proves as much. Consequently, when he says, "*Originally the numbers were kept separate, e.g., 20 or 22, and only later added together,*" he is engaged in conjecture. He also uses the word "may" with respect to the influence of the Masoretic Text (MT) of 2 Kings 8:26. Again, recall what said in regard to Who Moved the Stone and all its suppositions?

Third, you say, "42 is an error in the translation, not in the bible." You don't know that. Now you're guessing. Have you ever seen the originals? No. Do you know of anyone who has? No. Do you have any writing that can definitely and beyond question be proven to be an exact replica of the original? No. Of course not. In other words, you don't have much of anything other than faith and prayer, and we all know how demonstrable they are.

Fourth, you don't seem to realize that the Septuagint, in which you place so much reliance, is a translation, a version, just like the KJV and scores of others and is subject to all the aches and pains associated with every work claiming to be an accurate reproduction of the alleged original. Its not the final authority, its not divinely inspired, and its not inerrant.

And finally, you quote Myers as saying, "*The chief LXX witnesses have '20', while there is some minor support for '22',....*" Good grief! Have you no sense of logic? You are unwittingly discrediting your own argument. You admit "The chief LXX

witnesses have '20', while there is some minor support for '22', as opposed to "20," which strongly implies the correct number is neither 22 nor 42; its 20.

You also say, "*Which meant that the correct answer was d)*" but you fail to clarify what you mean by d). I did not have d) as an option. If you meant to say b), then, as said, you debunked your own argument by quoting Myers.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #754 from Louis W. Cable of Lufkin, Texas

Dear Dennis. I thoroughly enjoy your critical analyses of the works of Christian apologists. These critiques are indeed devastating, and they give freethinkers some very potent ammunition for rebutting Bible thumpers. I grew up with these types and know them well. Some of your subscribers may not have had the dubious benefit of that experience. If ever you have met a true Bible believer you couldn't help but notice the air of self-righteousness they so arrogantly display. His way, he will tell you, is the only way; his truth is the only truth; his life is the only life worth living. Everyone who does not agree with him is doomed. Isaiah was surely speaking of these people when he said in 5:21, "*Woe unto those who are wise in their own eyes, and clever in their own sight.*"

In BE #176 you critiqued The Case of Jesus the Messiah by the apologists Ankerberg, Weldon, and Kaiser. Once again you demolished bogus claims of prophecy fulfillment. However, the last paragraph was disappointing; you were much too generous. Ankerberg is, in my opinion, a charlatan. He has (or at one time had) a TV show in which he purported to give equal time to those in disagreement with his claim of Bible inerrancy. The show is not shown live. It is taped for later presentation. Despite his claim of impartiality, Ankerberg, or someone on his staff, apparently edits the tapes to show his opponents in an unfavorable light. He and his cohorts always 'win.'

P.S. If you print this letter, please give my full name, Thanks

Editors Response to Letter #754

Louis. In one of our issues years ago I made essentially the same point with respect to editing by the programs creators and was sent a letter from the shows producer assuring me censorship did not occur. Still, I have no doubt that their ability to edit every program all but guarantees a more favorable outcome from their perspective than would otherwise be the case.

Several years before BE appeared, I called the producer and challenged the shows objectivity. All I can remember with respect to the specifics of our conversation, other than its intensity, is that when I mentioned the accuracy of Robert Ingersoll, the producer immediately alleged Ingersoll was "full of prunes." That's a direct quote. I

had to muster every ounce of self-restraint in my repertoire in order not to tell him what the Bible was full of.

Letter #755 from JU of Dewey, Arizona

Dear Friends. I was delighted to discover a television program on our local Prescott channel 7 that discussed Biblical Errancy. I live in a fairly conservative community and find that I am overwhelmed by the continuous bible thumping from the right wing Christian religious groups. One particularly vehement group is the "Potters House" cult that has infiltrated our school board and threatens to undermine the whole school system.

I am writing you to get information or a list of sources so can gather ammunition in the form of good information to strike back against these fanatics. Any information you can provide will be appreciated. If you have an Internet web site or if there are web sites that have discussions about Biblical Errancy, let me know that too. Thank you.

Editors Response to Letter #755

Dear JU. Thanks for your compliments and rest assured the entire anti-religious community knows how you feel. Most of us are convinced that we not only live in the Bible Belt but on its buckle.

As far as web sites are concerned you can read nearly all of Biblical Errancy's back issues at: <http://members.aol.com/ckbloomfld>. And we will be glad to send you a free list of materials we have available. If you devour everything contained therein, you should be well equipped to cope with practically any biblicist you may encounter.

Letter #756 from KB of Los Angeles, California

Dear Dennis. BE#177 arrived Friday, Sept. 5. Those items in NBs letter (#743) pertaining to "In God We Trust" on our monies and "under God" in the pledge of allegiance are things that should be committed to memory by freethinkers of every stripe. I find myself having to explain why I put black lines through the letters on the backsides of my paper currency. I know that am putting the idea into someone's mind that it wasn't "always there," especially those born after 1955.

Regarding the tapes of your programs locally, they (programs 9 through 16) are in the hands of Verdugo Hills Cable (now a branch of Media One). When left them in the middle of last month, the engineer there did not have an immediately available time for them, but he said he would book them in as soon as he could find the slot...

#177 arrived with one of those postal service bar codes pasted across the text above the line on the mailing side. If this is happening generally, it might help if you had the columns on page 6 about two lines shorter. See the enclosed copy. I used a mirror to

read what had come off on the back of the P.O.s slip, rewrote it, and will paste it over the damage.

Keep up the good work and let me know when you have additional (programs 17 and beyond) ready....

Editors Response to Letter #756

Dear KB. We've finally completed all 100 recordings after nearly four years of effort. Every edition of our TV program, BIBLICAL ERRANCY COMMENTARY, is now available and we hope you will play the entire series as soon as practical. Thanks for the aid.

As far as bar codes are concerned, you are not the only person who has had one posted over the final lines on the 6th page. Within the last several months we have received the same grievance from others. I apologize for putting too much writing on the last page and will try to rectify the situation.

Letter #757 from JB of Mesquite, Texas

Do you distribute any tracts. I recently became an unbeliever through my own study of the Bible. However, I would have become an unbeliever much sooner if I had been exposed to the kind of material you publish. If you have anything available in tract format, it will help me to start many believers down the road of unbelief. During 23 years of believing, I had never before come across any refutations of the Bible that I couldn't dismiss out of hand, because the evangelical world view is remarkably impervious. However, when I discovered on my own that biblical inerrancy is untrue, the very foundation of my world view was undermined and no longer impervious to reason. Many (most?) believers will never recognize biblical errancy on their own, and I believe that some of your material in tract format can give them the leg-up they need to climb out of the pit of irrationality they now obviously dwell in.

Editors Response to Letter #757

A cardinal principle upon which our philosophy and this publication rests is that freethinkers must first knock the props out from under the biblical superstructure before biblicists are going to seriously weigh and contemplate another world view. You have only succeeded in buttressing that premise. For some reason or another the full import of what you are alleging, JB, just doesn't register with thousands of freethinkers. I have made this point repeatedly, but the latter's adherence to the externals of court battles, legal briefs, letters to the editor, appeals to the Constitution, citations from the writings of the founding fathers, invocations of the First Amendment, scientific evidence, exposures of religious history, comparisons to other religions, historical discoveries, etc. is all but intractable. They just don't comprehend the full import of your comments.

Freethinkers also seem oblivious to the full implications of your assertion *"that you would have become an unbeliever much sooner if I had been exposed to the kind of material you publish."* Instead of realizing biblicists are going to say, *"I don't care what kind of extrabiblical evidence you have; if it contradicts the Bible then it has to be false because the Bible is the word of God and what you have is not,"* they seem intent on pursuing an anemic strategy that is plagued by a history of impotence and failure. Their tactics are not unimportant; just less important in so far as combating our main opposition is concerned.

Because our strategies are clearly in concert, you should find our materials to be of great assistance. We have two tracts in particular, each of which asks biblicists to confront over 20 key questions in regard to Jesus and the Bible. Hopefully you will be able to distribute them in abundance.

Letter #758 from GL via email

Dennis. I just wanted to say thank you for all the information that you have made available. I was involved with a church, born again, and accepted Jesus as my savior, and let me tell you I had questions that would come up when I read the bible and was given some answers that I just could not understand. And that's if I even asked them because was I afraid that was questioning the validity of "the word of god." I have found from my experience that Christianity is based on one thing and one thing only and that is fear. That is what gets people into it and that is what keeps people in it. People are too afraid to question their beliefs because of fear of punishment, even when they have valid doubts. I was one of them. I just want to say how thankful I am that you created your web site. Keep up the great work.

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

REVIEW #1

THE CHRIST (Part 2)

Last month's issue discussed the degree to which the lives of Jesus and Krishna are identical as revealed in The Christ by John Remsberg. Remsberg clearly demonstrates that the comparison is even more applicable when the life of Jesus is correlated with that of Buddha. On page 370 he states, *"The word Buddha, like the word Christ, is not a name, but a title. It means 'the enlightened one'. The name for this religious founder was Siddhartha Gautama. He was born about 643 B.C, and died 563 B.C. (Note well that that is long before the birth of Jesus--Ed.). His mother, Mahamaya, was a virgin. Dean Milman, in his History of Christianity, says, 'Buddha, according to a tradition known in the West, was born of a virgin' (Vol. I, p. 99). Devaki (the mother of Krishna), Mary, and Mahamaya, all gave birth to their children among strangers.... The 'Tripitaka', the principal Bible of the Buddhists, containing the history of the teachings of Buddha, is a collection of books written in the centuries immediately following Buddha. The canon was finally determined at the Council of Pataliputra, held under the auspices of the Emperor Asoka the Great, 244 B.C., more than 600 years before the Christian canon was established....*

Buddha was 'about 30 years old' when he began his ministry (as was Jesus allegedly--Ed.). He fasted 'seven times seven nights and days'. He had a 'band of disciples' who accompanied him. He traveled from place to place and 'preached to large multitudes'. Bishop Bigandet calls his first sermon the 'Sermon on the Mount'. At his Renunciation 'he forsook father and mother, wife and child'. His mission was 'to establish the kingdom of righteousness'. 'Buddha', says Max Mueller, 'promised salvation to all; and he commanded his disciples to preach his doctrine in all places and to all men'....

Buddha formulated the following commandments. 'Not to kill; not to steal; not to lie; not to commit adultery; not to use strong drink'. Christ said, 'Thou knowest the commandments: do not commit adultery; do not kill; do not steal; do not bear false witness; honor thy father and thy mother' (Luke 18:20). Christ ignored the Decalogue of Moses and, like Buddha, presented a pentade which, with the exception of one commandment, is the same as that of Buddha.

Prof. Seydel, of the University of Leipzig, points out 50 analogies between Christianity and Buddhism. Dr. Schleiden calls attention to over 100. Baron Hiarden-

Hickey says: 'Countless analogies exist between Buddhistic and Christian legends--analogies so striking that they forcibly prove to an impartial mind that a common origin must necessarily be given to the teachings of Sakay-Muni (Buddha--Ed.) and those of Jesus. Concerning the biographical accounts of the two religious teachers Harden-Hickey says, 'One account must necessarily be a copy of the other, and since the Buddhist biographer, living long before the birth of Christ, could not have borrowed from the Christian one, the plain inference is that the early creed-mongers of Alexandria were guilty of plagiarism'.'

The following are some of the parallels presented by this writer.

At this point Remsberg lists comparisons between the lives of Jesus and Buddha that should be brought to the attention of every Christian who ever lived. *"Both have genealogies tracing their descent from ancestral kings. Both were born of virgin mothers. The conception of each was announced by a divine messenger. The hymns uttered at the two annunciations resemble each other. Both were visited by wise men who brought them gifts. Both were presented in the temple. The aged Simeon of one account corresponds to the aged Asita of the other. As 'the child (Jesus) grew and waxed strong in spirit' so 'the child (Sakay-Muni) waxed and increased in strength.' Both in childhood discoursed before teachers. Both fasted in the wilderness. Both were tempted. Angels or devatas ministered to each. Buddha bathed in the Narajana, and Christ was baptized in the Jordan. The mission of each was proclaimed by a voice from Heaven. Both performed miracles. Both sent out disciples to propagate their faiths. In calling their disciples the command of each was, 'Follow me.' Buddha preached on the Holy Hill, and Christ delivered his sermon on the Mount. The phraseology of the sermons of Buddha and the sermon ascribed to Christ is, in many instances, the same. Both Buddha and Christ compare themselves to husbandmen sowing seed. The story of the prodigal son is found in both Scriptures. The account of the man born blind is common to both. In both the mustard seed is used as a simile for littleness. Christ speaks of 'a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand;' Buddha says, 'Perishable is the city built of sand.' Both speak of 'the rain which falls on the just and the unjust.' The story of the ruler, Nicodemus, who came to Jesus by night has its parallel in the story of the rich man who came to Buddha by night. A converted courtesan, Magdalena, followed Jesus, and a converted courtesan, Ambapali, followed Buddha. There is a legend of a traitor connected with each. Both made triumphal entries, Christ into Jerusalem, and Buddha into Rajagriba. Both proclaimed kingdoms not of this world. The eternal life promised by Christ corresponds to the eternal peace, Nirvana, promised by Buddha. And both religions recognize a trinity."* This list could be extended but the point has been made.

...Remsberg quotes Bishop Bigandet further as saying, *"In reading the particulars of the life of Buddha it is impossible not to feel reminded of many circumstances relating to our Savior's life as sketched by the evangelists. It may be said in favor of Buddhism that no philosophic-religious system has ever upheld to an equal degree the notions of a savior and deliverer, and the necessity of his mission for procuring the salvation of man...."*

The external forms of Christianity, especially Catholic Christianity, are modeled in a large degree after those of Buddhism. Of Northern Buddhism (Lamaism) the Encyclopedia Britannica says: 'Lamaism with its shaven priests, its bells and rosaries, its images and holy water, its popes and bishops, its abbots and monks of many grades, its processions and feast days, its confessional and purgatory, and its worship of the double Virgin, so strongly resembles Roman Catholicism that the first Catholic missionaries thought it must be an imitation by the devil of the religion of Christ.' The central object in every Buddhist temple is an image of Buddha. The central object of every Catholic church is an image of Christ. Holy relics and the veneration of saints are prominent in both. Buddha commanded his disciples to preach his gospel to all men. Christ commanded his disciples to do the same.

...Connected with the triumphs of these religious faiths there is an historical analogy deserving of mention. Three centuries after the time of Buddha, Asoka the Great, emperor of India, became a convert to the Buddhist faith, made it the state religion of the empire, and did more than any other man to secure its supremacy in the East. Three centuries after Christ, Constantine the Great, emperor of Rome, became a convert to the Christian faith, made it the state religion of his empire, and won for it the supremacy of the West."

In concluding his presentation of the similarities between Buddha and Jesus, Remsburg quotes Remusat who says, "*Buddhism has been called the Christianity of the East*" and then adds the following compelling correction. "*It would be more appropriate to call Christianity the Buddhism of the West. Buddha, and not Christ, was the 'Light of Asia.'* At this torch Christians lighted their taper and called it '*The Light of the World*'."

In light of the fact that Buddha predated Jesus by approximately 600 years, the unavoidable conclusion to be drawn from the parallels between their lives is readily apparent. For obvious reasons, this kind of information is all but non-existent in Christian sermons, schools, literature, media, and other propaganda agencies. After all, Jesus couldn't very well be the unique messiah for all mankind when he is exposed as nothing more than another pretender in a long series of alleged saviors.

REVIEW #2

DOES THE BIBLE CONTRADICT ITSELF? (Part 1)

One of the more prominent apologetic works is a popular defense of the Bible entitled Does the Bible Contradict Itself? by W. Arndt, professor of New Testament exegesis and hermeneutics at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. To some extent Arndt operates in the tradition of Haley who wrote what is probably the most famous 19th century defense of scripture--Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible. Arndt's answers are often brief while deceptive and superficially persuasive. Only when one disassembles and dissects the relevant data and the accompanying ramifications, assumptions, conjectures, and irrelevancies does reality step from fog to foreground. An extensive, but by no means exhaustive, critique of his techniques and defenses is

in order because they represent the kind of strategy employed by many apologists. Some of his more egregious violations of intellectual integrity are the following:

On page 12 Arndt addresses the contradiction between Gen. 25:6 (*"But unto the sons of the concubines which Abraham had,...."*) and Heb. 11:17 (*"By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac; and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son"*) by saying, "Abraham has only one son, and he had several sons--both statements are true. ...Isaac was the only son whom Sarah had born to him, the only one who was to be in the direct line of ancestry to the Messiah. Isaac was the only heir of the vast possessions of Abraham. Hence, while it is true that Abraham had sons by concubines, the statement that Isaac was his only son is justified and not in conflict with the passages that speak of Ishmael and the sons of Keturah."

In order to escape this dilemma Arndt arbitrarily injected an unsustainable textual addendum. Nothing is said about Isaac being the only son in "the direct line of ancestry to the Messiah." The text says Isaac is the only begotten son of Abraham, period; it does not say he was the only son in "the direct line of ancestry to the Messiah." That is a gratuitous insertion that is not warranted by Scripture.

The word "begotten" will not save the day because nowhere does Scripture give that term any other meaning than that which can be found in Webster's dictionary, namely, "beget" means: *"to be the father or sire of; to procreate; to bring into being or produce."* These meanings can be applied to many individuals and do not distinguish Isaac from other OT figures in any meaningful way. Nowhere does Scripture restrict that term to the Messiah generally or Jesus specifically. According to Gen. 5:4 Seth was "begotten" and according to Judges 8:30 seventy sons of Gideon were "begotten". So no special significance can be attached to the word "begotten." If "begotten" means one is in the direct line of ancestry to the Messiah then all 70 of Gideon's sons were in that lineage as well--quite a trick, indeed!

Moving further, on page 17 Arndt confronts the contradiction between Ex. 9:3, 6 (*"Behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thy (Egypt's--Ed.) cattle which is in the field, upon the horses, upon the asses, upon the camels, upon the oxen, and upon the sheep; there shall be a very grievous murrain. And all the cattle of Egypt died"*) and Ex. 14:9 (*"But the Egyptians pursued after them, all the horses and chariots of Pharaoh, and his horsemen, and his army, and overtook them encamping by the sea...."*) by stating, "How could Pharaoh pursue the Israelites with a large army, including horsemen and chariots, if in the plague of which we read in Ex. 9:3, 6 all his horses had died? In answer I beg to submit the following three points: (1) The word "all" in such cases is a relative concept. When a heavy frost in spring shatters the hopes for an abundant fruit crop in a certain locality, I may say the whole crop has been destroyed, despite the fact that a few isolated apples and peaches will appear on the trees. My remark simply states that, generally speaking, there will be no fruit crop, or, in other words, that the fruit which has survived is not worth mentioning. Thus it may have been when a dread murrain overtook the cattle and horses in Egypt. The loss was so general that the animals which remained were very few in number and hardly worth mentioning....."

This explanation is only another way of saying that "all" does not mean all. It means "most" or "nearly all." Are we, or are we not, dealing with God's perfect, inerrant word? According to millions of Christians, we are. If so, then we are not dealing with the linguistic license accorded imperfect human beings in which we know absolutes do not refer to "totality". We are dealing with perfection and perfection allows no imperfections or near misses. This is not a theological game of horseshoes. Long ago I noted that the Bible's propensity for absolutist comments is a weakness of the first magnitude and this is a quintessential example of same. There can be no in-between when you are dealing with perfection and God is perfection by definition. If he wrote it, whatever it may be, then it has to be perfect.

Secondly, if "the animals which remained were very few in number and hardly worth mentioning" then how were the Egyptians able to pursue the Israelites with a force strong enough to pursue hundreds of thousands?

Arndt then proceeds to his next explanation. "(2) Moses indicates in his narrative that the plague affected not all the cattle of the Egyptians, but only those which were in the field (Ex. 9:3). The account then permits us to assume that the horses of Pharaoh which he kept in his forts ready for immediate service escaped the murrain."

It is interesting to note that Arndt qualified his comment with the word "indicates" because he knows as well as I that that is not what the text says occurred. Although the 3rd verse does say, "*the hand of the Lord is upon the cattle which is in the field*" verse 6 goes much farther by saying "*And the Lord did that thing on the morrow, and all the cattle of Egypt died,*" not just those which were in the field.

Arndt concludes by saying, "(3) The animals belonging to the Israelites were not stricken, as we see from Ex. 9:4, 7. It may be that Pharaoh, immediately after the cessation of the plague, filled the gaps in his supply of war horses by taking as many horses from the Israelites as he could, under some pretext or other." This is nothing more than rampant speculation for which there is not a shred of textual support either. "May be" are hardly the words of sound, proven scholarship. If he is going to stretch events to that degree, why not just say God resupplied the Pharaoh as needed like manna from heaven or hundreds of horses were shipped in from foreign lands. Better yet, why not say new horses sprang from the cells, DNA, and protoplasm of those horses that were killed or God made horses "*out of the dust of the ground*" like he did Adam? And if you really want to go all out, why not contend aliens from space landed with an ample supply of horses they were willing to loan. The fact that none of this nonsense has any textual backing whatever should be of no consequence. After all, if you are going to let your imagination run wild like a babe in toy land, why impose limits?

One can't help but notice that Arndt failed to employ an excuse that would probably have been seized upon by the more inept biblical defenders. Ex. 9:6 says all the cattle of Egypt died; it did not say all the horses. No doubt some eager defenders would seize upon the distinction made between cattle and horses and allege the former were intended while the latter were not. But that would only prove he is unaware of the fact

that the word cattle could be more accurately translated from the Hebrew as livestock, which would include horses. The word "cattle" in Ex. 9:6 comes from the Hebrew word "miqneh" which means "livestock" or "live herds" or "flocks" that are property. Unlike the King James, a sizable number of modern translations are willing to admit as much. The Modern Language, the NIV (fundamentalist), the JB (Catholic), the NAB (Catholic), the NWT, and the NASB all use the word "livestock" rather than the word "cattle" which would include horses as well as cattle, rather than cattle alone. The Good News Bible uses the word animals which is even more encompassing than livestock because that would include pets too. So, the unavoidable conclusion to be drawn from this entire scenario is that all the Pharaohs horses were killed. How, then, could the Pharaohs army have pursued the Israelites on horses and horse-drawn chariots?

On page 20 Arndt attempts to reconcile a contradiction we mentioned long ago with respect to the acts of God. Ex. 20:14 says, "*Thou shalt not commit adultery*" which contradicts Num. 31:18 in which God says, "*All the women children that have not known a man by lying with him keep alive for yourselves.*" Arndt says, "This pair of passages presents so little difficulty from the point of view of harmonization that it would not have been listed if it were not for the frivolous and unscrupulous use which some unbelieving writers are making of Num. 31:18 in our days. They maintain the order contained in this passage was given so that the immoral desires of the Israelites might be served. If that were true then God would indeed be contradicting Himself.... But is the import of Num. 31:18 correctly given by these scoffers? The passage or the context does not contain one syllable which might justify their interpretation. In raising their charge, they are drawing entirely on their wicked imagination, imputing to God and the leaders of Israel the motives which might have actuated themselves in such a situation."

Apparently working on the theory that the best defense is to seize the offense, Arndt attributes motives to biblical opponents that are designed to gain the upper hand psychologically, even though they are neither provable nor relevant. An alleged "wicked imagination" on the part of biblical critics is not the dilemmas source; logic is. Psychological motives are not what matters; deeds are. The fact is that God ordered men to take women and keep them alive "for yourselves." Arndt contends the text does not justify imputing impure motives to God and the leaders of Israel when there is nothing in the text to prove otherwise. He just assumes out of hand that since god is the perpetrator, the motives must be pure. Judging from an incredibly large number of other Scriptural acts by god, that assumption can hardly be deemed justified. What God ordered is more important than why he ordered it, absent evidence to the contrary. And most assuredly evidence to the contrary is not forthcoming.

Arndt says critics "maintain the order contained in this passage was given so that the immoral desires of the Israelites might be served," when critics are saying nothing of the sort. Who said anything about motives. Critics are not saying anything with respect to why the order was given, since that's not the issue. The fact is that God told men to take women and use them "*for themselves.*" If only one person involved is

married, then God is ordering adultery. Why the order was given is of secondary importance.

Arndt says, "The passage or the context does not contain one syllable which might justify their interpretation" when Arndt provides nothing that would justify any other. Essentially, when all the smoke and mirrors are removed, Arndt's argument amounts to nothing more than saying "God wouldn't do something like that. He is too nice a guy. And how do I know he is so pure, because the Bible tells me so." In that case, I'd strongly suggest Arndt reread Scripture, and do so much more closely than was formerly the case, after reading issues 115 through 120 of BE.

Continuing on page 21 Arndt says, "The command of God has its full explanation in the fact that the women mentioned in Num. 31:18 had not been active in seducing the Israelites to participation in the immoral worship of Peor, hence they were permitted to live, although they had to become the slaves of the Israelites....." Arndt tries to attribute decent motives to God by alleging he saved the women from death and consigned them to slavery instead, which is irrelevant. He is trying to shift the focus from adultery to slavery. Whether or not God saved them from death and made them slaves instead is insignificant, especially in light of the fact that the Bible doesn't clarify their slave status one way or the other. The point that counts is that adultery was condoned, indeed commanded, in the process. The fact that they were enslaved rather than killed doesn't exonerate God. It isn't even germane. The fact that God ordered the Israelites to use them in the act of adultery certainly is.

On page 33 Arndt tackles the conflict between 2 Sam. 6:23 ("*Therefore Michal, the daughter of Saul, had no child unto the day of her death*") and 2 Sam. 21:8 ("*But the king took the two sons of Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah, whom she bare unto Saul...and the five sons of Michal, the daughter of Saul, whom she brought up for Adriel, the son of Barzillai....*"). He states, "There are two different ways of bringing these two passages into agreement. The holy writer in his statement in 2 Sam. 6:23 may intend to say that Michal had no child in her marriage with David. If we assume this to be his meaning, then all difficulty vanishes." In our discussion of the work entitled Who Moved the Stone by Morison we dwelled at length on the speculative approach to biblical defense and Arndt has again raised its ugly head. "May intend," and "if we assume" are not the words of proven scholarship but more in the tradition of "I only hope so." Arndt is guessing in every respect and just as importantly he is guessing without biblical support. Nothing is said about David or Michal's marriage to David.

Arndt continues by saying, "The other explanation advocated is that we assume Michal in 2 Sam. 21:8 to be a copyists mistake for Merob. If we compare the latter passage with 1 Sam. 18:19 ("*And it came to pass at the time when Merab Saul's daughter should have been given to David, that she was given unto Adriel the Meholathite to wife*"), we shall see that Merob was the daughter of Saul who was given in marriage to Adriel, the man mentioned in 2 Sam. 21:8. Thus, it seems clear that this passage does not speak of Michal, the wife of David. Some Bible editions propose this explanation in the margin, that by Michal, Michal's sister is meant."

There is that word "assume" again. Credible biblical analysis is not in the assumption business. It is in the facts, data, proof, evidence, statistics, and direct quote business. And these are considerations with which Arndt and his compatriots all too often have little or no patience. They not only play havoc with a lot of meticulously manufactured methodologies and thousands of tangled theorems but demolish those soothing feelings accompanying the delusional assurance heaven awaits the true believer. Arndt says, "Thus, it seems clear that this passage does not speak of Michal, the wife of David" when there is nothing clear about it. Second Samuel 21:8 uses the word "Michal" not "Merob." That is what is clear. Arndt arbitrarily assumes there has been a copyist error and then, just as arbitrarily, assumes the woman intended was Merob.

Arndt closes the issue by saying, "Another view put forward by some writers is that Merob was called Michal at times, having two names....." Again more speculation and guesswork for the pile, because there is nothing of a scriptural nature that would corroborate this unbridled addendum either. I am always inclined to ask writers who insert nearly as much between the lines as is on them: why don't you just throw away every current version of the Bible and write your own? That way you would no longer be forced to ram square theories through round facts. Then, again, you would have to deviate markedly from the manuscripts wouldn't you. But what are mere trifles like honesty, integrity, and credibility when salvaging Scripture in general and Jesus in particular are at stake. (To Be Continued Next Month)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #759 from BM of Seattle, Washington

Dear Sir. I am an atheist here in Seattle and was very pleased to see your program on channel 29. I was surprised when you didn't identify yourself as an Atheist or use the word atheist during the program. Those of us who are non-believers need a common word to unify us. In spite of its negative connotation I would hope in the interest of unity you would proudly proclaim your atheism.

Editor's Response to Letter #759

Dear BM. BE is not nearly as concerned with the existence or nonexistence of some kind of supreme being as with Scripture and its alleged perfection. The accuracy of the latter is of greater concern to us than the presence of the former.

Secondly, the word atheist has been saddled with so much negative baggage by religious propagandists throughout the years that it would all but close the minds of thousands if it were to be employed in the title or serve as a backdrop to our programs on a regular basis. It would be like calling yourself a socialist before speaking to a crowd of Reaganites. The word would burn bridges, build barriers and propagate prejudgments.

Thirdly, you must first dissuade people from their erroneous beliefs before suggesting an alternative. How often can you build a structure before bringing in the bulldozer or wrecking ball to prepare the ground. You are trying to eat an omelet without cracking some eggs.

Letter #760 from BG of Jacksonville, Florida

Dear Dennis McKinsey. I just read a book titled "The Bible Code", by Michael Drosnin. A Mormon friend loaned it to me. (He's trying to convert me). We made a deal. I gave him several back issues of Biblical Errancy to read in return.

I don't know if you have ever read "The Bible Code. It was written in 1997 and it's full of claims about the truth of prophesy. I'll quote 2 paragraphs from the book;

"The final countdown now began. The Bible Code had yet again been proven real, accurately predicting an Israeli election that every poll called wrong, just as it had accurately predicted the year Rabin would be killed. But as September 13, 1996, the day of the predicted holocaust drew near, the new Prime Minister refused to heed the warning.

It was 3 years from the day of the Rabin-Arafat handshake. Rabin was now dead, as the Bible Code predicted. The peace was now dead, as the Bible Code predicted. Peres the architect of the peace, had been replaced by Netanyahu, the opponent of the peace, as the Bible Code predicted."

The book is 232 pages long, with graphs and different models to prove his theory. It's getting a lot of attention from different Christian groups. I really wish you would get a copy and review it.....

Editor's Response to Letter #760

Dear BG. I have read too many books of this kind already and every one has been all but worthless as a guide to life. Scam artists are everywhere and in few areas are they more multitudinous than in that of prediction and prognostication. Their scheme is one of remaining fluid at all times by avoiding comments that allow no interpretation or escape hatches as if they had the plague. Back-dating and nebulosity lie at the very core of their stock and trade.

Back-dating consists of reading into prior comments interpretations tailored for today's events. The adherents of Nostradamus, for example, are well known devotees of this approach. Biblicists don't have a lock on this strategy by any means. You simply go back into a writing created years ago and twist comments contained therein in such a manner that they can be applied to current events. Nebulosity, on the other hand, consists in making comments today that are so vague, nebulous, and imprecise that they can be distorted as the need arises to fit future events. Either way it's a con game.

Fortunately, both ways can be tested, something the adherents of each subconsciously detest. Ask those relying upon back-dating to peruse their prized writing and show where the specific events to which they refer are stated after having proven the writing was definitely written prior to the events. In addition, ask them to find another prediction of something that will happen in the near future, something specific, something that is clearly quantifiable, measurable, and observable, something that would not be obvious to any ordinary human being, such as predicting the sun will rise over the horizon on June 1, 1999. Then just watch them worm and squirm as they seek to weasel out of these requests through any one of several subterfuges.

Ask the "nebulosity" crowd to predict specific events that will happen in the near future. If the death of Rabin was predicted, then ask them to state, or better yet, write down the day upon which any one of thousands of other famous public figures and celebrities will die. Ask them where the value of various stocks and bonds will be on certain dates or what the winning lottery numbers will be for different state lotteries. This list could be extended almost to infinity. Common sense would tell you that if these people had any kind of lock on accurate predictions, they would be wealthy beyond belief and they would not have to make money through conning others in the process. It never ceases to amaze me how many people are willing to accept the words of charlatans that such and such a book or such and such a person made this or that accurate prediction without checking the source, performing experiments, insisting on being an eye-witness, or demanding a repetition. It is truly incredible.

Practitioners of perversion not only read into events that which they wish to project, but their listeners are often so starved for signs from the Almighty or so desperate for signs, wonders, and messages that they will actually aid the hoax and contribute to their own illusions, delusions, and hallucinations. It's analogous to the fortune teller or psychic who relates events in someone's life in a general way and then the hearer fills in the details, only to conclude the pretender has great wisdom or predictive capabilities. In truth, these frauds provide no information that does not come from the victim either directly or indirectly via soliciting and inveigling. They would be sickeningly rich, rather than just sickening, if they really had powers of projection and prophecy.

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

REVIEW

DOES THE BIBLE CONTRADICT ITSELF? (Part 2)

Last month's issue discussed several contradictions addressed by W. Arndt in his book Does the Bible Contradict Itself? that have dogged biblicists since time immemorial. We can now continue that litany.

On page 73 Arndt attempts to reconcile the rather simple and direct conflict created by the differing accounts as to the words written on the cross. Matt. 27:37 says, *'This is Jesus the King of the Jews'* Mark 15:26 says, *'The King of the Jews'* Luke 23:38 says, *'This is the King of the Jews'* And John 19:19 says, *'Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews.'* So which is it? Arndt says, "...One glance suffices to show that among the four versions there is no difference in meaning. John's account is simply more complete than those of the others.... The opponents say, however, that verbal inspiration implies absolute accuracy. They say that if the Bible had been given by verbal inspiration, then John could not have written that the superscription on the Cross was *'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews,'* while Mark simply says the superscription was *'The King of the Jews.'* ...This criticism arbitrarily lays down the principle that when one quotes a statement, one must, in order to be faithful to the original, give every word of it. To state this principle is to expose its injustice. Nothing is more common in all human languages than to abridge a speech, or a remark which one is quoting...

Arndt's defense closely resembles one often used by biblicists with respect to the four different accounts of what occurred at the time of the Resurrection. We are repeatedly told situations of this nature are like obtaining testimony from different witnesses to an automobile accident. Supposedly we can only get the actual picture by piecing all the perspectives together. At least that's the theory. The fact that this entire approach is fatally flawed in several respects never seems to dawn upon the Bible's defenders.

First, the only accurate account according to this ruse is the one that is the most all-encompassing. We are supposed to believe that the one including all the others is by definition the most correct, when that is by no means true. If there are four witness to a hit and run and four different accounts as to how many people were in the car that sped away--one, two, three, or four--the police don't automatically conclude the correct number of occupants is four. There might have been two with two shadows. There might have been three with a head rest giving the illusion of four.

Second, regardless of how often speech is abridged, there can only be one correct wording. If the wording in John is correct then that in the other 3 is erroneous. Imagine the kind of legal chaos Arndt's approach would generate whenever contracts came into conflict. The one with the most words that included the others would always be deemed more valid, even though abridged contracts are often newer and more correct than the predecessor from which they arose.

Third, Arndt says, "The opponents say, however, that verbal inspiration implies absolute accuracy." That is not what opponents say. They say that verbal inspiration implies accuracy, period. And you can't have accuracy when you have 4 different versions. Each version is either accurate or it isn't. There can be no in between, no gradations of accuracy. You can't have "accuracy" and "absolute accuracy." The word absolute is redundant. Arndt's trying to deceive his readers by giving the impression that 3 of the gospels are accurate while only one is absolutely accurate. No. That's not how it works. If one is accurate, then it is absolutely accurate as well, and the others are inaccurate. In effect, Arndt is attempting to attribute gradations of perfection to parts of Scripture. That is about as sensible as saying one comment is accurate, another is more accurate, a third is highly accurate, and another is extremely accurate. And all of this schlock is being attributed to a book that is supposed to be perfectly accurate to begin with. If you are not careful when dealing with biblicists, your mind could become as convoluted, confused, chaotic, and conning as theirs.

Fourth, Arndt says, "One glance suffices to show that among the four versions there is no difference in meaning" when there most assuredly is. Neither Mark nor Luke identify the person on the cross as Jesus. At least not from the superscription per se. Both merely say "the King of the Jews" which could be applied to others who died on the cross in that day and age while claiming to be the King of the Jews. Neither says it was Jesus, the founder of Christianity, who was dying. That assumption is only made because Matthew and John use the word "Jesus" specifically.

Moreover, many people were named "Jesus" in that era. So, if the word Nazareth had not been used in John and carried over into Matthew, Mark, and Luke, there would be no reason to assume the person referred to is the founder of Christianity. How do biblicists know their one and only Jesus of Nazareth is the one who is dying? Because John, and only John, makes the connection in so far as the inscription is concerned, that's how. So when Arndt says, "among the four versions there is no difference in meaning," I beg to differ. Reconciliation is only possible by blending all four and filling in gaps created by three.

The bottom line is that there can be only one writing on the cross; only one of the Gospel accounts can be accurate and verbatim.

On page 114 Arndt discusses the contradiction between Deut. 8:2 (*"And thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord, thy God, led thee these forty years in the wilderness to humble thee and to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldst keep His commandments or not"*) and Acts 1:24 (*"And they prayed and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, show which of these two Thou*

hast chosen"). He states, "When the Bible says that God knows the hearts of all men, and again, that God proves men to know what is in their hearts, does it not contradict itself? The matter has puzzled Bible readers time and again. The answer, however, is not so difficult as might be thought. To begin with, there is no passage in all the Scriptures which says that God does not know all things."

Wrong again! Many verses show God either does not know something or is seeking to obtain information. That is the clear import of Psalm 14:2 (*"The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God"*). Why would he look down to see if he already knew? Ezek. 20:3 says, *"Thus saith the Lord God; Are ye come to inquire of me? As I live, saith the Lord God, I will not be inquired of by you."* Again we see God seeking information. In Num. 22:9 (*"And God came unto Balaam, and said, What men are these with thee?"*) we again find God seeking information. In Hosea 8:4 (*"They have set up kings, but not by me: they have made princes, and I knew it not..."*) and Gen. 18:21 (*"I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know"*) God directly states he lacks some information and, unless he is lying, the conclusion is clear. When he says He does not know something, that should settle the matter and would have done so long ago had anyone else been involved. But because his followers can not conceive of him being deficient in any respect, they don't believe him. I, on the other hand, take him at his word. It's only reasonable that if he said it, he meant it. Biblicists are actually saying to God: You don't really mean that God, now do you Oh, yes he does. Don't they believe Scripture! They sure do when it fits their needs and complies with their predilections. One could also consult Gen. 3:9, Gen. 4:5-6, 4:9, 2 Chron. 32:31, and Amos 9:3 for additional confirmation of God's lack of omniscience. As is so often true, once biblicists have a concept embedded in their psyche, God himself can't change their minds.

Arndt continues, "Those statements which speak of God's proving the hearts of men do not say that He is ignorant with respect to the thoughts of their hearts. We cannot say that here we have a case of direct denial, one passage affirming what the other negatives. Again, when the Bible says that God puts men to the test to know their hearts, the meaning evidently is that God subjects man to certain visitations, which will reveal that what God knew beforehand concerning their hearts is absolutely true. It means that evidence is furnished which corroborates God's judgment."

Arndt is trying to escape by turning black into white. What did God say in Hosea 8:4 which Arndt artfully dodges? He stated, *"They have set up kings, but not by me: they have made princes, and I knew it not..."* He stated I knew it not; he stated it directly. What more do apologists want? At the end of Gen. 18:21 (*"I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me; and if not, I will know"*) he directly states that he will then know, which means he did not know beforehand.

Frankly, I don't know what it would take to convince many biblicists that God can come up short in the knowledge field. They won't even accept his own words, words that did not come from men or atheists, but straight from God's "divine word."

Even in the verse Arndt quoted, Deut. 8:2, God said "he humbled thee to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart." In other words, he sought to obtain information. God is making a test in which he is not sure as to what the outcome will be. How could it be clearer?

Arndt also engages in the kind of guessing for which Morison is so famous by saying "the meaning is evidently that..." when there is nothing evident about it. Why would God perform tests to discover what he already knows?

(To Be Continued Next Month)

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #761 from DC of St. Paul, Minn. (Part a)

I just reviewed your Issue #2 of Biblical Errancy. It is obvious you went through a lot of work. However, it was also very quickly obvious that you apparently have not read any scholarly or theological works in regards to these matters.

Editor's Response to Letter #761 (Part a)

I will do you the courtesy of forgetting you ever made a comment that ridiculous. Having been in this business as long as I have and having read hundreds of rationalizations and obfuscations, I sometimes wonder if I would not be better off if your comment were true.

Letter #761 Continues (Part b)

To be blunt, even a simple perusal of a few would have eliminated some of your remarks. The issue had a number of simple errors such as in your reference to 2 Kings 13:21 when you talk about a "grave" when it was a tomb; or, in referring to Ingersoll as "one of the greatest Biblical commentators in American history" (Who bestowed that honor? Certainly not anyone who has ever read, produced, or evaluated commentaries); or, in alleging that Adam was born (Gen 1:27); all these reveal a superficial research and analysis on those points.

Editor's Response to Letter #761 (Part b)

Talk about superficial research and to be even blunter, you don't know what you are talking about and your shallow comments reveal that all too vividly.

First, if you had bothered to read any of the literature, other than that within your narrow purview, you would have noticed that the NEB, the NAB, the NASB, the

RSV, and the Modern Language all say "grave." Are you saying your scholars are more knowledgeable than those who composed these versions?

Second, you ask who bestowed the title upon Ingersoll of being "one of the greatest Biblical commentators in American history." I did. Notice I said 'commentator' I did not say 'rationalizer,' 'justifier,' or 'practitioner' in the art of 'explaining away.' Biblicists have legions well versed in the craft of mental legerdemain with regard to Scripture, but that skill did not lie within the realm of Ingersoll's area of expertise.

Third, and most pathetic of all, is your assertion that in Issue #2 I was "*alleging that Adam was born (Gen. 1:27)*" Incredible! Let me quote verbatim what I said on page 2 of the second issue. "*And lastly, others participated in even more momentous events. Adam was never born to begin with (Gen.1:27); he came into the world as a full-grown adult.*" In other words, I said the exact opposite of what you allege. And you are telling me that my research is superficial!

Letter #761 Continues (Part c)

Others are more complicated; your comments about Mt. 12:40 betray a basic ignorance of how Jews measured time, you ignored the context of John 3:13, your assumption that Lk. 23:43 has been accurately punctuated is misplaced, and finally your note of the Mt. 1:16 vs. Lk. 3:23 ignores known Jewish customs. It would be futile to deal with these when you missed the boat on the previous simple one's.

Editor's Response to Letter #761 (Part c)

The word "futile" only applies to your pathetic attempt to manufacture misunderstandings where none exist and to walk off contentedly into the sunset with nothing more than a perfunctory "you missed it" rejoinder. That time excuse with respect to Matt. 12:40 ("*For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly: so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth*") has been laid to rest on several occasions and by resurrecting it's corpse you have only exposed your failure to have read much of BE beyond the second issue. As a quick reply, tell me how you are going to cram 3 nights into the time allotted.

As far as John 3:13 ("*And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven*") is concerned, all you did was make an assertion without so much as even trying to substantiate your charge. Second Kings 2:11 shows Elijah went up to heaven far earlier than Jesus and you provided no proof to the contrary. Apparently your word alone is supposed to suffice. Sorry, but that glue won't stick.

With regard to Luke 23:43 ("*Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise*") you state "your assumption that Lk. 23:43 has been accurately punctuated is misplaced." Good grief, DC. Do you research anything? What on earth brings you to that conclusion in light of the fact that every version of the Bible I am aware of, except one, has the comma in front of the word "today." Do you have any evidence to

prove otherwise, or are we supposed to rely upon your conjectures and those of the Witnesses alone. Only the New World Translation of the Jehovah's Witnesses puts the comma after the word today, rather than before, in a transparent attempt to elude a contradiction.

And finally you criticize me for mentioning the contradiction between Matt. 1:16 which says Joseph's father is Jacob and Luke 3:23 which says his father is Heli by saying, "your note of the Mt. 1:16 vs. Lk. 3:23 ignores known Jewish customs." Really? Such as what? You mean the Jews had a custom in which two men could have the same son? Again you seem to feel that your mere assertion is sufficient proof.

Letter #761 Continues (Part d)

The basis for most of the other criticisms are revealed when you talk about inerrancy. You assume, as do the fundamentalists, that in order for the Bible to be the Word of God to man that it must be inerrant. If that assumption is removed your criticisms fall with it. In short, your criticisms are only valid against fundamentalists, or fundamentalism. They are not valid against Christianity or the Bible per se.

Editor's Response to Letter #761 (Part d)

You state, *"You assume, as do the fundamentalists, that in order for the Bible to be the Word of God to man that it must be inerrant."* My friend there is no assumption involved, only a fact. If that premise is removed, the Book "falls with it." You can no more have a divine book that is flawed than you can have a perfect God creating imperfection or a perfect God that is occasionally imperfect. Just think about the implications of what you are contending. That would mean the very writing most representative of God, indeed, the only writing representing him, would contain errors, inaccuracies, and falsehoods. That would be impossible since God and all his acts and creations are perfect by definition. You can't have perfection creating imperfection since that would nullify perfection....

Moreover, as I have said so often, how do you know what parts are true once you begin to admit certain parts are false, and who makes that determination? You are jeopardizing the credibility of the entire book.

Letter #761 Concludes (Part e)

Could you also tell me what is your background? Were you a Christian at one time (like Till)? If so, what type of denomination? What was your educational background like?

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #761 (Part e)

You can find a short autobiography of me on the last page of the 158th issue. As I noted then, I was never a churchgoer but I have always been interested in philosophy

and religion. Although the autobio contains a synopsis of my educational background, I learned infinitely more about Scripture by reading on my own than I ever obtained via formal instruction. Indeed, if I had gone through some sort of seminary or religious indoctrination program, I have no doubt that my ability to objectively critique Scripture would have been dramatically and deleteriously, if not fatally, curtailed.

Letter #762 from EK of Jamaica Estates, New York

Dear Dennis. Regarding Issue #181, Jan. 1998. In his book Does the Bible Contradict Itself? Arndt attempts to reconcile Exodus 20:14 "*Thou shall not commit adultery*" with Numbers 31:18 "*All the women children that have not known a man by lying with him keep alive for yourselves.*"

You say that if only one person is married, then God is ordering adultery. This is not the Biblical law of adultery as only if the woman is married to another man does adultery occur. (Biblical law is hardly egalitarian). David and Solomon had concubines while married but only when David had relations with Bathsheba, a woman married to Uriah, does adultery occur.

The women children who had not known a man by lying with him were undoubtedly unmarried, hence no adultery could occur under Biblical law.

Editor's Response to Letter #762

Dear EK. I certainly agree with you that biblical law is not egalitarian, but I am in a bit of a quandary as to where biblical law says that "only if the woman is married to another man does adultery occur." Could you cite chapter and verse for that contention? Essentially what we are discussing is the biblical concept of adultery. Scripture says, "*Thou shalt not commit adultery,*" but we are in disagreement as to what it means by adultery. Just what is adultery from the biblical perspective? You say a man can only commit adultery according to biblical law if the woman involved is married, but I don't agree. A couple of verses either state or imply that a married man can have relations with an unmarried woman and be guilty of adultery. The woman involved does not have to be married. Prov. 6:32 says, "*But who so committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul.*" Notice it did not say "a married woman" It says a woman, period, which may or may not include someone who is married. A much stronger verse is Matt. 5:28 in which Jesus says, "*...whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.*" Notice it does not say the woman must be married. It just says a woman, period. Admittedly neither verse says a man is committing adultery by having relations with a single woman, but it is not ruled out either. The basic problem is that the Bible does not clearly and emphatically support either of our positions. The Bible says, "Thou shalt not commit adultery" but nowhere does it clearly and unequivocally define exactly what adultery entails. And because it is not clearly defined I think my position is more reliable than yours. Only

by producing verses that state a man only commits adultery by having relations with a married woman can you hope to salvage your stance.

As far as David and Solomon having concubines is concerned, do you have any verses contending their relationships with these women did not constitute adultery? You say, "Only when-David has sexual relations with Bathsheba, a woman married to Uriah, does adultery occur." You will have to furnish a verse or verses to that effect, if your assertion is to have any credibility.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #763 from JB Via Email

(JB sent us a series of letters that represent the kind of mental agony many people endure when they decide to make that qualitative leap from religion to reality, from Scripture to sanity. Few aspects of this transition are more traumatic than confronting friends and relatives who are yet to make the escape and who are critical of those who have. Although JB was a dedicated Christian for many years and taught the Bible with exceptional comprehension, his wisdom and his conscience would no longer allow him to maintain an aura of unreality about his life. So he defected to the other side and this is part of his story. Because JB's journey, doubts, and questioning is representative of thousands, we have decided to make his correspondence available to all, many of whom can no doubt identify with his ordeal. When asked for some general personal information JB stated, "I studied the Bible and evangelical apologetic literature for 23 years on my own. I had no formal training except in Sunday School, which is almost entirely useless for really knowing Christianity. Many years ago I was in Campus Crusade for Christ in college, and I was president on my campus (Emory University in Atlanta) for one year. If it matters, I have a Ph.D. in physical chemistry from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and I work as a technologist and a manager at a major instrument company.

My objective is not really to prove anything, although that would be nice. My real objective is to demonstrate to my in-laws that I came to disbelief competently, and not out of ignorance, whim, or in reaction to an emotional or spiritual conflict, or out of evil in-tent, as they are wont to think. If I achieve this, I will consider my effort successful. It will make my relationship with my in-laws bearable again."

He begins his first letter by saying,

"The following was in response to a nasty letter my father-in-law sent me upon first learning of my deconversion. My intent was to set the tone for a cordial relationship, to prevent my father-in-law from cutting off all conversation, which he had threatened to do in his letter, and to undermine the false assumptions he was making about my loss of faith....

In response to my father-in-law's letter I said, "For 23 years I was a Christian. During that time -- but especially after having children -- I was very serious about living the

Christian life and I studied the Bible to learn how to live it. As I studied, I began to encounter difficulties. For many years I overlooked these difficulties and accepted Christianity anyway, believing that the difficulties must have resolutions which I simply had not discovered yet. However, the more I studied, the more numerous and prominent the difficulties became, to the extent that I could not overlook them any longer. I redoubled my efforts, studying the Bible and reading the apologists, and giving Christianity every benefit of the doubt. One day last Christmas season I sat down and opened my Bible for personal devotions and suddenly recognized that I did not believe it anymore. The cumulative force of the difficulties thoroughly and completely discredited Christianity, even for a sincere and willing believer, and the church simply cannot answer the difficulties. I was a sincere, dedicated Christian, seriously trying to live the Christian life, and I lost faith as a result of studying the Bible -- quite contrary to my own wish. I know that my very existence, as a Christian who rejects the faith based on knowledge of the faith, is threatening, and I understand why you have reacted so strongly. My wife and I have experienced many of the same emotions about this that you have. Our loss of faith is something that happened to us while we were doing the things that Christians are supposed to do -- not something that we willfully or maliciously decided. (Why would we? It would have been much easier to continue on as believers.) The whole process has been wrenching for us, and, like you, I have lost many hours of sleep because of it. However, knowing what I know, it is impossible for me to believe again. Belief is not something a person decides to do -- belief is something a person experiences as a result of what he or she knows. To affirm something that 's impossible for me to believe would be lying, and I cannot do it with a clear conscience. [My father-in-law had told me I should believe anyway, whether Christianity is true or not!]

To one of my in-laws I said, I am glad your letter said that you want to maintain good relations between the families. We want the same. It is because we wanted to maintain good family relations that we did not reveal our loss of faith when it first occurred. We wanted to slowly move away from the faith to give you all a chance to get used to the idea and spare you the shock. But we were found out by accident, and so now we all must deal with it. You also said you do not want to debate the issue, and we agree, because debate would result in a family feud. However, I believe that there will always be tension between our families if we close off two-way dialog about the issue. I am willing to discuss the issues with you or any other family member.... Can we keep open the possibility of having a fair, two-way dialog?"

(Next month we will read the letter JB sent to his pastor--Ed.)

Letter #764 from WS via Email

Dear Mr. McKinsey. I've enjoyed your internet site that provides some good arguments for biblical errancy. I am also opposed to the inerrantists. I was reading your 1983 article on "Slavery" and thought that another good point to include is in the book of Philemon. Paul is sending the runaway slave, Onesimus, back to his Christian master, Philemon. This is especially good since it's clear that Christians were also slave owners. Another point in Philemon was that found in verse 8, where Paul

encourages Philemon to act out of love when his slave returns, but also recognizes Philemon's right to deal harshly (out of duty) with Onesimus. I haven't read all your commentary to know if you touched on this point, but thought I would bring it to your attention.

Editor's Response to Letter #764

That's an account of the biblical attitude toward slavery that we've never discussed. Thanks for mentioning it.

Letter #765 from DH of Duluth, Minnesota

Dennis. In BE #180, response to letter #754, you say that a radio producer said Robert Ingersoll was, "full of prunes." Well, I agree. Prunes are good for you. Perhaps a healthy dose of Ingersoll prunes would help relieve the mental constipation that seems to inflict so many of these inerrantists. I take a bit of Ingersoll every now and then to keep the mental juices flowing. And of course, no Paine - no gain.

Letter #766 from KB of New York, New York

Let me state that I consider your efforts to expose the true nature of the Bible to be invaluable. I have already bought my brother a copy of your book, and he enjoyed it immensely. I am also the proud owner of your book and every issue of "Biblical Errancy." I have credits equivalent to a masters in philosophy, and I am convinced that reading your comprehensive and exacting scholarship has made me a more careful reader. Dennis, you are indeed a national treasure. Keep up the good work. The road is long, the battles are many, and the enemies are well entrenched and determined, but the war must be fought. Before I started reading your work, I thought this war was a lost cause. Thanks to you I know that it is not. I will continue to do what I can to help on my end.

Editor's Response to Letter #766

Thanks for the kudos. The greatest assistance you could render us at this time would be to play our TV programs on your local public access channel.

Letter #767 from TB of Little Rock, Arkansas

Dennis McKinsey. Hello, my name is TB. I spoke with you once on the phone earlier this year; perhaps you remember. Anyway, I wanted to let you know that I have attended the public access classes required by our local cable company for use of the public access station, and can use it whenever I like. I would be more than happy to air your shows. Please send me as many tapes as you would like aired.

Editor's Response to Letter #767

Bingo! That's precisely the kind of letter I have been seeking from people for lo these many months, TB. Your assistance is most appreciated and that is stating it mildly.

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

REVIEW

DOES THE BIBLE CONTRADICT ITSELF? (Part 3)

Last month's issue discussed a couple of contradictions addressed by W. Arndt in his book *Does the Bible Contradict Itself?* that have bothered biblicists for centuries. We can now continue with additional examples.

On page 126 he confronts the conflict between 1 Sam. 16:1-2 (*"And the Lord said unto Samuel, How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, see I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? Fill thine horn with oil and go; I will send thee to Jesse, the Bethlehemite; for I have provided Me a king among his sons. And Samuel said, How can I go? If Saul hear it, he will kill me. And the Lord said, Take an heifer with thee and say, I am come to sacrifice to the Lord"*) and Prov. 12:22 (*"Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord; but they who deal truly are His delight"*).

Arndt states, "The charge is made that God, who in the text from the Book of Proverbs strictly prohibits lying or deception, in the passage from First Samuel Himself commands His Prophet to engage in an act of duplicity and that hence the same God who forbids deceiving people in one passage in another endorses it. A careful consideration will show that the charge is...unfounded. In 1 Samuel 16:1-2 God orders Samuel to anoint one of the sons of Jesse as king of Israel, and when Samuel points out that this is a very dangerous thing, God orders him to offer up a sacrifice at the house of Jesse and on that occasion to attend to the anointing of the king. There is no reason to charge God with ordering Samuel to do something dishonest in this case." Wrong! Of course, there is. God told Samuel to say he had come to sacrifice to the Lord when that's not the reason at all. It's merely a pretext.

Arndt continues, "It is true, when Samuel was asked why he was going to the house of Jesse, his reply was, to offer up a sacrifice to Jehovah. But was that telling a lie? No, he went with that very purpose, and nothing compelled him to tell inquirers of all his designs in going to the house of Jesse." Another falsehood. That certainly was not the very purpose; that was a subterfuge, a ruse, a concoction. In fact, the 16th chapter does not even directly state there was a sacrifice. The fifth verse focuses on this issue the closest but it does not specifically state that a sacrifice occurred.

Arndt continues, "There is certainly nothing dishonest in our speech if, when on the way to the house of a friend in whose company we wish to inspect some lands which we should like to purchase, we simply make the statement, on being asked as to the

object of our trip, that we intend to pay a visit to our friend. In that case we are stating the truth, and no one will charge that we are deceiving the questioner by our reply."

As if we did not get enough of this kind of deception and double talk from our political leaders, now we have to endure it from religious spokespersons who are supposedly operating on a higher plain. To say that no one will charge that we are deceiving the questioner by our reply is patently false. I will. That is by no means the real reason and to say that we are doing so in order to pay a visit to our friend is trickery. That is neither the reason nor the motivation, merely a by-product.

Secondly, the parallel Arndt draws between the two accounts is invalid. In 1 Sam. 16:1-2 God not only created a deception but a lying pretext as well, while in the second account the speaker is relating one correct aspect of the whole event but omitting some key information. Although both accounts are deceptions, the main difference is that in the former a direct lie is concocted, submitted, and propounded.

Arndt continues by stating, "Haley (author of the famous apologetic work Alleged Discrepancies in the Bible--Ed.) has this paragraph, which states the situation quite exactly: It is our privilege to withhold the truth from persons who have no right to know it and who, as we have reason to believe, would make a bad use of it. Lord Harvey well observes: 'Secrecy and concealment are not the same as duplicity and falsehood. Concealment of a good purpose, for a good purpose, is clearly justifiable.... in God's dealings with individuals, concealment of His purpose till the proper time for its development is the rule....'" But God is not merely concealing information, as is occurring in the land deal, he is directly telling a man to lie, pure and simple. To perform a sacrifice was not the reason for Samuel going to Jesse. Although Lord Harvey's quote has merit, duplicity and falsehood rather than secrecy and concealment apply to God's behavior in the original contradiction.

On page 132 Arndt faces the contradiction between Job 2:3, 7 ("*And the Lord said to Satan, Hast thou considered My servant Job that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and upright man, one that feareth God and escheweth evil?.... So went Satan forth from the presence of the Lord and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown?*") and Prov. 12:21 ("*There shall no evil happen to the just; but the wicked shall be filled with mischief*"). Arndt states, "No evil shall happen to the just man, says the Bible. And yet, according to the same Bible, Job, who was a just man, had to suffer evil if ever a man did. How shall we harmonize the declaration in Proverbs with the history of Job? The solution lies in the meaning of the term evil, which in the sense employed Prov. 12:21 describes real hurt or damage to us. Did Job experience evil of this sort? He did not. We must remember that his sufferings were merely temporary, that they led him into a deeper knowledge of God and His ways, that they served as a fire of purification, which made him a better man, that they were the precursor of greater wealth and bliss than he had enjoyed before.... For a while it seemed, it is true, as though Job's lot was a terrible one. in reality it was most blessed."

At this stage of his book Arndt appears to be merely groping for answers.

First, he contends, "We must remember that his sufferings were merely temporary" which is wholly irrelevant. Who cares how long they lasted. The fact is that Prov. 12:21 says "*There shall no evil happen to the just.*" It says NO evil. It did not say the just man will experience evil for only a short period of time or temporarily.

Second, Arndt alleges, "his sufferings...led him into a deeper knowledge of God and His ways" which is also irrelevant, since Prov. 12:21 says "*There shall no evil happen to the just.*" Arndt is trying to shift our focus by saying, "Yes he suffered, but it made him a better man." To Arndt I would say, "What difference does that make in so far as this contradiction is concerned? He suffered, didn't he!"

Third, Arndt states, "Prov. 12:21 describes real hurt or damage to us. Did Job experience evil of this sort? He did not." Is he serious! I wonder if he has ever had boils or known someone who has.

And finally, Arndt states, "For a while it seemed, it is true, as though Job's lot was a terrible one." Whom is he trying to snow! There's no "seemed" to it. It was terrible and if Arndt doubts this, then perhaps he would be willing to endure "*sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown.*" That should awaken him to the errors of his ways with celerity.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #768 from DA of La Puente, California (Part a)

(DA wrote the following comments regarding our 179th issue in which we wrote a critique of DeHaan's 1962 apologetic work entitled Genesis and Evolution--Ed.).

You're dealing with an ancient book written in 1962. OK it went into a 16th printing in 1978, but that is still a long time ago and we may never encounter someone who even remembers the text.... You should avoid reviewing such forgotten works. A quick visit to a book store's religious department might show you what people are actually reading and what they need analysis of.

Editor's Response to Letter #768 (Part a)

I can't help but feel you are trying to plow me under with laughter sometimes, DA, because virtually every one of your letters has at least one belly-shaker, and this appears to be it. So a book written in 1962 is too ancient to be reliable and I should consult more current writings. If you think 1962 is too ancient to be potent, imagine what that does to the Bible. If reliability is dependent upon age, and the older a work is the less credible or powerful it becomes, then the Bible must be among the most dubious and anemic writings in all of history. With supporters like you the Bible does not need critics like me.

Second, you mean biblical defenses were less powerful 35 years ago than they are today. Really! Well what tomes of today do you feel are more potent than those of

Haley (1876), Collett (Before World War I), Torrey (1909), Arndt (1955), DeHoff (1962), and DeHaan (1962) to cite only a few examples?

Letter #768 Continues (Part b)

(On page 1 I quote DeHaan as having said, "The first verse of the Bible determines whether you are a believer or an infidel. What you think of this verse determines your whole attitude toward the rest of Scripture." Later, on the same page DeHaan states, "You either believe it or reject it." To all of this I said, "This is the kind of subtle indoctrination that is indicative of the more crafty apologetic writers...."--Ed.).

To this DA asks, "Your in your face flat statement is subtle? I don't know if I want to read something blunt."

Editor's Response to Letter #768 (Part b)

You have great difficulty interpreting what lies on the page before you, DA, especially when it does not conform to what you want to read or interferes with your predisposition to transform texts into something desirable. I said DeHaan's statement was a "kind of subtle indoctrination." I did not say my comment was intended to be subtle.

Letter #768 Continues (Part c)

(In the 179th issue I said, "one can only shudder at the prospect of using the Bible as the final authority in a subject like chemistry, when none of the chemical elements is mentioned--"Ed.).

DA now says,

I would prefer a more specialized text myself, but my computer program finds 81 mentions of iron, 156 mentions of gold, 123 mentions of silver, 5 mentions of tin, and several mentions of lead...in just the OT. That is several hundred above none.

Editor's Response to Letter #768 (Part c)

Now who are you trying to deceive, DA? None of these "mentions" has anything to do with the science of chemistry but, instead, are directly related to mining, the extraction of valuable minerals, measuring someone's wealth, or constructing with minerals. Do you see any reference to symbols, atomic weights, atomic volumes, or other chemical properties of elements? In fact, do you see any reference to the science of chemistry, period? Of course not. Biblical writers would not know a periodic table from a four-legged kitchen contraption upon which you eat. It is precisely this kind of sleight of hand that causes biblical apologetics to be held in such low esteem by knowledgeable and unbiased observers.

Letter #768 Continues (Part d)

You state, "Matter is all that exists and it has always been here; it has always existed." You might want to recheck your physics. Big Bang theory says there was no matter prior to that event, circa 10-20 billion BC. (A bit before 4000 BC perhaps, but a creation of matter in both cases.)....

Editor's Response to Letter #768 (Part d)

You need to recheck not only your physics but your logic as well, DA; there is no "might" to it.

First, you assume that the Big Bang theory is the last word in astrophysics. Steady State theoreticians would hardly agree with that and they are considerably more knowledgeable in this whole field than you will ever be. To them matter has always existed.

Second, if matter came into existence by an explosion, a big bang, then the obvious question to be asked would be: What banged? If something exploded, then it had to exist prior to the existence of the explosion.

Third, you talk as if the Big Bang theory is a proven fact and you were an eyewitness. Your ideas may be ancient, but you aren't. It is a theory, not a demonstrable, conclusive fact. Why do you think it is called the Big Bang Theory?

Fourth, you say ten to 20 billion years BC is "A bit before 4000 BC perhaps." With figures that divergent, tongue-in-cheek won't even provide you an escape.

And fifth, you say "creation of matter" in both cases. So, in so far as the development of the universe is concerned, you are equating the Big Bang theory with the mythology of biblical creation. I am sure Big Bang proponents are glad to hear that. Why don't you just call them pseudo-scientists and be done with it.

Letter #768 Continues (Part e)

You state, "Evolution does indeed teach there is upward development...." Not really. Evolution tells us one species comes from another, but only our own bias classifies this as upward development. There is change, but it can either be "upward," "downward," or "sideways." Like beauty, the direction is largely in the eye of the beholder.

Editor's Response to Letter #768 (Part e)

First, considering the fact that life evolved from life forms not appreciably different from simple one-celled organisms to beings with an extremely complex physiological makeup, including a very complicated brain, I would say that evolutionists have proven their case beyond any reasonable doubt. Bias has nothing to do with scientific fact. Are you saying organisms have not in fact become more complex and intricate as time has passed? Are you saying life began with mankind and evolved downward eventually giving rise to viruses, one-celled organisms, etc.? I assume you have

something to substantiate a theory as bizarre as this. Would you care to provide some examples of evolution going downward? Some of our readers would probably be more interested than I.

Second, how can a scientific fact as to whether or not an organism is becoming more or less complex or more or less adapted to its environment be comparable to making a subjective judgment regarding beauty? We are dealing with science, not artwork.

Letter #768 Continues (Part f)

You say, "Prisons are heavily populated with people who have low self-esteem....," Better recheck your sources.... Low self-esteem has been a liberal buzz phrase these last few years, and it is both badly defined, and blamed for most everything, without much attempt to produce any actual evidence. When actual research has been done, the results have been rather painful to the theory. People in prison in fact have rather high self-esteem, certainly higher than the facts justified. Those with high self-esteem think they deserve the other guy's money and that they can get away with the crime.... Increasing self-esteem of criminals would increase crime.

Editor's Response to Letter #768 (Part f)

First, you could do with some checking yourself my friend. Only in your case you need to check sources other than those upon which you are relying. Prisons are heavily populated with school dropouts, low achievers in employment and other enterprises, and people whose environmental upbringing has been anything but conducive to the enhancement of self-pride and contentment with one's character. And you are subtly trying to tell me that these are factors favorable to having a high opinion of one's capabilities and worth. Who are you trying to beguile?

Second, would you be so kind as not to characterize me as a liberal or insidiously allege that I am blaming low self-esteem for most everything. When and where did I say that? Would you either cite chapter and verse or confess your blunder.

Third, research by whom? The right wing or fundamentalist sources with whom I suspect you are allied judging from some of your extraneous comments! Now those are reliable sources, indeed!

Fourth, you really exposed your rightist or fundamentalist philosophy in regard to this issue when you said, those with high self-esteem think they deserve the other guy's money and that they can get away with the crime. Since time immemorial you and your colleagues have been preaching that the conditions in which one is raised, heredity, and other material factors are of far less importance to a person's status than individual decisions and responsibility, when that philosophy is no truer now than the first day it was uttered eons ago. You and your cohorts have always tried to blame the victim rather than the conditions or system in which the victim was raised or to which he was subjected. If that is true, then carefully explain to me why blacks comprise between 50% and 60% of the prison population in the United States while they are

only 11% of the general population? You would do well to watch our 59th TV program in which this issue is covered more extensively.

Fifth, your Christian indoctrination really came to the fore when you said, "Increasing self-esteem of criminals would increase crime." So low self-esteem and a poor opinion of one's self worth is beneficial to society as whole. You would have us believe that the more people look upon themselves as pieces of dung, to quote Martin Luther, the better off we all are. It is just that kind of comment that really blows the man-hole cover and exposes your philosophy for the sewer that it is.

And lastly, I said "Prisons are heavily populated with people who have low self-esteem..." which is not only accurate but qualified, while you said, "People in prison in fact have rather high self-esteem..." which is not only inaccurate but absolutist in nature. You're following in the footsteps of your favorite book, I see. If you had bothered to take a simple course in logic you would know that your comment is phrased in such a manner as to refer to all people in prison, which is preposterous. Every person in prison has high self-esteem? Are you serious? On second thought, maybe you have more than one belly-shaker this month.

But we are getting too far afield from biblical errancy. BE is not a politico/sociological journal.

Letter #768 Continues (Part g)

With regard to my Letter #750...I never said you should not have the last word in BE. Rather I said you should not cry so hard when the editors of other publications deny you the last word. They are simply doing what you do.

Editor's Response to Letter #768 (Part g)

Don't you have any intellectual integrity? Let's revisit the dialogue verbatim. On page three of the November 1997 issue I said, "DA begins his letter by quoting me as having said to him in Issue 168, 'I get the last word in an individual issue, since I don't know of any other practical way it can be done, do you?'" He replies, "Sure. Do it the same way loads of editors have done with my frequently hostile letters to them. Print it and make no response. Highly practical...."

Clearly you are saying I should not have the last word but I should merely print the words of others without commenting upon them. For you to assert that you never alleged I should not have the last word is patently false.

After laying down this false premise, which is nothing more than an attempt to lead people astray, you falsely allege, "You should not cry so hard when the editors of other publications deny you the last word". When did I "cry so hard" because "the editors of other publications denied me the last word?" You made this charge previously and it was answered in the 168th issue, showing that your memory appears to be no better than your logic.

In regard to this issue, I also stated on page 2 in the 168th issue, "Fourth, the word 'steamed' is not only inaccurate but hyperbolic, unless, of course, you choose to characterize every objection as being 'steamed.'

You love to close with some kind of smart aleck remark, so I will invoke one of your favorites by saying see you next month.

(To Be Continued in the Next Issue)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #769 from DC Via Email

(DC has some problems with the idea of God which generates several tests in his mind--Ed.)

Dear Mr. McKinsey,

Test #1: If God can do anything, can He find something that HE can't do? If He can find something that he can't do, then is he still omnipotent? If not, do you credit God with only limited omnipotence?

Test #2: If God can do anything, and if He knows everything, does He know a way to kill himself? If so, and God can be killed, is He really Eternal or Omnipotent? If not, then is He really Omniscient?

Test #3: The Bible teaches that Jesus died for your sins in the ultimate sacrifice. Is this true? Some men have sacrificed their lives for other men. They have died and not come back to life. Some ordinary men have died for their friends with no expectation of coming back to life. Jesus reportedly expected to come back to life and reportedly did come back to life, ie., his death was temporary. If you accept that a man's death is a meaningful sacrifice, then how can a temporary death be superior to the permanent death of some ordinary men? If the death of Jesus is a true story, then how was it an ultimate sacrifice, when men have already done the same or more than God?

Test #4: The Bible teaches that modesty is a virtue. Yet, the Bible also teaches that God is Holy, perfect, and to be praised forever.

Editor's Response to Letter #769

Dear DC. Your questions are well taken but why are you directing them to me? Wouldn't it be more appropriate to address to them to the religionists?

Letter #770 from JB Via Email

(Last month's issue contained a letter in which JB explained why he left Christianity. In this second letter JB continues the kind of inter-relational conversation one can

expect during an open rejection of religion in general and the Bible in particular by relating the following statement to his pastor.)

To my former pastor:

Last night I learned that my father-in-law called you and told you that my wife and I have lost faith. Let me confirm that it's true that we have indeed lost faith. I had intended to inform you myself at a time of my own choosing, because I did not want you to be in the dark indefinitely about whatever must have happened to us. Anyway, I might as well take this opportunity to anticipate some questions you may have, so I will do so now.

First, the reason we lost faith is simply that we came to the conclusion that the Christian religion is false. I came to this conclusion, quite contrary to my own wish, after years of sincere and thorough study of the Bible and evangelical apologists. My wife followed me into unbelief soon after I lost faith, because of her long and intimate familiarity with my comprehensive knowledge of the Bible and my ability to make sense of it and defend it, which I had demonstrated over the years while leading my small group Bible study. When I told her that I had lost faith because of the serious and foundational fallacies of the Bible, she knew that my new position had to be well grounded in fact, because nothing else would have caused me to change. She knows that there is no secret persistent sin, or angry defiance against God, or unpleasant experience with the church behind my loss of faith. She had seen me struggle to resist coming to this conclusion, but the contrary evidence overwhelmed my intellect, and, if I may paraphrase Josh McDowell, "my heart cannot worship what my mind cannot accept." There is much more that could be said here, but I want to be brief. If you inquire, I will be glad to fill in the story with more detail.

Second, neither the members of my small group nor anyone else at MC [church] know that we have lost faith. When I lost faith, I simply told my small group that leading the Bible study had become too stressful, and that I would not be leading it anymore -- the truth, but not the whole truth. We did not reveal our loss of faith for two reasons. ...

We decided that it would be too traumatic to tell the children.... Instead we are teaching them to think critically and helping them come to their own conclusions as they are ready.

And I did not want to shake the faith of my small group members, especially while we ourselves were in the throes of coping with the collapse of our entire world view. So, since no one knows, you will not need to do any damage control with my former small group members.

Third, I release you from any bond of confidentiality that my father-in-law may have placed on you when he spoke with you. Although we don't make a point of telling people, my wife and I do not mind any longer if other people know that we have lost faith.... You may mention or discuss the matter with others at your own discretion....

Fourth, you may take our names off the church roll at your leisure. We received a call from a deacon of the church shortly after we stopped coming to church, and I believe we told him we were taking a break from church to reevaluate our beliefs and to spend more time together as a family. Of course, we no longer expect to come back, and so our names can come off the roll. We are not in a hurry for you to do this, however, as it makes little difference to us whether we are on the roll, although it is probably abhorrent to you to keep atheists on the church roll any longer than absolutely necessary.

Fifth, we harbor no animosity toward you or the church in general. Some church leaders, whose power of reason is strong enough that they should know better, are culpable for misleading or deceiving people, because they immorally teach dogmas whose truth they recognize to be uncertain. I regard most church leaders, however, simply as victims of the Christian Delusion. I believe the Delusion commandeers the leader's rational faculties and shields itself from the light of reason. I regard myself as formerly a victim of the Delusion, and I regard you as still a victim of the Delusion. If I regarded you as undeluded, then I *would* have animosity toward you for knowingly manipulating people with falsehoods. I hope that the impact of my loss of faith will put a chink in the armor of your Delusion, and ultimately liberate you from its repressive control. After the difficult transition period, life really is better this side of Christianity.

Finally, I regret that we left the church without a word, especially after having worked with you in various ways to make MC [church] successful. But from our point of view, we had no other choice. How could we possibly have asked you for pastoral support to figure out how to live without faith?! And the relationships we had cultivated in our small group were exactly antithetical to the kind of relationships we would have needed to support us through this loss. Your duty and theirs would have been to shepherd us back into the fold, and so we had to struggle through the loss of faith on our own. In this limited sense, loss of faith is harder than the loss of a loved one, since there is no support of (believing) friends or family to carry one through a loss of faith. Although the news has reached you earlier than I would have chosen, I am glad that you now know why we left. It has bothered me that we left you uninformed about the nature of our departure. In any case, I hope that our relationship can remain cordial, although obviously it must be on different terms than before.

(Next month JB will describe the philosophical problems he had with the Bible--Ed.)

Letter #771 from RR of Palestine, Texas

You may find this interesting. Those whom Jesus raised from the dead, cured of leprosy, or blindness, failed to become his followers. Not one of them appeared at his trial. Not one offered to bear witness of his miraculous power. Certainly there never was a greater miracle, and yet Matthew, who was present-- who saw the Lord rise, ascend and disappear--did not think it worth mentioning. Christian scholars admit that they do not know why.

They also admit that, if the four gospels were written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, they must have been written in Hebrew. And yet a Hebrew manuscript of any one of these gospels has never been found. All have been, and are, in Greek.

Letter #772 from JT Via Email

Dennis. Just got #176, in which FA (Letter #735 under Dialogue and Debate) says Jesus never missed a meal. Yet, Matthew 4:2 says: "And he fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was hungry." So he missed around 120 meals in a row.

Editor's Response to Letter #772

Good point, JT. I should have mentioned it in my reply. Can't get em all. There are just too many holes in their arguments.

Letter #773 from Jimmy Via Email

Dear Dennis. I am a born-again skeptic. Thank you so much for the availability of your Biblical Errancy newsletters via the web. I am a recent walk-away from Christianity, and your impeccable logic has helped me to see things more clearly. I consider myself a survivor, and I consider you a helper. Soon I will be strong enough to start working to right the wrongs which I have committed as a Christian, a fundamentalist, and a deceiver.

Issue #184 April 1998, Editor: Dennis McKinsey

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

COMMENTARY

This month's issue will be devoted entirely to letters from our readers and next month we'll resume our Review of Arndt's work entitled Does the Bible Contradict Itself?.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #768 from DA of La Puente, California Continues from Last Month (Part h)

(On the 4th page in the 179th Issue DA said, "When I point out that errors in the KJV have been copied in many successors, you make the extravagant claim that I am saying '...the Greek and Hebraic translators of modern versions agreeing with the KJV are incompetent.' Not at all. I am saying they are producing flawed text, which is what you expect of any mortal in any case." He now wishes to add--Ed.),

No I do not have to say the editors and translators who agree with the KJV are incompetent when I say they are wrong.... I do not have to claim, much less show, that some translators were incompetent when I call them wrong. I need merely show they were wrong.

Editor's Response to Letter #768 (Part h)

Don't try to expand the discussion to broad generalizations, DA. In so far as the specific problem we were discussing is concerned, you are attributing incompetence to the modern translators who agree with the KJ version of the verse under discussion. We were discussing a particular verse; so don't try to widen the topic in order to make it look as if I am accusing you of saying they were incompetent in every area, period.

Letter #768 Continues (Part i)

(In the same issue I said to DA, "Like all those indoctrinated into Christianity, you look for the kind of ulterior motives that are so prominent within those victimized by your own ideology." He now wishes to say--Ed.),

Now, ignoring the errors in your attempt at long distance psychiatry, this is the pot calling the kettle black. Evolution teaches us there are nothing but ulterior motives, and that the Christian ideas of charity, love, forgiveness, etc. are merely disguised self-interest, or pathological....

Editor's Response to Letter #768 (Part i)

You are accusing me of practicing long-distance psychiatry with respect to one individual, namely you, when you have the chutzpah to accuse all evolutionists of teaching that self-interest or pathological factors lie behind all Christian ideas of charity, love, and forgiveness. Talk about broad generalizations with respect to motivations in nearly all locations, not to mention a noticeable absence of proof! Do you have any evidence that evolution teaches what you allege? Some evolutionists do and some don't, but to make an all-encompassing indictment of everyone is ridiculous. Apparently you learned about evolution in a fundamentalist Sunday school or its equivalent.

Letter #768 Continues (Part j)

[After citing Ezek. 30:12 ("*And I will make the rivers of Egypt dry*") in the 168th issue, I asked, "What rivers are in Egypt other than the Nile?" DA wants to return to this issue for a third time. He appears to be obsessed with the number of rivers in Egypt and has decided to anoint this as the issue upon which to make his verbal stand at the Little Big Horn--Ed.],

You wish to assert Biblical error on the grounds that there is only one river in Egypt, the Nile. But there are a number of problems for you to overcome first.

One that I have not brought up before is that the Nile is not the only river in Egypt. The others are poor things compared to the Nile. Indeed, they may not classify as more than wadi (rivers that exist only during the rainy season), but the climate was considerably wetter in 500 B.C. So some may have been full rivers at that time. In any case, the dictionary definition of wadi is a seasonal river, which makes it a river, and Egypt has a lot of wadi.

Editor's Response to Letter #768 (Part j)

First, where did you get the idea that a wadi has to be a river. Egypt could have hundreds of wadi and not one is a river. Webster's New World Dictionary defines a wadi as "*a valley, ravine, or watercourse that is dry except during the rainy season. And 2, the stream or rush of water that flows through it.*" Notice it says "stream," meaning they could all be merely streams, unless, of course, you wish to claim every stream is a river, which could make the ditch that sometimes flows behind my neighbor's house equivalent to a river. Next you'll be telling me the water flowing from an Egyptian's sluice toward a ditch is a river.

Second, you say, "the climate was considerably wetter in 500 B.C." Where on earth did you get that data? What climatological or meteorological agency did you consult for that piece of enlightenment?

Third, you say, "So some may have been full rivers at that time." Now you are engaged in rank speculation of the most unscholarly kind. You say "may have been." Remember what I said in regard to Morison's book Who Moved the Stone? If you

don't, I strongly suggest you reread that commentary. You are not only guessing, or should I say hoping, but acting as if that is the equivalent of proof.

Fourth, you say, "the dictionary definition of wadi is a seasonal river, which makes it a river, and Egypt has a lot of wadi." Well, here we have a direct clash between sources. My dictionary does not say by any means that a wadi must be a river. That is by no means a requirement. My Hammond's Atlas shows some wadi in Egypt and defines a wadi as "an intermittent stream." Nothing is said about a wadi having to be a river.

Letter #768 Continues (Part k)

As noted before, you are the one asserting some-thing, and thus the burden of proof falls on you. You like to dodge this by asserting the irrelevant "an extraordinary claim requires extraordinary proof," but that clearly does not apply to the very mundane statement under discussion. You assert this is a contradiction. Thus you must prove it.

Editor's Response to Letter #768 (Part k)

I am beginning to worry about you, DA.

First, what was the original problem? In case you have forgotten or prefer not to remember, it arose from the following. [After citing Ezek. 30:12 ("*And I will make the rivers of Egypt dry*") in the 168th issue, I asked, "What rivers are in Egypt other than the Nile?"] If you will note, there is a question mark following my comment. So, you have clearly departed reality when you claim I am the one asserting something. I asked a question; I did not assert anything.

Second, the Bible refers to the "*rivers of Egypt*," so it is incumbent upon either the Bible or its supporters to provide proof of same. To turn the tables, the burden of proof is on you, your book, and its proponents, not me. You say, "You assert this is a contradiction. Thus you must prove it," which is quite wrong. I did not assert anything; I asked a question. And I don't have to reconcile the problem that exists; you do. You must prove there are other rivers.

Third, you allege I "like to dodge this by asserting the irrelevant 'an extraordinary claim requires extraordinary proof.'" Where on earth did you get that pearl? Can't you get anything right? Would you be so kind as to cite one instance in the entire history of this publication where I ever made that comment. Once you realize your search is fruitless, would you be so gracious as to write a retraction with an appropriate apology. As far as I am concerned an extraordinary claim requires any kind of solid proof, extraordinary, ordinary, or otherwise. Apparently you have confused me with someone else. When it comes to miracles and the supernatural I am desperate for any proof worthy of the name. As I have said before, it would be difficult to find topics that get more gab with so little dab.

Letter #768 Continues (Part l)

That in turn means you must prove what the text actually says. Quoting the KJV, known to be frequently wrong, will not do here. When other versions say "river," "streams," or other alternatives, you must demonstrate why "rivers" is the correct text.

Editor's Response to Letter #768 (Part l)

As I said before, DA, you don't listen very well to prior replies and frankly it's becoming something of an annoyance. Several of your letters have shown that you place tremendous importance upon this defense, even though I have exposed its inadequacies on several occasions. So, I am going to put this vapid ruse into its crypt one more time and I trust you will do all of us the favor of letting it remain entombed permanently. I am under no obligation to nail down the wording of your book. Let me repeat that. I am under no obligation to provide the correct wording of your book. You, on the other hand, are saddled with that horrible burden. For you to say that there is a conflict between versions with respect to what the correct wording should be--streams, rivers, and other alternatives in our example--and to conclude from that that I can't prove a contradiction because I don't know the correct wording is utterly futile. Why do I have to keep repeating the same point. You are admitting not only that biblicists don't know what the text says but that you don't either. Therefore that part of Scripture is, for all practical purposes, worthless and should be expunged from the Bible. If you don't know what it says, then why allow it to remain? As I have said before, biblicists have resolved the contradiction by eradicating a part of Scripture in the process. True, you can't prove a contradiction if you can't be sure of the wording. But if you can't be sure of the wording, then that part of Scripture becomes useless and should be deleted. It's only cluttering up the book by adding vacuous verbiage.

The bottom line in all of this is that if biblicists insist on using this defense with respect to innumerable biblical contradictions, then they will, indeed, have resolved innumerable biblical contradictions. But they will have done so only by abolishing most of Scripture in the process, a solution with which I am in wholehearted agreement. If biblicists want to eliminate contradictions by eradicating parts of the Bible, then I certainly can live with that. I would not think of standing in their way. True, you can't prove a contradiction if you can't definitely pin down the wording; but if you can't definitely pin down the wording, then you no longer have Scripture that is definite. In effect, part of the Bible has vanished, and if that system were followed throughout, there would be no need for this publication and I could relax with the feeling of a job well done. For some reason or other a modified version of the old Baby-with-the-bathwater adage comes to mind. You threw out the dirty water of contradictions, but the bathtub in which they reside went along for the ride.

Letter #768 Continues (Part m)

And of course, you must prove that "rivers" is in fact in conflict with the facts.

Editor's Response to Letter #768 (Part m)

As I have already shown, I don't have to prove anything of the sort. There is no "of course" to it. I originally asked a question and it is up to you to provide an answer accompanied with some proof. And until you do, the statement is not to be accepted simply because the Bible says so.

Letter #768 Continues (Part n)

Which brings up the dictionary. (At this point DA quotes me as having said to him, "you can't even find an accurate Webster's Dictionary, since it would be ridiculous to define a river as 'a natural stream of water bigger than a creek and emptying into an ocean.' Where on earth did you get that book?")

Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, College Edition, 1962. p. 1258. Also Webster's Revised-Updated Popular Library Pocket-sized Edition, 1968, p. 468. Also a baker's dozen of other dictionaries, mostly of the 2000+ page size, all of which give definitions that allowed delta branches to be called rivers, and offered no definition that rejected such a use. It would appear you did not even consult a dictionary in making a response. Having just told us to do the research, you might want to take your own advice.

Editor's Response to Letter #768 (Part n)

You are one of the most deceptive and unprincipled apologists I have ever encountered, DA, and believe me, I have crossed views with some real flimflam artists. I asked you where on earth you got a dictionary defining a river as '*a natural stream of water bigger than a creek and emptying into an ocean.*' Instead, you completely evaded my question by focusing on whether or not deltas are rivers and said, "a baker's dozen of other dictionaries...all of which give definitions that allowed delta branches to be called rivers." What does that have to do with my question? Nothing! You know it and I know it. And why did you try to slip out through a sewer pipe? Because you probably did some actual research and discovered, much to your chagrin and embarrassment, that none of the dictionaries supported your ridiculous comment. My 1700 page Webster's New World Dictionary (Second College Edition, 1982) defines a river as: "*a natural stream of water larger than a creek emptying into an ocean, a lake, or another river*" which is not only accurate but one with which I would fully agree. I checked several other dictionaries and they all gave essentially the same definition. I did not have to do any research to know your definition was absurd. Common sense was quite sufficient in light of the fact that I could name plenty of rivers that did not empty into oceans. There can be no doubt as to who is deficient in the research department because your commentaries keep submitting your name.

Letter #768 Continues (Part o)

Of course, you might also try (sic) reading what is right in front of you. I said, and you quote "main definition of 'river' is a 'natural stream...'" The main definition is not the only definition, just the prime one. In addition, note the three dots ... that end the

quote. This is of course a standard way of saying the quote is incomplete... Irrelevance is the case here. The rest of the quote was "..., a lake, or another river." But that is of no importance to us.

Editor's Response to Letter #768 (Part o)

What utter drivel! All you are doing is drowning in your own river, DA, your river of deceit and disingenuousness. What do you mean the later part of the dictionary definition is irrelevant? It is not only highly relevant but it is what makes the definition true and proves you engaged in prevarication. It's a key part. You don't know what you are talking about and are only hoping you can snow your reader into believing you do. Let's return to your original comment. You stated on page 5 in the November issue and I quote verbatim: "Then there is the definition of "river" to consider. (By the way, my Webster's main definition of "river" is '*a natural stream of water bigger than a creek and emptying into an ocean...* '). To that I said: "Moreover, you can't even find an accurate Webster's Dictionary, since it would be ridiculous to define a river as '*a natural stream of water bigger than a creek and emptying into an ocean.*' Where on earth did you find that book?" Now you say, "you might also trying (sic) reading what is right in front of you" and that is precisely what I did. I read the very words in front of me that you put in print. Now you are accusing me of not having read the entire definition because I did not take note of what you omitted via three dots (...). You say "In addition, note the ... that ends the quote. This is of course a standard way of saying the quote is incomplete. The definition is not just incomplete. It's inaccurate. You omitted that which matters. The very words you wrote are false and that's that.

Letter #768 Continues (Part p)

We are discussing the branches of the Nile, which empty into the ocean.

Editor's Response to Letter #768 (Part p)

Oh no we are not. We are discussing your absurd definition of a river and your futile attempts to wiggle through the bars of the cage in which you put yourself.

Letter #768 Continues (Part q)

(At this point DA shifted gears and did return to the topic of whether or not the branches of a river's delta constitute separate rivers. On page 5 in the November issue I said to him, "Are you telling me each branch...of that delta is a separate river? If so give me the names of all these rivers." To that he replied, "They already have them. Names like 'West Branch,' 'North Branch,' 'Lower Branch,' 'City Branch,' etc. are common... the branches of a river are routinely named". To that I said, "You exposed your own duplicity by stating, 'the branches of a river.' You just admitted only one river is involved. 'A' river." DA now says--Ed.),

Not at all. "The branches of a river are rivers" is the same style of statement as The sons of a man are men. We would hardly say there was only one man involved. Nor can we say there is only one river involved.

Editor's Response to Letter #768 (Part q)

Your analogy is as bogus as your objectivity. The sons of a man are separate and distinct beings, unconnected to the principal; whereas the branches of a river's delta are inseparable parts of the principal (the river). Indeed the river would cease to exist throughout the length and breadth of the branches were the latter to vanish, while fathers and sons could continue living quite easily were the other to die. This is only another example of why defending the book by whatever rationalizations can be devised, is far more important to you and your cohorts than acknowledging reality and accepting the Bible is innumerable failings and inaccuracies. An absence of scruples is your trademark.

Letter #768 Continues (Part r)

(On page 5 in the Nov. issue I said, "I don't know of any river in the world with branches of its delta classified as separate rivers, and that includes the Mekong, the Amazon, the Ganges, and the Nile." DA now says--Ed.),

Try the Mississippi delta. The river has been trying to switch its course to the Atchafalaya River for some decades.

Editor's Response to Letter #768 (Part r)

First, I did try the Mississippi and it failed the test, too.

Second, you say "The river has been trying to switch its course..." Good grief! Now you are trying to tell me a river has a mind of its own. Do you relate the thoughts of rocks and the intentions of hurricanes as well?

And third, you say, "The river has been trying to switch its course to the Atchafalaya River for some decades." I think you are losing it DA. To begin with, the Atchafalaya River is an entirely separate river running parallel with the Mississippi, so it is not even relevant to the discussion. It is not the Mississippi; it is not a branch of the Mississippi, and it is not connected to the Mississippi. You even admit they are poorly connected by saying, "The river has been trying to switch its course to the Atchafalaya River for some decades." So, other than to escape the stockade in which you imprisoned yourself, why did you even bring it up? You weren't trying to throw me off track by any chance were you? No, of course not. The very idea would never have entered your head.

Letter #768 Concludes (Part s)

Note too that the branches of the Mississippi are called "bayou," a word that comes from an Indian word meaning "river" and one of its definitions is "river...."

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #768 (Part s)

Wrong again. To be specific it comes from a Choctaw word meaning small stream which hardly qualifies as a river.

But even more importantly a modern dictionary such as Webster's New World (1700 pages) defines a bayou as "a sluggish, marshy inlet or outlet of a lake, river, etc." Notice it: (a) does not say it is a river, and (b) says it is part of a lake, river, etc. It is not a lake or river per se.

Incidentally, I know the concepts of the Bible's supporters are antiquated at best, but you would do well to upgrade your socio-politico awareness and terminology. Most of those whose ancestors greeted the white man would prefer to be called Native Americans, not indians with an inaccurate lower case I. If you don't want to be called a Bible Thumper, a Fundie, a bead rattler, a Pope's puppet, (if you are a catholic), or some other disparaging epithet, I would suggest you refer to people in more appropriate and respectful terms by giving consideration to words they prefer.

Incidentally, would you stop putting periods and commas outside of quotation marks. That's a juvenile grammatical faux pas that I find distracting.

Your final two short paragraphs are nothing more than sophomoric summaries offering me advice that could far more appropriately be directed toward your own inadequacies.

On top of everything else, DA, I feel compelled to inform you that although you like to debate, you are nowhere nearly as accomplished as you seem to think you are. And it is quite obvious from your writing style that defending and projecting your own ego is of far greater importance to you than defending the Bible. Win, lose, or draw you not only love to see your name and writings in print but receive a kind of high from the experience. As they used to say in the 60's, You're ego-tripping and, believe me, there can be no doubt you have awfully big ego over which to trip.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #774 from JB Via Email

(Last month's issue contained a letter written by JB in which he explained to his pastor why he left Christianity. In this, his third letter, he attempts to relate the ideological problems he had with the Bible. He states--Ed.),

The following is a short document I wrote to collect my thoughts the day before I told my wife that I had lost faith. I wrote the document for my own use never intending to share it with anyone, and so I do not try to prove anything, but only to summarize what I had learned over the years....

SOME ELEMENTS OF MY DECONVERSION

The church tends to ignore controversial teachings in the Bible:

- (a) Speaking in tongues
- (b) Baptism for the dead
- (c) Women must wear head coverings
- (d) Doctrine of hell
- (e) Sons of God in Genesis 6
- (f) Necessity of poverty to follow Jesus (Luke 14:33)
- (g) Many of Jesus's unclear teachings.

The church has been on the tail-end of positive social movements

- (a) Eradication of Nazism
- (b) Abolition of slavery
- (c) Women's suffrage
- (d) Civil rights for African Americans
- (e) Women's opportunities for service.

The Bible is unclear or vague on major issues

- (a) Abortion
- (b) Divorce
- (c) War
- (d) Church discipline
- (e) Debt
- (f) Paedobaptism
- (g) Soteriology (including justice of substitutionary sacrifice)
- (h) Christology (for example, Trinitarian theology)
- (i) Satanology
- (j) Nature of the afterlife

- (k) Eschatology
- (l) Fundamentals of the faith
- (m) Standing of Jewish believers in relation to the Law.

The Bible is inconsistent on major issues

- (a) The nature and existence of the afterlife
- (b) The efficacy of works of the Law with regard to salvation
- (c) The distinction between soul and spirit
- (d) Large theological gap between Old and New Testaments
- (e) Greek influence on Israel's late Old Testament theology
- (f) Differences between Jesus and Paul in the New Testament
- (g) Differences between Paul and James in the New Testament.

The Bible records scientifically impossible events as factual

- (a) The creation narrative
- (b) Noah's deluge
- (c) Solid dome over the sky
- (d) Earth supported by a foundation
- (e) Popular answers from the church have been nonsense
- (f) None of the more rational answers survives scrutiny.

Shortcomings of the prophecies

- (a) Many Old Testament prophecies are too vague to be tested
- (b) Many Old Testament prophecies are yet unfulfilled
- (c) Prophecies were not written prior to the events forecast
- (d) Jesus does not fit the Messiah described by the Old Testament
- (e) New testament prophecy is largely incomprehensible.

There are contradictions throughout the Bible

- (a) Staff or no staff? (Mk 6:8/Lk 9:3)
- (b) Healing of centurion's servant
- (c) Three days and three nights?
- (d) Day of crucifixion?
- (e) Post-resurrection events (Mt 28, Mk 16, Lk 24, Jn 20-21, Acts 1:3-12, 1Cor 15:3-8)
- (f) Sovereignty of God? (2 Peter 3:9)

Problems with the Canon

- a) The canon is disputed by the church
- (b) There is no objective basis behind the canon
- (c) Jude quotes the non-canonical Book of Enoch as scripture.

Problems with authorship and transmission of the autographs

- (a) Many books of the Bible have no statement of authorship
- (b) Some books in the canon are pseudepigraphical (lie about authorship)
- (c) Both Israel and the church altered the texts
- (d) The church conflated the text.

Problems with interpretation

- (a) No single hermeneutic is adequate for interpretation
- (b) The meanings of words and phrases have been lost
- (c) Cultural references have been lost
- (d) Many books and passages admit multiple interpretations
- (e) NT authors were free and loose in their interpretations.

Fundamental problems with every systematic theology

- (a) Covenant theology muddles distinctions between Israel and the church
- (b) Calvinistic reformed theology stumbles at the existence of evil

- (c) Dispensational theology is too hopelessly complex to be credible
- (d) Arianism destroys the sovereignty of God
- (d) Roman Catholic theology introduces unbiblical and irrational ideas
- (e) The Bible neither presents nor lends itself to systematic theology.

The only hypothesis that fits all the data

- (a) The Bible is not the actual Word of God
- (b) The Bible is a human creation, arising through natural social processes
- (c) The theology in the Bible is not immutable, but has changed over time.

Therefore

- (a) The Bible does not address every issue for which we need a word from God
- (b) Being inconsistent, the Bible: is unsuitable as a final arbiter in disputes, is a false witness presenting fiction as truth, is untrustworthy in its statements concerning the supernatural, and is neither a sufficient nor reliable guide for living.

WHERE TO FROM HERE FOR ME?

I have spent 23 years seeking answers in the evangelical church without success. Therefore it seems advantageous to withdraw from the church and from teaching the Bible and spend my time more productively. The evangelical church is hypocritical, because it claims to have the truth, but it systematically ignores, denies, and covers up the serious rational challenges to its dogma. I also reject the outright leap of faith required to find a place in liberal churches. In my opinion they are engaging in institutionalized self-delusion.

Letter #775 from MB of Collinsville, Illinois

I was indoctrinated into the Christian religion from an early age, but eventually I began to question some of the illogic that it presented. As a result, I let Christians know my feelings on this controversy. Without surprise, not many Christians showed respect for my view and tried to reveal their "truth" to me. It became irritating to have to defend my disbelief to the arrogant Christians who wanted to save my soul. Thanks to you, I don't defend my disbelief now, but rather I go on the offense and challenge them to defend the Bible's flaws.

I came upon your Internet site. I am very impressed with your exhaustive research and excellent ability to communicate it. I didn't realize that the Bible was that full of errors until I read some of the BE issues at your site. It is refreshing to read such a rational and objective critique of the Bible. Although I am not an atheist, I hold the same

feelings as you do with respect to the negative impact that Christianity has on our culture. I also feel it is important to give a balance to such one-sided, false data.

I would appreciate it if you could send me your "Encyclopedia of BE. When I get a little more cash I will send for all the "BE issues". If you have more information on other literature you have, such as tracts on biblical falsehoods, I would love to order some.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

We would like to remind everyone that our book entitled **THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF BIBLICAL ERRANCY** can be purchased from us for \$52.20: Biblical Errancy, 2500 Punderson Drive, Hilliard, OH 430256 or from our publisher, Prometheus Books at 59 John Glenn Drive, Amherst, New York 14228-2197 (1-800-421-0351). After having read the book, one of our subscribers recently told me by phone that he loved its In Your Face Style.

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A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

REVIEW

DOES THE BIBLE CONTRADICT ITSELF? (Part 4)

Last month's issue temporarily diverged from our ongoing discussion of biblical contradictions faced by W. Arndt in his book Does the Bible Contradict Itself. We can now resume our litany with another example of apologetics in action.

On page 134 Arndt turns to the conflict between Psalm 18:41 (*"They cried, but there was none to save them; even unto the Lord, but He answered them not"*) and Matt. 7:8 (*"For everyone that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened"*). He states, "When first reading these two statements, one may be led to think that they are in disagreement. Both speak of prayer. The Matthew passage declares that no prayer is in vain; the Psalm passage apparently states that a prayer was offered by certain people and was not heard. The words of Jesus in Matt. 7:8 predicate a universality which the words of David in Psalm 18:41 seemingly deny. The difficulty is easily disposed of. That God hears every real prayer is a blessed truth which is proclaimed in a number of passages in Holy Scriptures. Cf. Prov. 8:7 (*'For my mouth shall speak truth; and wickedness is an abomination to my lips'*), 1 John 5:14 (*'And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us'*), Matt. 21:21 (*'Jesus said...If ye have faith,*

and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done'), Luke 11:5-13, etc."

Arndt's strategy won't carry the day for several reasons.

First, he has restricted the Matthew passage. It not only declares that no prayer is offered in vain but that anyone praying will attain satisfaction. There are no limitations with regard to the quality of the petitioner.

Second, Matthew says nothing about a "real prayer" as opposed to one that isn't. Arndt is alluding to some kind of fake prayer which is nowhere discussed or defined in Scripture.

Third, the contrary citations are either irrelevant or contradictory. Prov. 8:7 does not say God will or will not answer prayers nor does it outline the conditions under which they will be answered. All it says is that God does not like wickedness. Just because he does not like wickedness does not mean he is refusing to answer prayers.

First John 5:14 is the verse apologists trot out most to escape the all-inclusive comments of Matthew 7. But instead of resolving the problem, it merely exposes a biblical contradiction between 1 John 5 and Matthew 7. Apologists try to use the former to modify and alleviate the latter, when one could just as easily say the latter expands and broadens the scope of the former. It would be textually sustainable to say the original command was that prayer had to be offered in accordance to God's will in order to be fulfilled but later that requirement was dropped and all prayers would henceforth be met. They no longer had to be offered according to his will.

Matt. 21:21 states that your prayer will be answered if you have faith, but it does not say that in order to be answered you must have faith. Faith is not alleged to be a requirement.

Matt. 21:21 says that if you have faith your prayer will be answered, while Matt 7:8 goes further by saying prayer will be answered, with or without faith.

Fourth, Arndt states, "The words of Jesus in Matt. 7:8 predicate a universality which the words of David in Psalm 18:41 seemingly deny." There is no "seemingly" to it. The latter directly states that they cried and the Lord "answered them not." Yet, Matt 8:7 says "everyone who asketh receiveth." The word EVERYONE is all inclusive. The bottom line is that none of these verses will resolve the original contradiction through modification of Matthew 8:7.

Arndt nearly always says something akin to: "The difficulty is easily disposed of" with respect to nearly every contradiction he confronts, and almost never is that proven valid.

Arndt concludes by saying, "At the same time, however, it is true that there is many a cry which the Lord does not answer. These vain, fruitless utterances come from the lips of God's enemies, the very kind of people that Psalm 18:41 speaks of. The Scriptures assure us in solemn words that the prayers of the ungodly are not acceptable. Cp. Psalm 66:18 (*"If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me"*), 1 Sam. 28:6 (*"And when Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord answered him not, neither by dreams nor by Urim nor by prophets"*). The so-called prayers of these people simply are no prayers at all. ...when the Bible says every prayer will be heard, it has reference to real prayers, the petitions sent up to God by His Children."

This explanation is virtually no defense at all.

First, Matt. 7:8 does not restrict its coverage to God's friends or exclude his enemies. Where is that to be found in the text? It is a blanket statement with an absolutist nature that is unmistakable and undeniable. It clearly says EVERYONE.

Second, in so far as Psalm 66:18 is concerned, we are back to a perfection dilemma that has plagued biblicists from the beginning. If one need only have some iniquity in his heart to be excluded by God, then we are all excluded and no one's prayers will be heard, since everyone has some degree of iniquity. After all, doesn't the Bible say that we are all sinners and we have all come short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23). Who doesn't have some iniquity in his heart, be it ever so small? No one is perfect.

And third, Arndt states, "It has reference to real prayers, the petitions sent up to God by His Children." We are repeatedly told by Christians that we are all God's children. Now Arndt is claiming that real prayers only come to him from His children and those from the "ungodly are not acceptable, the so-called prayers of these people simply are no prayers at all." But they have to be acceptable, if we are all God's children.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #776 from EK of Jamaica Estates, New York

Dear Dennis. Regarding Issue 182, Letter #762 & the Response.

You asked that I cite chapter and verse to support my contention that "only if the woman is married to another man does adultery occur."

In Deuteronomy 22:22-27 there are three examples:

- 1) a man who lies with a woman married to another man.
- 2) a man who, in the city, lies with a betrothed virgin who does not cry out and
- 3) a man who, in the field, takes hold of a betrothed damsel and lies with her but she cries out.

In all three examples the man receives the death penalty in accordance with Leviticus 20:10. The first two women are also put to death in accordance with Lev. 20:10 but the third is not because she cried out in the field and there was no one to save her. All three are examples of adultery, since the women were either married or betrothed to another man.

In Deuteronomy 22:28-29, a man finds a virgin who is not betrothed and lies with her. The man's "punishment" is he shall give the girl's father 50 shekels of silver and she shall be his wife because he humbled her and he may never divorce her. The capital punishment for adultery does not apply because adultery did not occur because the woman was not married or betrothed. The man's marital status is never an issue.

I found additional support for my position in the NT. In Romans 7:3 it says that a woman, who while her husband lives, marries another man she will be called an adulteress, but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man.

Editor's Response to Letter #776

Dear EK. I think you got lost in the shuffle somewhere, so let's return to the beginning. You said to me in the 182nd issue (Feb.), "You say that if only one person is married, then God is ordering adultery. This is not the Biblical law of adultery as only if the woman is married to another man does adultery occur. (Biblical law is hardly egalitarian). David and Solomon had concubines while married but only when David had relations with Bathsheba, a woman married to Uriah, does adultery occur. The women children who had not known a man by lying with him were undoubtedly unmarried, hence no adultery could occur under Biblical law." In other words, according to you, adultery is ONLY possible under biblical law if the woman involved is married. But as I said to you then, "I am in a bit of a quandary as to where biblical law says that only if the woman is married to another man does adultery occur. Could you cite chapter and verse for that contention?" Your current attempt to justify your original assertion is wholly inadequate. You cite Deut. 22:22-27 which contains verses that nowhere say that the woman must be married in order for adultery to occur. They say that if the woman is married or betrothed, adultery has occurred. They do not say the woman must be married or betrothed in order for adultery to have been committed. To repeat one of my favorite analogies: When I say a dog is an animal, I am not saying that in order to be an animal you must be a dog. In the present instance, the Bible is saying that if the woman involved is married or betrothed, then adultery has occurred; but it is not saying the woman must be married in order for adultery to occur. You say, "In all three examples the man receives the death penalty in accordance with Leviticus 20:10." Correct! That is because the woman was married or betrothed, but that is not saying ONLY if the woman is married or betrothed will the death penalty be imposed.

You say, "In Deuteronomy 22:28-29, a man finds a virgin who is not betrothed and lies with her. The man's "punishment" is he shall give the girl's father 50 shekels of silver and she shall be his wife because he humbled her and he may never divorce her.

The capital punishment for adultery does not apply because adultery did not occur because the woman was not married or betrothed. The man's marital status is never an issue." That is not what the text says. The man's marital status is never mentioned. Maybe capital punishment is not imposed because neither is married. How do you know what the punishment would have been if the man had been married and the woman had not been? You are assuming automatic exoneration while I am saying now, as I said in February, that the Bible does not make its position clear in this regard. We simply don't know what the verdict would have been if only the man had been married and there is no way to be sure. Why? Because the Bible nowhere says, as you claim, that ONLY if the woman is married does adultery occur.

Romans 7:3 ("*So then, if while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law....*") certainly does not support your position. Nowhere does this verse say that adultery ONLY occurs if the woman is married. It only says adultery is occurring if she marries another man while her husband is alive, but it does not say that adultery is ONLY possible when a married woman is involved with a man other than her husband. Suppose a married man has relations with an unmarried woman? Is that adultery? According to your interpretation of Scripture, it is not, while according to mine it very well could be, although Scripture is too imprecise to make a definitive judgment.

I feel compelled to repeat what I said in February: The basic problem is that the Bible does not clearly and emphatically support either of our positions. The Bible says, Thou shalt not commit adultery but nowhere does it clearly and unequivocally define exactly what adultery entails. And because it is not clearly defined, I think my position is more reliable than yours. Only by producing verses that state a man only commits adultery by having relations with a married woman can you hope to salvage your stance. And that you have again failed to do.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Letter #777 from JB Via Email

(Last month's issue presented a letter written by JB to his pastor in which JB delineated some of the reasons he went from being a 23-year Sunday school teacher to being an atheist. He received a critical reply from his pastor and decided to write a fourth letter in order to provide the following itemized refutation of the pastor's judgments and conclusions--Ed.),

The Pastor says, Dear JB. You have not had a "Loss of faith". You have believed a lie (Romans).

JB replies: In your theology, either I was never a "true believer" in the first place, or I am still a true believer, but I have erred. This is a fine theology until one actually experiences the unmentioned third option: I was a true believer, but I lost faith because the FAITH ITSELF was in error. Those who know me best also know that

this option does exist and hence that Paul must have been wrong. By the way, there ought to be room in your theology for people who truly fall away. The writer of Hebrews contradicts Paul and acknowledges that believers really can fall away.

The Pastor says: You are a smart man JB but you are not smarter than Jesus!

JB replies: Your theme throughout your message about my being a "smart man" is irrelevant to the question of whether Christianity is true or false. The problems with Christianity are plain enough that anyone of average intelligence can see them, if they will only look. Even if someone does not see them through the rose-colored glasses of interpretation provided by the church, it does not take above-average intelligence to understand the problems when someone points them out. In fact, intelligence actually hindered me from discovering the problems in Christianity, because I could think of so many more ways to rationalize the problems than most people could. As to the intelligence of Jesus, he himself misquoted Old Testament scripture, attributed the Pentateuch to Moses when it could not possibly have been written by Moses, and got the details wrong in the Old Testament story of David and the shewbread. It is odd how the Son of God could have made such errors, isn't it?

The Pastor says, Even if you reject Jesus as deity, he was by all historical accounts the most profound and wise teacher who has lived. He taught that you should fear God.

JB replies, This is an unsubstantiated statement that you are repeating from the evangelical apologists. The "all historical accounts" that you speak of are essentially nothing more than the four gospels, and these are so problematic that they discredit themselves. As to Jesus being "the most profound and wise teacher who has lived," this has been convincingly discredited. I can give you a reference if you care to read the opposing view.

The Pastor says, You are a smart man, but not likely any smarter than King David, King Solomon, Moses, the Apostle Paul, and other historical figures who were smart enough to believe in God.

JB replies, The modern Age of Reason didn't start until about three hundred years ago. Until then most of the western world, except for some educated Greeks, was mired in superstition. The question of God's existence would hardly have even occurred to them. For a thousand years after Aristotle, people believed that an iron object would fall faster than a wooden object of the same shape and size. It wasn't until Galileo that this easily refuted belief was overturned, because he was willing to test it. This shows that "time-tested" beliefs may not necessarily have been tested at all. The prevailing culture dismissed the truth, preferring to believe what it had always believed, not unlike what is happening with Christianity today. David, Solomon, Moses, and Paul also believed the world was flat and that the sky was a solid dome of transparent material holding an ocean of water off the earth (reference available upon request). Shall I believe that, too? You have committed the fallacy of arguing from authority, and I have shown why it is absurd to do so.

The Pastor says, You are not a novelty JB. Even Nebuchadnezzar had a battle with pride and the false belief that there is no God. He returned to his senses.

JB replies, No, I am not a novelty, but if I looked only at the examples the church gives me, I might be excused for thinking that I am novel. The church conveniently ignores the stories of people who have reasoned their way out of Christianity. If their criticisms are touched on at all, it is in parody. Why doesn't the church study the serious critics of Christianity and refute them in Sunday School? Surely if Christianity can really hold up to the challenge, this would be a way to bring more of the "wise" into the church, of whom Paul says there are so few. Why is not only your church, but the church universal, ignoring this unsaved population? I know why -- the ignorant and the credulous are easier to convert. You believe that I, like Nebuchadnezzar, have a problem with pride, and that is undoubtedly the reason you keep calling me a smart man. On the contrary, I came to disbelief in all humility, against my own wishes. Succumbing to the contradictions, inconsistencies, and incoherencies of the faith has nothing to do with pride.

The Pastor says, You are a smart man, but you are not omnipresent. Therefore, you cannot KNOW there is no God somewhere in the universe can you? Therefore you cannot be an Atheist. No honest, rational, logical person would ever claim omnipresence except God himself. You are not really ready to make such an irrational claim as Atheism are you JB?

JB replies, You believe the Christian apologists too readily. There are many things wrong with what you say here. Let me point out two.

First, you load too much meaning onto the word "atheist." The word literally means "without theism." An atheist, that is, a person who is not possessed of a belief in a god, does not necessarily make the assertion that "I know there is no god," although some do. I myself am an atheist because I am not possessed of a belief in a god. My belief in God evaporated when I lost faith, through study of the Bible. However, I do not assert that "I know there is no god." That goes beyond logic, as you say. If you put a gun to my head and force me to defend some assertion about my atheism, I would assert something like, "It is so unlikely that a god exists, that for all practical purposes I can live my life as if no god does exist. Practically speaking, then, I can actually believe that there is no god, even though I cannot demonstrate beyond all possible doubt that no god exists." I hope from this explanation that you can see that agnosticism (literally "without knowledge") overlaps atheism, and that the two are not two distinct categories, as you have assumed. A person can be both an agnostic and an atheist at the same time. That is, a person can hold the position that we have no knowledge of a god, and the same person, simultaneously, can be unpossessed of a belief in a god.

Second, lack of belief in a god does not require omnipresence. It is simply a state of mind of a person. Now, I would agree with you that to assert truthfully that no god of any kind exists would require omnipresence, and, I might add, omniscience. (JB should have rightfully placed the burden of proof upon the pastor's shoulders and

asked him to prove there is a God--Ed.). However, it is possible to assert truthfully that the CHRISTIAN GOD does not exist, with no need of omnipresence or omniscience. This is because the characteristics alleged of the Christian God make it an incoherent concept. Without going into lengthy detail (but I can give you a reference upon request), I will just say that the Christian God is like a square circle. Any reasonable person, without being omnipresent or omniscient, can assert truthfully and confidently that a square circle does not exist anywhere in the universe.

The Pastor says, At best JB, you might qualify as an Agnostic. I'm sure deep in your heart is a wound painful enough to cause you to need to believe the lie that there is no God. Perhaps it eases a struggle over death, your own or someone you love or loved?

JB replies, Why can't Christians simply accept the fact that sincere believers can reject faith based on purely intellectual examination? I was perfectly content and comfortable believing Christianity. It was losing faith that put me in an uncomfortable position. When I first lost faith, I actually believed that I would live the rest of my life in existential despair. But I had to disbelieve, despite the consequences, because the intellectual bankruptcy of Christianity was so profound. I also discovered that the alleged existential despair of unbelievers is a lie created by the apologists to keep believers tame.

The Pastor says, God is merciful JB. You will never be able to explain all his ways.

JB replies, But I never required an explanation of all God's ways. I do require an explanation of all the blatant contradictions, inconsistencies, and incoherencies of the Christian faith. If Christianity were not so thoroughly discredited, I would still be a believer. Your entire message begs the question of the accuracy of the Bible. You'll never convince me of the truth of the Bible by ignoring its problems.

The Pastor says, Innocent people are being led by you. You are a smart man, but you are jumping out of an airplane with no parachute and dragging others with you. How will you compensate your children and your wife in eternity for your error?

JB replies, So, I can snatch my wife and the kids out of God's hand? You credit me with too much power. I'm not indoctrinating any of them. It is the church that indoctrinates. I am doing nothing other than expecting them to examine the evidence for themselves and come to their own conclusions. Of course, you know that the church could never survive this way. That is why it resorts to indoctrination of children, and the younger the better. After all, the church has to get to them before they are capable of critical thinking.

The Pastor replies, This is no scientific game JB. You are culpable before an almighty God.

JB replies, This statement makes an appeal to fear. Although it has become unfashionable to talk about Hell, Christianity is indeed a religion based on fear. Jesus's only unique contribution to religion was the invention of Hell. Before Jesus,

the Jewish faith viewed death as a rest and a comfort to look forward to after this weary life. It is as if a sadistic God, in the initial creation, had mistakenly left this loophole, and so he sent Jesus to take away even the hope of a final peace in death by threatening the living with Hell after death.

The Pastor says, You are a smart man. Seek wisdom.

JB replies, I sought wisdom in the Bible, believing that God's Word must be wise. And there IS some wisdom in the Bible, human wisdom, because human nature has not changed over the course of history. But when I found and confirmed contradictions, inconsistencies, and incoherencies in major doctrines, including soteriology, I found it impossible to trust the Book on its own authority alone. You or I could write a better Bible.

The Pastor says, Don't be the fool who has said in his heart that there is no God.

JB says, I've already addressed the assertion that "there is no God." However, the foolishness of it is not saying it in your heart. If there is a foolishness, it is saying it out loud in front of your believers, as I have done. It's almost more trouble than it's worth.

The Pastor says, Unbelief is an earthly sport. Carl Sagan became a believer the second he entered into eternity.

JB replies, Do you care to prove this unsubstantiated assertion? And it's OK with me if you write plainly and say "Hell" instead of "eternity." Softening the "gospel" (literally "good news") of Hell keeps contemporary people in the pews, but I can see right through it.

The Pastor says, Behind every agnostic is a conflict with God. You are a smart man JB, but you are not smarter than God. Humble yourself under his mighty hand!

JB replies, I have as much conflict with Yahweh, the ancient Hebrew tribal war god, as I do with Allah, Thor, Zeus, Brahma, Mithra, Isis, Osiris, Quetzalcoatl, or any of the thousands of other gods created by the mind of man. By the way, you are only one god away from being an atheist yourself. If you'll only give up belief in Yahweh, as you have given up all these other gods, you'll be without a belief in a god. Maybe you would like to tell me why you believe in this one last god, and deny the rest? Maybe you would like to explain to me and my in-laws why your belief in Yahweh has nothing to do with the culture that you grew up in; that if you had been born Arab you nevertheless would have believed in the Jewish god Yahweh, and not Allah, for example. After all, I need to know which god to humble myself to. If I had to lay bets on eternity, I would have to cast my lot with the god of Islam. His hell is worse and his heaven is better than that of the Christian god. According to ALLAH anyone who says that Jesus is the son of God is damned, but according to YAHWEH, anyone who does NOT accept Jesus as the son of God is damned, so I cannot accept both religions, as they are incompatible. Tell me which god is the right one. I really need to know.

And give me some solid reasons, please. After all, it's your word against Allah's; you are a smart man, Pastor R, but not as smart as Allah.

The Pastor says, You have embraced a belief that denies God is. You have become a believer in the religion of unbelief. Your position changes nothing in the universe, heaven, or hell. It is self-defeating. Call out to God for deliverance from Satan's greatest and oldest deception JB!

JB replies, More unsubstantiated assertions. My sarcasm above will answer this as well. Why don't you give me some reasons to believe these things, instead of making bald assertions? Surely the Holy Spirit speaking through you can't be outwitted by a mere human speaking reasonably, can it?

The Pastor says, I will count it a privilege and an act of friendship to help you back when you are ready. I miss you and your family.

JB replies, It is impossible for me to believe again, knowing what I know. If you see me coming back, you will instantly know that I have lost my ability to reason. However, we miss MC [church], too. The loss of a church family was the hardest part for my wife. It's too bad that Christianity is too narrow to extend fellowship to former believers who have rejected the faith based on knowledge of the faith. Is MC [church] really a "church for the unchurched," proud that even an atheist [an atheist, married to a believing member of the church, used to run the church soundboard]) could work the sound board and feel a part of things? Then extend the hand of fellowship to my wife and me, and invite me to disclose my reasons for unbelief to anyone who asks. Give your congregation the chance to reach out to me in Christian love and convert me. The church accepts people "Just As I Am," as the hymn goes, but only so long as they are ignorant and credulous enough not to ask embarrassing questions....

The Pastor says, I appreciate your actions toward MC [church] people. Please continue that behavior. As the Shepherd of this flock I would count it as a personal attack for you to influence even one MC sheep toward your unbelief. I would be assertive and passionate in my contact with you. I trust this is a non-issue.

JB replies, "Sheep" is an apt word. You know as well as I do that there is no way these people can sustain faith in the face of reason, and that is why you feel you must protect them. As long as you can keep them ignorant, they will be your "sheep," but if you allow them to be exposed to reasonable criticisms of Christianity you know that they will begin to think for themselves and become the freethinking "people" they were meant to be. Then you will lose all control. We have our own reasons for not revealing our loss of faith to MC [church] people, and so I don't expect that we will clash on this, although it is possible that our unbelief could come out by accident as it did with our extended family. However, I take your statement as a threat of blackmail. What you are really saying, in plainer terms, is "keep quiet or I will defame you." I've seen you do it before. You're very good at it, and it is ugly. Remember? Early on, I myself stood up in the congregation and backed you up the first time I saw you shun

someone out of the church. My comments and initiative turned that meeting in your favor and could very well have prevented a schism. Ironic, isn't it?

P.S. I don't envy you in the position I have left you in. If you DO answer my challenges, you will be inviting me to recite even more challenges to the absurdities of Christianity, with my in-laws looking on, particularly if you keep spouting the sophistries of the Christian apologists. If you DON'T answer my challenges, then you will leave them wondering whether Christianity is defensible. And if you make some excuse to cut off the dialog, you disobey the inspired Word of God, which enjoins you to "Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect....," (1 Peter 3:15). I have expressly asked you to give a reason, and you are obligated by your own Holy Book to answer. You say you don't have time? The inspired Word of God leaves no room for this excuse since you are to "be prepared IN SEASON AND OUT OF SEASON; correct, rebuke and encourage--with GREAT PATIENCE and CAREFUL INSTRUCTION." (2 Timothy 4:2 NIV). The Bible leaves no middle ground. It forces believers to act one way or another, to be hot or cold, but not lukewarm. The unrelenting Bible forced me away from the faith in the same way. So, what are you going to do? Don't bother trying to switch our conversation from e-mail to the phone. I want our exchanges written out for all to see. E-mail is not at all like preaching from the pulpit, where no one has the opportunity to hold you to account for your statements, is it? I am in the position of strength. My position is relatively straightforward, while yours is impossible to defend reasonably.... And I have nothing to lose, because, unlike believers, I am willing to follow truth wherever it may lead, as I demonstrated when I left the faith I loved. If the truth leads me back to the Christian faith, then so be it. You, on the other hand, have an entire world view (read, "delusion") and a livelihood to lose if you follow the truth. So, what are you going to do?

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

REVIEW

DOES THE BIBLE CONTRADICT ITSELF? (Part 5)

On page 137 Arndt tackles one of the most potent and implication-laden contradictions in all of Scripture. It pertains to the conflict between Eccle. 3:19-20 (*"For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth the beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they all have one breath, so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast; for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again"*) and verses like John 5:28-29 (*"Marvel not at this; for the hour is coming in which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice and shall come forth: they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation"*).

Arndt states, "The second text, as so many others, proclaims that there will be a general resurrection of the dead. The first has often been held, in our days again by Dr. Fosdick, to teach that death means annihilation and that hence the hope of the resurrection from the dead is vain. If the Ecclesiastes passage really teaches the utter destruction of the human person when man dies, then we must admit the existence of a discrepancy in the Scriptures. But does it contain such teaching? The text mentioned above merely asserts that as the beasts die, so must man die. The time comes when a beast breathes its last, and so it is with man. All go unto one place, says Solomon. All are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. It is plain that he is speaking of the dissolution of the body which results from death.

Wiggle as he may, Arndt will not escape this cul-de-sac.

First, he states, "The text mentioned above merely asserts that as the beasts die, so must man die." Oh no it doesn't! No doubt he would like to restrict our vision to this consideration, but the text alleges more than that. "Merely" is by no means accurate. The text states, "man hath no preeminence above a beast." If some part of man lingers on, be it a soul or otherwise, and goes to some sort of heaven or limbo, then man clearly has preeminence over the beasts, unless, of course, biblicists wish to allege that all animals not only have some kind of soul but go to heaven as well.

Second, the text says "All go unto one place." If people go to heaven or some sort of eternal reward or punishment and animals do not, then it is by no means true to say "All go unto one place." In fact, they all go to two or more places. And if that is true, then it would be incorrect to claim, as does Ecclesiastes, *"For that which befalleth the*

sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them." Unlike the animal kingdom, more than one thing befalleth mankind.

Third, there is a direct clash between the Eccle 3 and John 5 when the former says "for all is vanity". In the context of Eccle 3:19 "vanity" means futile, idle, and worthless. If that is true, then why would the hope of an afterlife promised in John 5 and other verses have any credibility?

Fourth, Arndt concludes, "But what of the soul? Does the writer of Ecclesiastes know that a man has an immortal soul, or does he deny the existence of an imperishable element in the human being? That he firmly believes in the immortality of the soul is plain from chapter 12:7, where he says: *"Then shall the dust return unto God, who gave it."* Everyone can see that here the return of the human spirit to God when death sets in is taught, and immortality is implied. This, then, is clearly established. The writer of Ecclesiastes...teaches just as clearly that the human spirit goes to God when a person dies and hence does not cease to exist."

Apologetists often race off to 12:7 to elude the clear comments in Chapter 3 but to no avail.

(A) It says, *"Then shall the dust return unto God, who gave it,"* and yet, Arndt claims "Everyone can see that here the return of the human spirit to God when death sets in is taught, and immortality is implied." But it says dust. Where does the text use the word "spirit" or say anything in regard to the spirit going somewhere? There is no equating of dust and spirit, nor is there any reason to equate the two. Talk about a leap of faith!

(B) If this ruse were valid, then we would only have returned to square one because man would, in fact, have *"preeminence above a beast."* That, in turn, would directly contradict Eccle 3. Either way, a major contradiction is inescapable.

And finally, what exposes the duplicity and utter disingenuousness of our apologetic friend as much as anything else and provides powerful evidence as to why apologetists are not to be trusted in their on-going attempts to defend the Bible at all costs is the fact that Arndt omitted the 21st and 22nd verses. The former says, *"Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down to the earth."* Here the text does talk about "spirit," unlike earlier when Arndt tried to equate dust with "spirit," and it clearly states man does not definitely know where his spirit goes.

The final verse in this chapter, the 22nd, says, *"So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should enjoy his work, for that is his lot; who can bring him to see what will be after him?"* Arndt completely ignores this admonition and definitely thinks he can predict the future by relying upon other parts of scripture that supposedly tell people what will be after them. In other words, he thinks he can do what Ecclesiastes says cannot be done.

On page 141 Arndt attempts to cope with another one of those time-honored dilemmas that has troubled millions of Christians for centuries. It concerns the clash between Isaiah 9:6 (*"For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder. And his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace"*) and Matt. 10:34 (*"Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace, but a sword"*). (We will leave aside all the factors showing the Isaiah verse could not apply to Jesus and proceed on the temporary assumption that it does--Ed.).

Arndt states, "Bible readers have wondered why Jesus, who is called the Prince of Peace in the magnificent prophecy of Isaiah, declares that He did not come to send peace on earth, but a sword. The context of Matt. 10:34 shows in what sense the words of Jesus must be taken. He is not speaking of a war which the Christian will have to wage, but which they will have to endure. His meaning is that acceptance of the Gospel will not bring outward tranquility and peace upon His Apostles, but enmity, hatred, opposition, and persecution.... The one speaks of the character of Jesus and that of His kingdom, the other of the experiences of His followers here on earth."

Arndt says Jesus "is not speaking of a war which Christians will have to wage, but which they will have to endure," when the text projects precisely the opposite meaning. Not only does Matt. 10:34 say nothing about the followers of Jesus being required to endure anything, but "*sending a sword*" is a clear call to arms. Arndt refers to the context of Matt. 10:34 and acts as if that modifies the message while ignoring his own instruction. The context disproves the very point he is trying to peddle. The next verse, Matt. 10:35 (*"For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law"*) provides clear evidence that Jesus is referring to waging a war, rather than enduring some kind of enmity, hatred, and persecution. "*I came not to send peace*" doesn't refer to others creating turmoil, but to Jesus being the source. He says, "*I*" came to send a sword," not others. Sending a sword refers to taking the offensive and has nothing to do with enduring anything.

All too often I can't help but feel that in a weird sort of way I am acting as an attorney for Jesus. He repeatedly makes statements to which his "supporters" implicitly reply: "You don't really mean that." Oh, yes he does, and I fail to see how this comment could have been clearer.

First, he said, "*I came not to send peace.*" It doesn't refer to others creating turmoil. Jesus said he would be creating the tumult.

And secondly, "sending" a sword or taking the offensive has nothing to do with "enduring." The latter was created ex nihilo.

Moving to our third and final conflict this month, on page 150 Arndt faces the clash between the comment by Jesus in Matt. 6:31 (*"Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we bring? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?"*) and the statement by Paul in 2 Thess. 3:12 (*"Now, them that are such we command*

exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ that with quietness they work and earn their own bread"). Arndt states, "These well-known texts undoubtedly have raised the question in the minds of many a Bible reader whether it is not somewhat difficult to harmonize the words of Jesus and those of Paul in this instance. Jesus apparently teaches improvidence, while Paul condemns it. A little close attention, however, to just what is said will soon show that there is no clash here whatever. Does our Lord in Matt. 6:31, 34 urge us to be lazy, shiftless, wasteful? He does nothing of the kind. What He inculcates is that we must not let our heart "be overcharged with the cares of this life...."

"Overcharged?" Who is Arndt trying to beguile with this ploy. Again we must ask Arndt to read the words lying in front of him. Jesus isn't talking about being overcharged with anything; he's talking about not being charged at all. He forbids any striving. He says, "*take NO thought*," not reduced thought, a little less thought, or a smaller amount of thought. He says, "*No thought*" which is another one of those absolutist statements that effectively buries the Bible and its supporters--another one of those absolutist phrases upon whose shores the Bad Ship Bible repeatedly runs aground. For Arndt to say that "Jesus apparently teaches improvidence" can only be deemed an intentional understatement. There is no "apparently" to it. Arndt is most concerned with interpreting words as he prefers them to be.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Letter #778 from MB of Collinsville, Illinois

I was indoctrinated into the Christian religion from an early age, but eventually I began to question some of the illogic that it presented. As a result, I let Christians know my feelings on this controversy. Without surprise, not many Christians showed respect for my views and tried to reveal their "truth" to me. It became irritating to have to defend my disbelief to the arrogant Christians who wanted to save my soul. Thanks to you, I don't defend my disbelief now, but rather I go on the offense and challenge Christians to defend the Bible's flaws.

I came upon your site on the Internet. I am very impressed with your exhaustive research and excellent ability to communicate it. I didn't realize that the Bible was that full of errors until I read some of the BE issues at your site. It is refreshing to read such a rational and objective critique of the Bible. Although I am not an atheist, I personally hold the same feelings as you do with respect to the negative impact Christianity has on our culture. I also feel it is important to give balance to such one-sided false data in society.

I would appreciate it if you could send me your "Encyclopedia of BE." When I get a little more cash I will send for all the "BE issues." If you have more information on other literature you have, such as tracts on biblical falsehoods, I would love to order some.

P.S. I want to cross reference the contradictions right alongside the verses in the Bible. Is this done in published form already? It sure seems to be a valid way to expedite locating the references in a confrontation.

Editor's Response to Letter #778

Dear MB. We appreciate your thoughtful comments and are glad to see you taking the offensive, a policy which we have advocated from the beginning. Indeed, proselytization has been at the core of our philosophy from the outset.

As far as your P.S. is concerned, that is an excellent idea, but unfortunately it represents another one of those books that critics of the Bible need to write but have never brought to fruition. If apologists can have running commentaries on each biblical chapter, verse by verse, why can't we.

For several years I have been pondering the feasibility of an even more poignant tome. I have five large alphabetically-indexed notebooks containing a monumental listing of the Bible's problems on virtually every contradictory topic from Genesis to Revelation. If these notebooks were ever published, they would provide an excellent quick-and-ready resource for biblical critics engaged in debate who needed instance access to relevant quotes. The most potent verses have already been starred or otherwise delineated in many instances to further reduce the amount of time needed for retrieval. Having debated many biblicists over the years and appeared on many radio talk shows, I have learned that it is not sufficient to merely have potent verses for all occasions. One must also be able to find them on very short notice. Arranging and categorizing material for the most efficient acquirement is of critical importance. It does no good to have excellent material if you can't pull it up in those moments that count. Instant access is often critical, as I have learned to my chagrin on several occasions. I had the evidence that mattered but couldn't recover it promptly, in which case I might as well have not had it at all. If you can't locate it at critical moments, all else is for naught. My five notebooks in published form would go a long way toward surmounting this obstacle, a long way indeed. The absence of a narrative would significantly reduce the amount of reading involved and further accelerate the speed at which information could be brought to the fore. When facts, quotes, and citations are what matters, excess verbiage should be minimized. While your proposal would probably sequentially move from verse to verse and chapter to chapter in successive books, mine would dwell primarily on the contradictions, errors, and fallacies associated with ideas and beliefs found throughout Scripture.

CLOSURE

While teaching high school in the 1960's one of my proselytizing students gave me a copy of a simplified version of the NT entitled Good News for Modern Man published by the American Bible Society of New York. After taking several weeks to read the entire book, I was astounded by the number of errors, contradictions, and fallacies contained therein that were all but invisible to biblicists, as I subsequently discovered. While reading the work, I practically covered it with notations, criticisms,

and observations only to lay it aside after having written a critique. For several years my interest in Scripture declined dramatically only to be rejuvenated around 1975 when I decided to pursue the matter with much greater intensity and commitment by reading the entire Bible. After purchasing the 4-columned Layman's Parallel Bible and Strong's Exhaustive Concordance, I spent a couple of years meticulously reading the entire book and taking copious notes. In addition, I read scores of biblical critiques by many notable authors such as Remsburg, Wheless, Ingersoll, Paine, and others. From 1975 through 1978 I engaged in an incredible amount of biblical research and note-taking. By 1978 five large notebooks crammed with information and indexed throughout had come to fruition. In effect, I had completed the first phase of an evolving long-term project.

After having compiled a tremendous amount of data, I decided to embark upon the next phase of my protracted project--radio appearances. I called or wrote to hundreds of radio talk show stations throughout the nation, explained to them my overall intent, and received several invitations to appear. From 1978 onward appearing on radio talk shows had a position of high priority on my agenda. In effect, the second phase of my overall strategy was underway.

Because of numerous requests for information while appearing before the public and in order to disseminate my burgeoning body of anti-biblical literature, I decided in the early 1980's to fill an obvious void by embarking upon an ever more ambitious undertaking. A monthly periodical would be created to not only spread the word but correct and enlighten the book's proponents. Once BE was underway and back issues were readily available, the third phase of my overall strategy was complete.

In the mid 1980's I entered the fourth phase of my journey by creating some poignant, anti-biblical pamphlets for distribution to the citizenry at large in order to offset the multitude of pamphlets that are distributed by religionists. That phase was successfully underway within a year.

In the early 1990's I decided our information should not only be available for those who like to read but for those who like to hear conversation, especially while driving an automobile. With that in mind I created many audio tapes of my radio appearances and 24 tape recordings encompassing the essence of my 5 bulbous notebooks. Writing scripts and assembling audible, coherent, and accurate recordings, as well as arranging the recordings of my talk show appearances into lucid, logical scenarios, encompassed nearly two years. When that was accomplished I had, in effect, successfully traversed the 5th phase of my universal strategy.

The sixth phase began in the early 1990's when a subscriber, Dr. Paul Kurtz-president of Prometheus Press, wrote me a letter suggesting I write a book containing a synopsis of my material. Realizing that my 24 audio tapes already contained the kind of information that would meld beautifully into a book, I decided to transform my audio tape scripts in such a manner as to comprise 24 chapters in a reference book with some understandable additions and deletions. After devoting a tremendous amount of time to script adaptations, including 4 solid days of reading galley sheets, I sent the

final manuscript to Prometheus for publication in August 1994. With that completed, I could see my entire program was proceeding smoothly and on track. Except for some minor glitches and unforeseen obstacles, everything was progressing according to plan.

The seventh phase of my overall strategy entailed the creation of 100 video tapes to be played on cable access public television stations throughout North America. It was not only my most expansive and ambitious project to-date but the only one requiring hundreds of volunteer supporters and distributors. It began in earnest on Jan 21, 1994, with our first recording session at a television studio and was completed more than four years later in April 1998. Unfortunately, unlike all prior undertakings this phase has met with limited success, despite repeated requests for assistance. For whatever reason, widespread assistance has not been forthcoming. Much to my chagrin I have come to realize that people are either too afraid, too lazy, too unconcerned, too isolated, too immobile, too preoccupied with hobbies and titillations, or too whatever, to become involved. As far as being afraid is concerned, I don't understand their trepidation. My name has been spread all over the continent via thousands of issues and advertisements; I've appeared on scores of radio talk shows, given speeches, and called radio talks shows repeatedly. I've made a hundred video tapes, many of which have appeared in Texas, Arizona, Ohio, California and elsewhere, published a reference book that is now available in many libraries, and done just about anything else I could think of to expose the Bible for the fraud that it is. And, yet, I have never received a serious threat in my entire career. I have been told I am going to hell and I'm doing the devil's handiwork; that kind of nonsense is to be expected. But I have never encountered any kind of serious warnings or threats that would understandably generate concern and apprehension. For some reason or other a lot of anti-religious people in general and anti-Bible people in particular seem to think that there are a horde of religious fanatics out there just looking for an excuse to pounce upon anyone who dares to criticize Scripture. In truth, nearly all biblicists are as indifferent and unconcerned as their opponents when it comes to suppressing their opposition. They are much more inclined toward behind-the-scenes censorship and squelching than direct frontal assaults. As is true of many freethinkers, if energy is required you can include them out. It isn't worth the effort from their perspective.

Moreover, the kind of opposition you receive is often commensurate with the manner in which you project your ideas and beliefs. Referring to biblicists and religionists as ignorant, brainwashed idiots wallowing in a sea of fantasies, dreams, and stupidities will more than likely generate resentment and comparable responses rather than objective, serious contemplation. That kind of language is a direct threat to egos and self-concepts and is bound to foster antagonism and hatred. Embarking upon an ego-trip to vent your frustrations and disgust may create feelings of satisfaction and euphoria, but it is unlikely to materially alter the beliefs of anyone. One can expect walls rather than bridges to arise in abundance with all the accompanying rhetoric, threats, and vituperation. We have always worked on the theory that opponents who are buried in a mountain of facts and data don't have time or interest in becoming ominous or menacing. They are too busy thinking about what you are saying to contemplate more bestial devices.

A few people have come to our aid with respect to playing our tapes and otherwise aiding our cause. Of that there can be no doubt. A few have volunteered time, labor, and funds and for that we are certainly grateful. But the critical, all consuming word is few. A few have done this; a few have done that, but that's not sufficient. Religionists can get tens of thousands of people to travel throughout the world and sacrifice years out of their lives to proselytize and propagandize humanity at considerable personal risk, both financially and physically, and, yet, I can't even get some people to take some video tapes down to their local TV stations once or twice a week and tailor the tapes to the station's particular requirements, free tapes at that. Astounding! The outcome of this phase is that I have learned a valuable lesson in recent years. I may have done my research and learned the Bible extremely well; I may have devised a rational and systematic strategy over the years, I may have generated the amount of personal commitment and resources that are necessary to accomplish what I wanted to do unassisted, I may have had my ducks all lined up in neat little rows, but I failed to factor in an extremely important component--the all but total unwillingness of others to get involved in anything other than reading. I failed to ask myself an extremely important question: Suppose others don't share your exuberance, your determination, your dedication, your commitment. What then? I never really pondered that angle. That was one component that I never really factored in. I just assumed that if people had the appropriate information and realized its potency they would take the ball and run. Instead, thousands have merely thrown it back into my court or ignored catching it altogether. I was so involved in the mechanics of the whole operation that I never even took this possibility into account. To be perfectly candid, I just didn't realize that I had more drive, determination, dedication, and enthusiasm in my chin than thousands of anti-religionists have in their entire body. Tens of thousands aren't willing to research, aren't willing to contribute, aren't willing to participate, aren't willing to dedicate their time to this activity in any serious, meaningful, or ongoing manner. The energy is just not there and that's the bottom line. I have actually had people drop their subscription to BE after having said, I agree with everything you are doing, everything you are saying, and everything you stand for, but I no longer wish to be involved. Good luck. I hope you are successful and I wish you the best. Now how do you deal with that kind of mentality?

In any event, in light of all the above, a decision has been reached, a switch has been thrown, the die has been cast. THE PERIODICAL KNOWN AS BIBLICAL ERRANCY WILL CEASE PUBLICATION ON DECEMBER 31, 1998 after 16 years of circulation. I make this decision with a heavy heart and deep regrets but facts are facts. BE is older than all of my children and is almost like another child. It's enough to turn my stomach. On that key date the last major phase will become one of refunding all unused subscription funds to those from whom we do not receive keep the change letters. After this year we will continue to distribute back issues, audio tapes, video tapes, pamphlets, and our book, but no additional issues of BE will be forthcoming.

In one sense there is a positive side to all of this; a welcome milestone will have been reached. I will no longer have to worry about monthly deadlines, writing well-researched and coherent commentaries, interminable proof-readings, seeking funds,

monthly mailings, folding, stapling, mail-labeling hundreds of issues and driving many miles each month to our designated post office, coping with interminable harassments by my postmaster, advertising, extensive bookkeeping, sending out renewal notices, purchasing supplies, constantly asking for non-financial assistance, coping with mistakes caused by constant changes in our printer's personnel, constantly surreptitiously hinting to my wife that some bookkeeping needs to be updated, and imploring her every month to proofread literature that she is not particularly interested in. Moreover, she has so many other commitments and obligations that finding sufficient time in which to become involved has been a significant challenge within itself. Fortunately, her organizational and creative talents have provided a means by which to overcome numerous obstacles, and without her bookkeeping skills and invaluable assistance all these years, BE would never have gotten off the ground. If there is an unsung hero in this whole activity, she is that person.

I am concluding BE not only with deep sorrow but a profound feeling of having let down many loyal subscribers. Many of you have been with us almost from the beginning.

In the end it was not our critics, our opponents, our enemies, if you will, who brought BE to an end; they are easy. It was our allies and compatriots who failed to assist when called upon repeatedly. There can be no doubt that a few of our supporters have given that measure of devotion and commitment so necessary for a successful endeavor, but their number has been too small so far. About the only turn of events that could keep BE going at this juncture would be the influx of so much money that I could employ a staff to distribute, modify, and circulate our tapes and newsletter on a regular basis which would obviate any further need for me to all but beg for assistance. And since I have no millionaire relatives and have never been lucky at picking lottery numbers, I don't see any possibilities in that regard.

Hopefully people in far greater numbers yet to come in American society will not only be considerably more committed to the eradication of religious superstition in general and biblical mythology and deception in particular but find our Encyclopedia and back issues to be of invaluable assistance in their continuing quest for sanity. To all those who did not act, even though they not only failed to face serious obstacles but dropped their subscription while in full agreement with our plans, data, procedures, and philosophy, I respectfully state: Give me a call when you are as serious as a stroke about this whole business. Until then, I can't help but feel that I am spending too much time in what has turned out to be little more than an entertaining avocation, something in which I have no interest and do not wish to be involved. If and when this change of attitude on the part of thousands were ever to occur, I only hope conditions are not beyond the point of possible rectification. Saying I told you so may be self-gratifying but it will be far outweighed by the pain and loss all rational minds will endure.

Most unfortunate is the fact that this summation will probably not be read by those to whom it applies the most--freethinkers who have never subscribed or who have

dropped their subscription, despite full agreement with our philosophy. Instead it will be read by our current subscribers to whom it often applies the least.

On a purely practical societal note, all freethinkers should keep in mind that the right wing political figures as... of such prominent public figures as Newt Gingrich, Jessie Helms, Pat Buchanan, Rush Limbaugh, G. Gordon Liddy, and William F. Buckley, to name only a few, is closely allied to the fundamentalism of Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, Jimmy Swaggart, and James Robison. As one gains adherents, so does the other. As one loses supporters, so does the other. They are two sides of the same coin, essentially Siamese twins, the basic difference being that one operates primarily in the politico-economic realm while the other concentrates on the socio-religious domain. The intolerance and insensitivity of one is mirrored in that of the other, and if you oppose one, the day could come when you will be oppressed by the other.

In any event, I think it only fair for us to have explained in some detail when BE will cease and why. We certainly owe everyone an explanation.

As far as my future plans are concerned, I will be turning most of the scene over to the knuckle-dragging, ideological Neanderthals who have been poisoning television and radio audiences, as well as parishioners, with their lies, half truths, and distortions for decades and switching over to the Internet, an enterprise that didn't exist when BE began years ago. Until the attitudes, commitments, and philosophies of tens of thousands of freethinkers change dramatically, I will be corresponding via email, spending time surfing newsgroups and chat rooms for opportunities to bring enlightenment to the benighted, and trying to enlist supporters for my cablevision undertaking. The latter enterprise will continue to be accorded the highest priority, despite all obstacles. Our programs may have been created by amateurs and lack the sophistication, pizzazz, and entertainment quality of commercial television, but they provide a degree of religious and biblical accuracy that mainline radio and television programs don't begin to approach.

EDITOR'S NOTE:

Some of you have no doubt already realized that we no longer send out renewal notices. That's because there are so few months remaining. In order to forestall needless refunds, those wishing to resubscribe are being asked to send only \$1 for each month remaining in this year.

Issue #187 July 1998, Editor: Dennis McKinsey

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

COMMENTARY

This month's issue will be devoted entirely to letters from our readers. Last's month's analysis entitled Closure understandably generated more letters, phone calls, and e-mail, both pro and con, than any comments we have ever made. We will not belabor this issue in the remaining months but relevant letters will be interspersed throughout subsequent issues because they either represent the judgments of many or are interesting in their own right.

DIALOGUE AND DEBATE

Letter #779 from NB of Tucson, Arizona (Part a)

(In letter #748 (Part f) in the 178th issue I said, "What does color-blindness have to do with the color of something? You mean color does not exist until people can see it. How silly! How myopic! How solipsistic! NB now wishes to reply with--Ed.),

If you don't think color does not exist until people can see it, try asking a person who has been blind from birth what "the red, white and blue" means.

Editor's Response to Letter #779 (Part a)

Leaving aside the convoluted manner in which you phrased your statement, NB, the fact remains that there is a real world out there that could not care less if anyone is present to view its properties. Whether or not people can see, has nothing to do with whether or not color exists. Color is there, pure and simple, and if you can't see it, that of no concern to reality. Do I think color does not exist until people can see it? No, of course not. Color may not exist for a person who has been blind from birth, but that does not mean color does not exist at all. It just means this particular person has no conception of color. For him it does not exist. But it does not mean color does not exist period.

Letter #779 Concludes (Part b)

As for the old "if a tree falls in the forest and no one is there, is there a sound?" controversy, did Beethoven hear a "sound" at the tumultuous premiere of his Ninth Symphony? He had been stone deaf for 20 years.

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #779 (Part b)

Whether or not Beethoven heard his symphony has nothing to do with whether or not his symphony emitted sound. There is no connection between the two. If his symphony was played at any decibel level what-ever, then there was sound, regardless of who was present or whether or not they could hear. Frankly, I find all of this solipsistic nonsense not only boring but juvenile. The very idea that sound and color do not exist unless someone is present to witness them is foolish, if not bordering on the absurd.

Letter #780 from DA of La Puente, California (Part a)

(In the Feb. 1998 Issue I criticized the defense Arndt provided for the four different wordings written on the cross. Matt. 27:37 says, '*This is Jesus the King of the Jews.*' Mark 15:26 says, '*The King of the Jews.*' Luke 23:38 says, '*This is the King of the Jews.*' And John 19:19 says, '*Jesus of Nazareth the King of the Jews.*' Then I asked, "So which is it?" Arndt replied by saying, among other things, "This criticism arbitrarily lays down the principle that when one quotes a statement, one must, in order to be faithful to the original, give every word of it. To state this principle is to expose its injustice. Nothing is more common in all human languages than to abridge a speech, or a remark which one is quoting...." To that I said, "Regardless of how often speech is abridged, there can only be one correct wording." DA now wishes to come to Arndt's defense by saying--Ed),

This is correct only if you add "...per speaker and/or listener.' Once we acknowledge that each writer is a different individual with different interests and is speaking to difference (sic) audiences with even more different interests, we find that a great many abridgements are correct, even if only one is correct for a given set of author (sic) and audience (sic)."

Editor's Response to Letter #780 (Part a)

With all due respect, DA, what does all that gibberish have to do with anything? Who cares how many speakers, audiences and interests are involved! They are all immaterial, if not irrelevant. The fact is that there can only be one wording on the cross and there can be only one correct duplication of that wording. I don't care how you are tailoring it to the interests or idiosyncrasies of anyone or any group; if you change the wording from what actually existed, then it becomes erroneous, period.

Incidentally, I wish you would be as concerned with proofreading what you are writing, as you are with not proving what you are writing.

Letter #780 Continues (Part b)

(In my fourth criticism of Arndt in the Feb. 1998 issue regarding the different inscriptions on the cross I stated, "Arndt says, 'One glance suffices to show that among the four versions there is no difference in meaning' when there most assuredly

is. Neither Mark nor Luke identify the person on the cross as Jesus. At least not from the superscription per se. DA again leaps to Arndt's defense by saying--Ed.),

You assert a difference on the grounds that "Neither Mark nor Luke identify the person on the cross as Jesus.... That assumption is only made because Matthew and John use the word Jesus specifically." Both statements are simply wrong. Mark 15:26 does not contain the word "Jesus", true, but he is the central figure of Mark 15. Any reading of 15:26 that says someone other than Jesus is under discussion is simply nonsense. This means also that one does not need to consider Matthew or John to know Jesus is the subject in Mark and Luke

Editor's Response to Letter #780 (Part b)

By excluding the ending of my statement you failed to quote me accurately. I said, "Neither Mark nor Luke identify the person on the cross as Jesus. At least not from the superscription per se." Notice, I said "from the superscription per se" which you conveniently excluded. Anyone who looked only at the inscriptions in Mark and Luke would not know Jesus was the one being crucified. Other data is required.

Letter #780 Continues (Part c)

(In the 182nd [Feb. 1998] issue DA attacked a remark in the 2nd Issue of BE. He stated, "The Second Issue of BE [Feb. 1983] had a number of simple errors such as in your reference to 2 Kings 13:21 when you talk about a "grave" when it was a tomb." To that I replied, "If you had bothered to read any of the literature, other than that within your narrow purview, you would have noticed that the NEB, the NAB, the NASB, the RSV, and the Modern Language all say 'grave.' Are you saying your scholars are more knowledgeable than those who composed these versions?" DA now seeks to follow up his comments with--Ed.)

This is one of your constant fallacies, argument from authority. Which set of authorities is more knowledgeable is irrelevant. The question is which is right (which can be neither).

Editor's Response to Letter #780 (Part c)

You certainly got this one twisted around. You are the one arguing from authority, not I. I am merely asking you which of your biblical authorities is correct. That is your problem to sort out, not mine. I cited some authorities to prove my point and you are contending others could be more accurate. All you are doing is substantiating my point. You say, "The question is which is right (which can be neither)." That is precisely my argument. That could very well be true; so how do you know what your book is saying. Remember what I said to you in the April issue. Perhaps you forgot, so I will refresh your memory: "I am under no obligation to nail down the wording of your book. Let me repeat that. I am under no obligation to provide the correct wording of your book. You, on the other hand, are saddled with that horrible burden." Later I said, "You are admitting that biblicists not only don't know what the text says but that

you don't either. Therefore that part of Scripture is, for all practical purposes, worthless and should be expunged from the Bible.... True, you can't prove a contradiction if you can't be sure of the wording. But if you can't be sure of the wording, then that part of Scripture becomes useless and should be expelled."

Letter #780 Continues (Part d)

(In the February 1998 issue I said to DC of St. Paul, Minn., "You criticize me for mentioning the contradiction between Matt. 1:16 which says Joseph's father is Jacob and Luke 3:23 which says his father is Heli by saying, 'your note of the Matt. 1:16 vs. Luke. 3:23 ignores known Jewish customs.' To this I said, "Really? Such as what? You mean the Jews had a custom in which two men could have the same son?" DA now wants to come to DC's defense by saying--Ed.),

Actually the Jews did, and do, and so does just about every other society. Go have a talk with most any adoptee and ask "who is your father?" You are quite likely to get a flat claim of having 2 fathers (one by birth and one by legal adoption.) Any attempt to dispute that is apt to get a distinctly unfriendly response, and rightly so. The two may be fathers in different ways, but they both merit the term and any attempt to insist only one is the father is clearly wrong.

Editor's Response to Letter #780 (Part d)

First, I am sorry to disillusion you, DA, but we have only one father. What people choose to call foster parents, adopting parents, step-fathers, etc. is their choice to make. But the fact remains that we have only one father. According to your logic, if I chose to refer to my neighbor or my teacher as my father, he would, in fact, be such. Hardly! Legal papers can alter the wording in whatever matter they deem desirable, but they can't change biology. What is that old conundrum: A duck by any other name.... You are substituting emotions, feelings, desires, and preferences for objective reality. Sorry to be so clinical and detached but facts are facts.

Second, you say "they both merit the term." They may both merit it, but only one has it. You can arbitrarily alter the terminology, but you can't alter the situation.

Third, you state "any attempt to insist only one is the father is clearly wrong." In truth, any attempt to insist anyone is the father other than the male who contributed to his birth is wrong. Under your ridiculous scenario an individual could have hundreds of fathers should he choose to so label them or should the legal paperwork so designate.

Letter #780 Continues (Part e)

(In the February 1998 issue I discussed the biblical concept of adultery and EK's assertion that ONLY if the woman is married is adultery a factor. DA now seeks to come to EK's defense by alleging--Ed.),

Among the several weaknesses of your claim is what EK points out, that nothing done to the women in Exodus 20:14 constituted adultery under the OT definition. The male could have sex with any number of women without committing adultery as long as none of the women were married or engaged.

Editor's Response to Letter #780 (Part e)

I'll tell you what I told EK, DA. Where does Scripture say this is not adultery? Where does Scripture say that adultery ONLY occurs when the woman involved is married or engaged.

Letter #780 Continues (Part f)

Since you like argument from authority, we start by quoting several: Harper's Bible Dictionary 1985, page 14, "In the OT, adultery had a precise and limited definition... Sexual relations between a married woman and any man other than her husband." New Standard Bible Dictionary 1936, page 555. "We nowhere read anything to the effect he (husband) was forbidden extramarital intercourse with other women." Expository Dictionary of Bible Words 1985, page 21, "Adultery is intercourse with or by a married or engaged woman." Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible 1962, page 51, "violation of a husband's right to have sole sexual possession of his wife..." Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Bible 1963, page 38, "He was guilty of adultery only when he had extramatrimonial relations with a married...or betrothed woman." Oxford Dictionary of the Bible 1996, page 7, "...adultery...man having sex with a married woman."

Editor's Response to Letter #780 (Part f)

First, not I, but you are the one repeatedly relying upon authority, as these citations demonstrate. You, like millions of biblicists, also cite the Bible as the ultimate authority.

Second, according to you Harper's Bible Dictionary says, "In the OT, adultery had a precise and limited definition... Sexual relations between a married woman and any man other than her husband." So I will ask you and Harper's where that definition is to be found in Scripture. Are we going to go by the Bible or Harpers.

Third, you cite the New Standard Bible Dictionary which says, "We nowhere read anything to the effect he (husband) was forbidden extramarital intercourse with other women." By the same token, where does it say it was permissible? Where does it say it was not adultery?

Moreover, all too often your thought processes are inconsistent DA, because you are now citing a source that deviates from your premise. You earlier stated (verbatim), "The male could have sex with any number of women without committing adultery, as long as none of the women were married or engaged. Now you are citing a dictionary that says a husband can have sex with any women, married or not. There

are no restrictions. It says "other women" and that can mean either married or unmarried.

Fourth, then you cite the Expository Dictionary of Bible Words which says, "Adultery is intercourse with or by a married or engaged woman." Does that say ONLY sex by a married or engaged woman is adultery? Even more importantly, does SCRIPTURE say adultery ONLY occurs when sex is performed by a married or engaged woman? If so, where?

Fifth, you cite the Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible which says, "violation of a husband's right to have sole sexual possession of his wife..." Is that saying that is the ONLY situation under which adultery can occur. If so, where is that stated in Scripture?

Also you earlier stated, the male could have sex with any number of women without committing adultery, as long as none of the women were married or engaged. This Interpreters Dictionary, which you are citing, is not supporting you with respect to engaged women. Where does it say adultery occurs if the woman involved is merely engaged?

And sixth, you cite the Oxford Dictionary of the Bible which says according to you, "...adultery...man having sex with a married woman." Again does that mean adultery can ONLY occur if a man has relations with a married woman. Where does the Bible state as much? You are not doing very well, even with your own sources.

Letter #780 Continues (Part g)

You wish to argue from Prov. 6:32 and Matt. 5:28 that since both lack the qualifier "married", adultery with an unmarried woman is possible. But you are arguing from silence, always a weak argument....

Editor's Response to Letter #780 (Part g)

Sooner or later you are bound to get it right, DA. I am not arguing from silence; I am questioning. I want to know where the Bible says, "*If, and ONLY if, the woman is married can adultery occur.*" I cited Prov. 6:32 and Matt. 5:28 because they leave open the possibility of a man committing adultery with an unmarried female. The latter is especially strong in that regard because it says "...whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart." Notice it does not say the woman must be married. It just says a woman, period. That's not an argument from silence. You, on the other hand, are contending that "The male could have sex with any number of women without committing adultery, as long as none of the women were married or engaged." Again, where does Scripture say involvement by a married man with unmarried women is not adultery? I cited Matt. 5:28 which states that to even contemplate the thought is adulterous, let alone commit the act.

All of this harkens back to what I originally said in the February 1998 issue, "The basic problem is that the Bible does not clearly and emphatically support either of our positions. The Bible says, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," but nowhere does it clearly and unequivocally define exactly what adultery entails. And because it is not clearly defined, my position is more reliable than yours. Only by producing a verse stating adultery only occurs when a man has relations with a married female can you hope to salvage your stance." And that, DA, you have failed to accomplish.

Letter #780 Concludes (Part h)

Now the Bible may not "clearly and unequivocally define exactly what adultery entails", but the implications are clear enough. We have Hosea 4:13-14 "*...daughters play the wanton...brides commit adultery.*" We have Lev. 20:10 "*If a man commits adultery with his neighbor's wife, both...shall be put to death.*" and Exodus 22:16-17 "*When a man seduces a virgin who is not yet betrothed, he shall pay the bride price...*" In both and other places, we have the married woman linked to "adultery", a word that is not used to describe similar conduct by the unmarried. It takes deliberate effort to avoid the conclusion that adultery involves a married (or engaged) woman, and does not occur when a man, married or not, has sex with a slave girl of his....

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #780 (Part h)

You say, "it takes deliberate effort to avoid the conclusion that adultery involves a married (or engaged) woman, and does not occur when a man, married or not has sex with a slave-girl of his...." To begin with you stated the original problem incorrectly. There is no problem involved in concluding that when a married woman is engaged in extramarital sex, adultery is occurring. But the original issue is whether or not adultery can ONLY occur if a married woman is involved, a problem you have seen fit to dodge throughout your monologue. And you completely ignored what is stated in Matt. 5 ("*...whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart.*"). It does not say the woman must be married.

And finally why did you even cite Ex. 22:16-17, since it is referring to an unbetrothed virgin, not a married woman? You say "it takes deliberate effort to avoid the conclusion that adultery involves a married (or engaged) woman..." when the only "deliberate effort" involved is coming to your conclusion that the virgin discussed in Ex. 22:16-17 somehow substantiates your position. If anything, it proves the opposite.

I can use this citation, however, by asking: If no adultery is involved, then why is the man required to pay the bride price for seducing a virgin? If it was not adultery, then what was it, and why was it illegal?

In any event, we have belabored this issue sufficiently and it is time to conclude the discussion. As I told EK in February 1998, until someone can produce a verse or verses that clearly say adultery can ONLY occur when the woman involved is married, there is no need to continue.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #781 from WS of Baton Rouge, Louisiana (Part a)

Dear Dennis: Your excellent critique of DA's letter in issue 184 contained two points that I should comment on.

DA's claim that Egypt's climate once was wetter is not his invention. Sources I've read over the years say the region has been slowly drying for millennia. That southern Egypt once had more rainfall than today is shown by the presence of rain spouts on temples built more than 2,000 years ago. They don't need the spouts today; the spouts must have been necessary back then.

Editor's Response to Letter #781 (Part a)

Dear WS. You may be correct but I have never seen any statements to this effect in my readings. Are you sure they were rain spouts and did not serve some other purpose? Everything I have seen and read indicates Egypt was as dry 4,000 years ago as it is now. But not being an expert, I will defer to your judgment.

Letter #781 Concludes (Part b)

However, we're not talking about monsoons, only somewhat more frequent rainstorms than the rare precipitation today. I can find no reference to any rivers in historic times in any of my books on Egypt. The Nile cut a valley across a desert. On both sides of the narrow strip of vegetated riverbottom land is bone-dry desert, a desert that comes right to the riverbank in parts of southern Egypt. If the wadis were riverbeds, even only for part of each year, they would be lined with vegetation. DA is leaning on a weak reed when he takes a reference to higher rainfall in ancient times to mean that Egypt is an African version of Louisiana.

Which brings me to the bayous. Forget the dictionary. Bayou is a vague term that covers channels of water that, in other areas, would be called creeks or rivers, depending upon their size. Some bayous will barely hold a canoe; others are shipping channels. Does DA claim Egypt has bayous? Show me.

The main branches of the Mississippi at its mouth are called passes. The Mississippi also sends out smaller streams across the mud flats near its mouths, and I've found one reference to them as 'bayous,' which may be what inspired DA's comment. But these are not independent rivers, merely smaller branches of Big Muddy. A branch is not a river, simply one of several channels used by a river at its mouth. The Nile has these too, but they're not separate rivers. At Cairo, the Nile is split into two parts by an island. Is DA going to claim these are two separate rivers?

It's true that the Nile is formed from two rivers, but they merge in the Sudan, in an area that was not a part of Egypt in the Bronze or Iron ages by anyone's geography. What the Mississippi/Atchafalaya problem has to do with Egypt is beyond me. The

Nile certainly isn't trying to mate with the Jordan River, unlike our two rambunctious rivers here (pardon my anthropomorphism). DA was obviously desperate to throw something into the breach in his arguments, no matter how useless.

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #781 (Part b)

I wish you would tell all of that to DA. Considering the fact that you live in the land of the bayous, the probability is high that you are more qualified to discuss the topic than he. I've decided he's beyond salvation because his ego won't allow reality to precede his presuppositions. He'd rather resist than desist.

Letter #782 from JB Via Email

(In the May 1998 issue we related the conversation JB had with his pastor as a result of having left the church and Christianity. What follows is the advice JB gave to one of his in-laws regarding what to say if the minister should call. JB says),

Now that I have backed my former pastor into a corner, I wouldn't be surprised if he calls you. He may send an e-mail, but he will probably use the phone instead. He will probably offer you some perspective from which to view my disbelief, likely saying that I am rebelling against God because of some hidden inner conflict, and/or that Satan is attacking me. He will likely tell you that I am misunderstanding and misusing scripture, and that there is really nothing behind the challenges I have raised. He may say that I am raising the issues only to hide behind them, because the real issue is some emotional or spiritual conflict, and he may use the word "smokescreen." He may assure you that all the questions I have raised have answers, and if you seem troubled by my challenges, he might even refer you to some apologetic books. He will likely offer you some high-sounding but vacuous assurances that, yes, Christianity is indeed true.

What he probably WON'T do is to answer the challenges I have raised, at least not in a serious way. If he does try to "answer" some of my challenges, ask yourselves why he is answering only to you and not to me. Does he know that I will expose his "answers" and show they are absurd? You see, ministers tend to avoid discussing whether Christianity is TRUE or FALSE, because they know they cannot defend the "truth" of Christianity. Instead, they ASSUME that Christianity is true and carry their listeners along on this assumption. I expect him, as I would expect most evangelical ministers, to avoid talking about whether or not Christianity is TRUE, and instead to try to turn your focus onto hypothetical emotional conflicts, or attacks of Satan, or character flaws in ME. If he does this, ask yourselves whether weaknesses in me, even if true, have any bearing at all on whether or not Christianity is true. I think you can agree with me that even if I were a murderous, lying, cheating scoundrel, the challenges to Christianity that I have raised stand on their own merit and deserve serious answers. The net effect of his call will be that he will have gotten himself off the hook, and won't have to answer my challenges, because he will have persuaded you that my challenges to the truth of Christianity are not the real issue. He will be taking advantage of the fact that as believers you are already inclined to accept his

explanation and perspective. If you read this message before he calls, may I suggest that you not accept his explanation and perspective at face value? Instead, may I suggest that you tell him you would like to see him respond to ME by e-mail with serious answers to my challenges relevant to the question of whether Christianity is true or false? If you do, then watch for him to subtly discount the validity of your request, probably by rehashing some of what he has already told you. But do you think it is really too much to ask of an ordained minister of the gospel, trained at seminary, to defend the truth of Christianity? Why not press for an answer? And why would a trained minister avoid answering, anyway, if the truth of Christianity could be defended?

Letter #783 from FA of Santa Rosa, California (Part a)

Dear Dennis. In letter #772 JT erroneously wrote that I said "Jesus never missed a meal" and then quotes Matthew 4:2 about Jesus and his 40 day fast which shows he missed 120 meals. And you agreed with him! It seems that both of you failed to read what I wrote: "... at no time in his life did he [Jesus] ever miss a meal--except by his own choice." In my opinion it was "by his own choice" that Jesus fasted 40 days.

Editor's Response to Letter #783 (Part a)

Dear FA. Now I remember why I never challenged you when I originally read your statement. I noticed you had that proviso attached. When JT later came along and accused you of making an error, I went along with JT's analysis without rechecking your comment. JT owes you an apology, as do I.

Letter #783 Concludes (Part b)

Actually the story about Jesus fasting for 40 days raises several problems about Jesus. 1) If Jesus was just a man he would have starved to death before the 40 days ended. 2) If Jesus was God he would not have been hungry before, during, or after 40 days. and 3) If Jesus was both man and God he could not be a model for us because we are not part God.... In my opinion the story is not be accepted as factual.

Editor's Concluding Response to Letter #783 (Part b)

We felt an obligation to print your remonstrance FA, because a correction was in order. No one likes to be quoted inaccurately, including myself.

Erratum: On the first page of last month's issue I incorrectly quoted Ecclesiastes 7:12. It says the "Spirit shall return to God," not the "dust shall return," as I stated. Therefore, my fourth point should be ignored. But the other three points, especially the first and second, are more than sufficient to expose a major contradiction. As I said in point 4(B), "If this ruse were valid, (which it appears to be and is, thus, no longer a ruse-Ed.), then we would only have returned to square one because man would, in fact, have 'preeminence above a beast'" and we would all not be going to "one place."

When I start making errors as simple as this, I can't help but feel it really is time to reassess.

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A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

REVIEW

DOES THE BIBLE CONTRADICT ITSELF?--(Part 6)

This month's issue will conclude our extended critique of Arndt's prominent apologetic work entitled Does the Bible Contradict Itself?

On page 153 Arndt addresses the contradiction between Mark 13:32 (*"But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father"*) and John 21:17 (*"Jesus saith unto him the third time, Simon, Son of Jonas, lovest thou Me? Peter was grieved because He said unto him the third time, Lovest thou Me? And he said unto Him, Lord thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee...."*).

Arndt states, *"The one passage ascribes omniscience to Jesus; the other denies that He, the Son, knew the day and the hour when the Last Judgment will take place. Let the reader carefully note when each one of these statements was made. When Peter said to Jesus, 'Lord, Thou knowest all things,' the days of suffering for our Lord were passed and the resurrection had taken place; but the words of Jesus Himself, saying that the Son did not know the time of the Last Judgment, were spoken before His great Passion and His victorious return to life.... The Bible distinguishes between Jesus before and after His resurrection. Before His resurrection He had made Himself of no reputation, took upon Himself the form of a servant, and humbled Himself, Phil. 2:7-8. After His resurrection His status changed: 'God hath highly exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name,' Phil. 2:9. ...while Jesus before His suffering and death was invested with all the divine attributes, He did not during this period of humiliation use His divine majesty fully and uninterruptedly. He possessed omniscience, but according to His human nature He was content to forego its use except on certain occasions. When He says the Son does not know the date of the Judgment, a glimpse is afforded into the depth of His humiliation entered upon for us, which made Him refrain from exercising the divine powers He possessed...."*

Arndt appears to have decided to shield Jesus from critics like me by denying a major aspect of his essential nature.

First, he states, *"The Bible distinguishes between Jesus before and after His resurrection. Before His resurrection He had made Himself of no reputation, took upon Himself the form of a servant, and humbled Himself, Phil. 2:7-8. After His resurrection His status changed: 'God hath highly exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name,' Phil. 2:9."*

We are talking about the knowledge of Jesus. Where do these verses say that his knowledge of events changed or improved? Nowhere does scripture assert that the Resurrection caused the kind of change Arndt is alleging. Why would it?

Moreover, Jesus is god and god by definition knows all at all times. He's omniscient. God is not in the business of learning or acquiring information. Whether or not he made a reputation and humbled himself is irrelevant. He either knew or he didn't. At no time was he not God; therefore, at no time could he not have known.

Second, Arndt says, *"...while Jesus before His suffering and death was invested with all the divine attributes, He did not during this period of humiliation use His divine majesty fully and uninterruptedly."* The question is not whether he used it or not. The question is whether he had it or not. And he must have had it, since he's god. Again, he either knew or he didn't.

And third, Arndt says, *"He possessed omniscience, but according to His human nature He was content to forego its use except on certain occasions."* Yet, Mark 13:32, says he didn't have omniscience, period, not that he merely refrained from using it.

Moving to our last example, on page 162 Arndt attempts to reconcile the clash between Gal. 6:10 (*"As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith"*) and 2 John 10, 11 (*"If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him Godspeed; for he that biddeth him Godspeed is partaker of his evil deeds"*). Arndt states, *"Can it be justly charged that Paul and John contradict each other here? Paul enjoins the Christians to do good to all man. John forbids them to take a man into their houses and bid him Godspeed who does not teach the true doctrine of Christ. Paul, it might be thought, shows himself tolerant and abounding in love; John, quite intolerant and hardhearted. The simple fact is that the two Apostles are speaking of two altogether different situations. Paul is discussing our duty toward those who are in need of our help; John speaks of our attitude toward false teachers. To understand the much-maligned injunction of John, we must remember that many false teachers were molesting the Christian Church in those days attempting to impose their heretical notions about the person of Jesus on the Christians. When they came into a town to carry on their pernicious propaganda, was it right for one who believed in the deity of Christ to offer his house to them as their headquarters? A proper conception of truthfulness and sincerity and of devotion to a great cause will not approve of such abetting of doctrines which we have to consider false and dangerous. Can we wish an advocate of a false religion Godspeed, just as though he and we were good friends, brethren and allies? That would be denying the truth...."*

John is positive in demanding that his readers should not identify themselves with the wickedness which these false prophets became guilty of. In short, the principle based on the above passage is: Love everybody, love your enemies; but do not approve of, and abet their errors." Although this scenario is what Arndt wishes the text said, the words convey a different message.

First, Arndt says, *"Paul is discussing our duty toward those who are in need of our help"* which is erroneous because the text clearly says we are to *"do good to all men"* not just those in need of help.

Second, Arndt says, *"The simple fact is that the two Apostles are speaking of two altogether different situations. Paul is discussing our duty toward those who are in need of our help; John speaks of our attitude toward false teachers."* Since the former includes the latter according to biblical theology, Arndt's distinction is without substance and they are by no means *"altogether different situations."*

Third, Arndt says, *"To understand the much-maligned injunction of John, we must remember that many false teachers were molesting the Christian Church in those days attempting to impose their heretical notions about the person of Jesus on the Christians."* This is immaterial as Paul referred to *"all men."*

He continues, *"When they came into a town to carry on their pernicious propaganda, was it right for one who believed in the deity of Christ to offer his house to them as their headquarters?"* According to Paul the answer is yes. Paul did not say you had to wish them Godspeed. He said *"let us do good to all men"* which does not entail a distinction between those who are false teachers and those who are not. Refusing to offer one's hand is not doing good to *"all men."*

Fourth, Arndt says John *"is positive in demanding that his readers should not identify themselves with the wickedness which these false prophets became guilty. In short, the principle based on the above passage is: Love everybody, love your enemies; but do not approve of, and abet their errors."* But Paul never commanded this. He didn't say you had to join them or become one of them. This is not even the issue. Paul said *"let us do good to all men"* and he did not exclude those who were propounding false or anti-Christian doctrines. Paul says, *"Let us do good unto all men, 'especially' unto them who are of the household of faith,"* not *"only"* to those who are of the household of faith.

And finally, John refers to *"those who bring not this doctrine"* which does not necessarily include false teachers, because it could very well be referring to those who are not bringing any doctrines at all. Or they could be bringing doctrines which they are making no attempt to teach.

That concludes our multi-issue assessment of Arndt's apologetic work entitled Does the Bible Contradict Itself?

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #784 from JB Via Email

(Last month we published the advice JB gave to one of his in-laws regarding what to say if JB's former pastor should call. The following letter was written by JB in response to some comments made by JB's former pastor in a letter to JB's in-laws, primarily JB's father-in-law.

The Pastor says, Dear P & S [JB's in-laws], My heart breaks with you over the circumstances with JB. Make no mistake, JB is wholly culpable for the direction of his family.

JB replies, Responsible, yes, but I have nothing for which to be culpable. If I continued to teach them a religion that I now know to be false, then I would be culpable.

The Pastor says, JB is rejecting God because God has not acted nor communicated to us in ways that JB feels is reasonable.

JB replies, Well, it is more than this. The alleged communications extant from God are UNreasonable. It is only because Christians are told by ministers, parents and others whom they trust, that the Bible is God's Word that they are willing to overlook the problems in it and convince themselves that they just don't have enough knowledge of their own to understand what God means. The real problems with the Bible are, in this way, transformed into problems of the reader so that the reader blames himself or herself, when the Bible is really to blame. But what sense does it make for God to endow us with reason, and then expect us to believe an inconsistent, contradictory, incoherent Revelation?

The Pastor says, I have no doubt that JB is angry with God.

JB says, You may have no doubt, but it is not true. I covered this in my previous message. And who are YOU to tell ME what I feel, contradicting my own description of what I feel or don't feel? Your entire interaction with me has been condescending, very unbecoming for a minister of God.

The Pastor says, I suspect long ago JB felt conflicted over incidents in his life that he felt a loving God should not/would not have allowed to happen. You may know him well enough to suspicion such life experiences.

JB replies, This is a theme that you (JB's father-in-law) wrote in your first letter to me, also. It's not true, but let's grant for the moment that it is, for the sake of argument. Let me ask you this. If I am angry with God because there has been some conflict in my past, what bearing does this have on the question of whether or not Christianity is true? It has no bearing at all. The question of whether Christianity is true stands totally independent of my very existence, much less any conflict or anger I might have. Even if I had never been born, the question of whether Christianity is true or false still stands.

The Pastor says, Whatever his reasons.

JB replies, I told you the reasons very clearly in my earlier messages. But you have no choice but to deny that my reasons are valid because the foundation of your religion would crumble if you accepted them as true.

The Pastor says, JB is at war with the God he preaches (now) does not exist. That's a no-win conflict for JB.

JB replies, False. I'm not at war with a phantom god. I am defending myself against the scorn of my in-laws by demonstrating to them that my unbelief is reasonable.

[To P and S, my in-laws]. By the way, I am content for you to remain in your belief. I only want you to have a reason to respect me again, and I'm trying to give you that reason by letting you see that I have come to my own personal unbelief competently, not as a whim or in emotional reaction to something in my past experience. And, in case there is any question in any-one's mind, I am also content to remain in my UNbelief. If you think I am experiencing any internal struggle because of it, you are mistaken. I can't say it any plainer than this.

The Pastor says, My encouragement to you is simply to continue to pray for JB, his wife and the kids. JB will continue to use "reason" as his moral high-ground.

JB replies, Well, I'll give you this, R [my former pastor] -- you're not spouting the sophistries of the Christian apologists now -- you're going exactly contrary to them. The apologists make a career out of attempting to show that Christianity is REASONABLE. It was Josh McDowell himself who said, if I may paraphrase, "My heart cannot worship what my mind cannot accept." I am willing to return to Christianity if it can be shown to be reasonable. I'm not asking anyone to show that Christianity is TRUE, but only REASONABLE (but you will not have done this if you leave my challenges unanswered). But is any one of YOU willing to leave Christianity if I can show that it is UNREASONABLE? Until you become willing to do this, then it is unfair to even ask me to return to Christianity, because you expect me to take all the risk for the outcome of testing the truthfulness of Christianity. Furthermore, if you are unwilling to do this, then you are being IRRATIONAL, by definition. Sorry to put it so bluntly, but you need to see the difference between following the truth no matter where it leads, as contrasted with making all the evidence fit a preconceived notion, which the human mind, being very flexible in this regard, can do. So, R [my former pastor], go ahead and disparage reason in a backhanded way. I, on the other hand, will disparage irrationality plainly and clearly.

The Pastor says, He wants to debate.

JB replies, No, I am not looking for a debate. Look at my response to your last paragraph below for an explanation of what I have done, because I have accomplished what I set out to do. Do you see it yet?

The Pastor says, I suggest that this level of deception is conquered only by fasting and prayer. He is already familiar with the truth of God's word.

JB replies, Well, not quite. I'm already familiar with the FALLACIES of "God's Word," and that's why anyone who wants to maintain his or her own faith must retreat to fasting and prayer, and telling oneself that JB is "deceived." Engaging oneself in a sincere debate over the fallacies of "God's Word" will almost certainly lead to the loss of one's own faith.

The Pastor says, Because JB has requested a defense of my belief in God and Christianity (separate issues) I am sending him a video debate entitled, Atheism Versus Christianity. I am sending you a copy as well.

JB replies, A debate! Let me guess -- you picked one in which the atheist made a poor showing and lost the debate. Debates are good for raising issues in a lively and entertaining way to get people to begin thinking for themselves, but they are no good at all for establishing truth. This is because the outcome of a debate usually depends much more on the skill and preparation of the debater than the subject matter under debate.

P [my father-in-law], my previous offer to you still stands. I'll watch this video if you will read or watch something of my choosing. If you agree to my condition, then I'll hunt down a transcript, a videotape, or an audiotape of a debate in which the atheist won. They're not too hard to find.

And R [my former pastor], don't accuse me of being unwilling to watch the video. I am willing, but I have to get something of value in exchange, tit for tat. That's fair, especially since I spent 23 years reading, listening, and looking at pro-Christian materials exclusively. If this videotape is "different" from the rest and "really" answers the issues, then it will be simple to get me to view it. P [my father-in-law] only has to read, view, or listen to one item of my choosing.

The Pastor says, Also, I will be sending some follow up questions and answers on paper that were not covered in the debate.

JB says, I hope they cover MY challenges that I raised in my previous messages. For 23 years I let the Christian church set the agenda and dance all around the real issues without ever addressing them directly. Now I'M setting the agenda.

The Pastor says, In the final analysis JB is already firmly rooted in his deception.

JB replies, "Deception" again. Say it enough and my in-laws will believe it. The "firmly rooted" part is right. I methodically studied the Bible and church doctrine for 23 years, and so I am intimately aware of the problems.

The Pastor says, God can and is willing to deliver him, but JB must turn to God.

JB replies, Which, being translated, means that I must accept God not only without reason, but contrary to reason. Begging the question is an elementary logical fallacy, but theism and Christianity depend on it for their existence.

The Pastor says, JB is not simply a victim.

JB replies, Correct. I am not a victim. I used to be a victim of the Christian delusion, but not anymore. I have raised a number of serious issues which you obviously can't answer, not because of any deficiency on your part, but because they are unanswerable. I still do not hold any animosity toward you, despite my tough talk. If you open your Bible one day and find that your faith has evaporated, like I did, I offer myself as a friend to help you deal with it. I promise not to expose your unbelief, unless you give the word, and I know how to put you in contact with people and resources that can ease the transition away from a life of faith. Right now you think it can never happen, and perhaps you never will lose faith, but if you do, look me up.

The Pastor says, He has willingly taken up an argument against God as creator. He is like a kid waving his finger in the face of God yelling, "prove it! I dare you!".

JB replies, This is not my attitude at all, as you will see when I explain below what I have done.

The Pastor says, The fact is God has and is proving that he exists (Romans 1).

JB says, Referencing the Bible as proof begs the question -- again.

The Pastor says, Again, I hurt deeply with you.

JB says, Yes, all of us have hurt deeply. Christianity takes such a grip on people's lives, that it is very hurtful indeed to discover that it is a false religion or to lose a friend or family member to irrationality. A more sensible religion would scorn people only for misdeeds, not misbeliefs. If I had kept my unbelief secret and kept up with going through all the Christian motions, no one would have seen any difference in me, and all would be well, even though I disbelieved. But, because I have acknowledged my unbelief openly, I am branded immoral with no evidence at all of any other misdeed. Incredible! This religion rewards you for keeping up a lie and punishes you for telling the truth!

The Pastor says, And I will pray for God's miraculous and undeniable intervention.

JB replies, Miracles have their own problems, but there's no use clogging up the works with a critique of miracles at this time. Let me just say that if I were to come back to faith, your assumption of its being miraculous would be unjustified. My return would easily be explained, as I said previously, by my losing my ability to reason, which could happen through brain damage from a car accident or by natural senility, for example.

The Pastor says, I fear for JB sincerely. He does not realize what he's doing.

JB replies, I remained a Christian for 23 years because I DID realize the consequences. If Hell were real, anyone would be a fool to dismiss the only Entity who could keep him out of it. Despite the fact that Christians don't talk much about Hell anymore, the fear of it still keeps many people in the faith, as it did me. It took a boatload of solid evidence to move me beyond that fear into disbelief. It was the fear of Hell that kept me from leaving the faith on only a few inconsistencies, but, as I said in my previous message, I found that the intellectual bankruptcy of Christianity, including the doctrine of Hell, was pandemic and profound. That discovery completely liberated me from any residual fear of Hell. And the weight of the evidence I have collected as a result of fearing Hell makes my present position unassailable to those who would presume to turn me back.

The Pastor says, I will be satisfied to send JB the information I've referred to. I will get those materials out as soon as possible. JB will likely keep trying to bully me into a debate. God's not asked me to play that part. I feel no compunction or desire to do so. I am sick over this. My battle tactics on behalf of JB and his wife (other than sending this initial material) will be with acts of wisdom and prayer.

JB replies, OK, let me explain why I'm not interested in a debate. I have already accomplished what I set out to do, which was to show that you are unwilling to defend the truth of Christianity. You are willing enough to defend Christianity under the ASSUMPTION that it is true, but you are not willing to defend the question of whether Christianity itself is really TRUE or FALSE. I don't need a debate, because I've already won what I was after. You gave it to me on a silver platter when you said, "God's not asked me to play that part," (how convenient for you) and, "I feel no compunction or desire to do so." Sorry to rub it in, but I don't want my in-laws to miss the significance of what has happened here. You, an ordained minister of the gospel, trained at seminary, "feel no compunction or desire" to defend the truth of Christianity, not even to retrieve a lost sheep strayed from your own congregation! As for "bullying" you, my taunts to you were measured to get YOU to respond, not to shake my finger at God. I needed some kind of response from you to draw this exchange to a resolution for my in-laws' sake. **AND THE RESOLUTION IS THIS, THAT MY CHALLENGES TO CHRISTIANITY STAND UNANSWERED.** It's not your fault, though, R [my former pastor], as the many challenges to Christianity are unanswerable. You've done the only thing you could do, which was to extract yourself from a losing battle. You got yourself off the hook for more abuse, and did some damage control with my in-laws on your way out. No doubt, God will take care of the rest, yes?

The Pastor says, P.S. By the way, the "shunning" by me of the member which JB is referring to was over a married man who fondled a teenage girl in our church. He worked with our youth. He admitted it to me in private, but later denied it in public to spare his marriage. I obeyed the biblical guidelines in that entire matter. I just wanted you to know that.

JB concludes, True, but irrelevant to the point I was making in my previous message, which was that you threatened me with blackmail. Worse yet, the "biblical guidelines" induce you to do so, an example of the "absolute standards of biblical morality."

Editor's Response to Letter #784

When your pastor refused to engage in debate and intellectual interplay with respect to the Bible, JB, you should have reminded him that he does not have that option according to his own book. Scripture clearly requires dialogue according to 1 Thess. 5:21 ("Prove all things"), 2 Tim. 4:2 ("convince, rebuke, and exhort, be unfailing in patience and in teaching"), Jude 3 ("ye should earnestly contend for the faith"), James 3:17 ("But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason"), and, of course, 1 Peter 3:15 ("Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you"). If your former pastor would rather amble off into the sunset than debate, he is not only disobeying scripture but behaving hypocritically by failing to practice what he preaches; namely, follow the Bible.

Letter #785 from AS of Riverside, California

Dear Mr. McKinsey.I have been using your "Encyclopedia" for the past several months in my frequent on-line debates with Xians on the "Christianity On-line Message Boards" on AOL. It's been a real "godsend" -- a wonderful quick source for confounding fundies and a great source of general education for the rest of us. One forthright apologist, who came into the area sure he'd convert all us heathen, was so discombobulated by my series of mathematical blunders, unfulfilled promises, and such, that he won't respond to my posts anymore. I guess that's progress of a sort. Speaking of the Encyclopedia -- I have noticed a couple of minor errors that you may want to correct in future editions. In most of these few cases you've, in my judgment, allowed the inerrantists to get away with errors that they shouldn't be granted. There is more errancy than you note! For example:

Pg. 214, 5th line -- A camel is an artiodactyl and DOES have a cloven hoof (2 toes per foot with enlarged horny nails -- just like sheep, goats, cattle, etc.), contrary to the Biblical claim. Why even simple folk from the Mid-East couldn't have gotten that one right I don't know. This is evidence not only that the Bible isn't the word of god but that, in this matter, it's not even the product of well informed men.

Hares have multiple toes (5 front, 4 rear), and the soles of their feet are furred and lack the enlarged horny nails typical of animals said to have hooves. Your statement that, "The appropriate term for a hare's foot is not hoof" is an understatement. They don't have hooves in any sense of the word (of course, this is only a Biblical contradiction of observed reality -- we know that fundies are not impressed by those).

Hares/rabbits do NOT "chew the cud" in the same sense as cattle and goats. It's true that they do sometimes re-ingest their own feces and process them again to maximize nutrient extraction from the semi-digestible materials they consume, but that is a very different process from standard cud chewing (even if the results are similar).

I don't know whether conies (rock hyraxes) chew the cud -- but I'll bet they don't. That should be checked into (maybe I'll do it if I get some time). In any event, they also do not have hooves comparable to those of the horses and cattle. They do have enlarged "hoof like structures on most of the toes," but the soles of their feet have moist naked suction pads for climbing (R. T. Orr, *Vertebrate Biology*, pg. 242-243). They don't have true hooves, but they do have enlarged nails on their several (5?) toes.

Pg. 215, line 13 -- mustard plants are NEVER shrubs--they're merely herbs (non-woody plants), and mostly annual ones at that. The Bible is totally wrong on this -- not only does mustard never make a tree, as you rightly noted, but it never even makes a shrub either. A shrub is defined as a woody plant with multiple stems from the base. The distinction between trees and shrubs is not always clear and some species can be one or the other depending on conditions; so I'd not make the assertion that "shrubs do not grow into trees" (which is irrelevant in this case anyway).

Pg. 226 -- line 22 -- the text says "Noah," where you meant "Adam." Your general point is well taken, however, as illustrated by the fact that thousands of scientists working for the past 200 years have not yet managed to name even 50% of the species of animals. The idea that Adam could have accomplished this in a single lifetime, even a very long "biblical" one is preposterous. Especially if he also had to write the names down, with descriptions, so the names could be matched with the animals in the future. He would have had to do that -- otherwise, what's the point of the whole exercise? Name 'em and forget 'em? Thanks for all your efforts at promoting reason in this daffy land.

Editor's Response to Letter #785

Dear AS. Although we had already been apprised of the 'Noah' in place of 'Adam' error on page 226, your corrections are most appreciated and have been duly noted in our list of future revisions. We would encourage everyone to forward any additional mistakes they may have noticed. It is more important that the book be accurate than my ego and those of three proof-readers be shielded.

Letter #786 from DH of Lebanon, Oregon

Dear Dennis. The series of exchanges between JB and his pastor spread over the past few issues have constituted some of the most powerful material I've read in BE. Thanks for sharing it with all of us. I'd like to encourage JB to revise his narrative into an autobiographical pamphlet so it could be shared with an even wider audience. If he does, let us know! The pamphlet could either be in printed form or, even better, as a file(s) on the Internet where we could read and download to pass along to others.

Coincidentally, with my mail yesterday along with BE #185 came a copy of Dan Barker's "Losing Faith in Faith," a book I'd ordered from Freedom From Religion Foundation. I'm already well into that fascinating autobiographical account of a former fundamentalist preacher who rejected Christianity due to intellectual reasons, coming to the same conclusions as did JB. Retelling personal stories of how we came to achieve a status of disbelief can be highly interesting as well as instructive (and it is my opinion that some people will respond much more easily to the facts presented within a personal story than they will by reading the facts alone, a fact "discovered" by the conservative-oriented magazine Reader's Digest many decades ago). Many of us have gone through those transitions and reading about others' struggles and outcomes can be helpful. Other books I recommend along this line are Edward T. Babinski's "Leaving the Fold: Testimonies of Former Fundamentalists" (Prometheus, 1995) and "Jesus Doesn't Live Here Anymore: From Fundamentalist to Freedom Writer" by Skipp Porteous (Prometheus, 1991). Also excellent is a dual volume set by Austin Miles, "Don't Call Me Brother" (Prometheus, 1989) and "Setting The Captives Free" (Prometheus, 1990), to be read in that order.... Keep up the good work.

Letter #787 from JD of Port Townsend, Washington

Dear Dennis. I've been an admirer of you and your work for years. Like many, I was raised a fundamentalist Christian, saw the light, got out of fundamentalism and have been outspoken ever since. For a short while in Seattle I was president of a Freedom From Religion Foundation chapter, the head office based in Madison, Wisconsin.... My approach at debate has been influenced by you. I go after the Bible. I've found your work most useful because I get a lot of bang for the buck. In other words, not an excess of commentary or dialog to wade through. I'm most appreciative of your scholarship and dedicated, thoughtful approach.

Issue #189 September 1998, Editor: Dennis McKinsey

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

COMMENTARY

This month's issue will be devoted entirely to correspondence from our readers and begin with another poignant letter from JB, who gained some valuable information and thoughtful insights as a result of teaching Sunday School in a fundamentalist setting for more than 23 years.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #788 from JB Via E-mail (Part a)

TOUGH QUESTIONS FOR THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Through years of participation in the life and culture of evangelical Christianity, a number of "difficult to understand" issues came to my attention. The approach to these problems endorsed by evangelical Christian leaders is for thoughtful Christians to accept the "difficulties" as inscrutable but nevertheless true, and to endeavor to strengthen one's faith in other areas where "difficulties" are not a hindrance. I acquiesced to this approach while I lived my busy life, until such time as I should be able to search out the solid answers that evangelical theologians had undoubtedly derived from their more thorough and sophisticated study of scripture. After years of studying the Bible as an individual and in groups, listening to sermons, attending Christian conferences, leading a small group Bible study, reading evangelicalism's best apologists, and even preaching from the pulpit once, I was dismayed to discover that the church cannot answer the tough questions about Christianity. I was heartbroken when I finally recognized, quite contrary to my own wish, that the cumulative force of the so-called "difficulties" thoroughly and unquestionably discredits Christianity. Anticipating that many Christians will not accept my

conclusion, and that they will urge me to come back to church and continue "searching, because of Jesus's promise that those who search will find, I have listed some questions the church must answer if it hopes to regain my attention. The questions that follow have been organized loosely into categories to aid in referencing them and many could legitimately be placed in other categories. Their current placement reflects my own judgment of where the weight of the questions carries the most force. The list is not exhaustive and is a sampling from a variety of sources. There are innumerable serious issues with Christianity already laid out in the existing body of skeptical literature. Several were independently discovered by myself before I learned of the existence of serious skeptical literature, a few are original with myself, and a few actually come from Christian sources. Some biblical references are given, but not all. I am assuming that any Christian knowledgeable enough to address these questions intelligently will not have trouble finding the relevant biblical passages. In addition, some questions assume a general familiarity with certain biblical and extra-biblical subjects which are not practical to reference because the relevant knowledge is widely dispersed through a large body of literature. For unreferenced items, a Christian who does not understand the issue probably is not well-read enough to attempt an answer.

Biblical Inconsistencies

1. Why does the evangelical church say there are no contradictions in the Bible when they are plainly there for anyone to see? (They are too numerous even to list a representative sample here. There are many books and monographs on this topic in the skeptical literature.1)
2. Why does the Old Testament teach that there is no hell, while the New Testament teaches that there is? The idea of "progressive Revelation" does not explain the conflicts in the biblical texts.
3. Why does most of the Old Testament teach that there is no afterlife (see Ecclesiastes 9:5-6, for example), while later Old Testament writings and the New Testament do?
4. Why does the church say that God is not the author of confusion (1 Corinthians 14:33), when many biblical passages flatly contradict this?2
5. Was God known by the name Yahweh prior to Moses (Exodus 6:3), or was he not (Genesis 4:26, 5:29, 9:24, 22:14, 27:20, 27:27, 28:20-21)?
6. Which "Ten Commandments" are *the* Ten Commandments - the ones listed at Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5, or the ones listed at Exodus 34? Only the list at Exodus 34 is explicitly called the "Ten Commandments" in the biblical text.
7. Was the Law given by Yahweh perfect (Psalm 19:7), or wasn't it (Hebrews 8:6-8)?

8. Why can't the six accounts of the resurrection be reconciled?3 Paul says that without the resurrection, the Christian faith is in vain (1 Cor 15:14). How could the biblical accounts possibly disagree on such an important narrative?

9. Why were the disciples surprised by Jesus's resurrection after Jesus had told them repeatedly to expect it?4 An angel even reminded the women that Jesus had told them of his impending resurrection (Luke 24:6-7). How is it that the women remembered his words (Luke 24:8), but the disciples didn't (John 20:9, Luke 24:12)? Even Jesus's enemies remembered that he had foretold that he would rise again (Matthew 27:63).

Biblical Ambiguities and Omissions

1. Why is the Bible unclear about how to be saved? Is there anything more important that the Bible could communicate? Why is it ambiguous and contradictory on this subject?

2. Why does Jesus teach salvation by works in the synoptic gospels, but John portrays him teaching salvation by faith?

3. Why does John not teach in his gospel that it is necessary to repent of our sins, since he states that his gospel was written specifically for the purpose of showing people how to be saved (John 20:31)?

4. Why is the nature and practice of the two sacraments - baptism and the Lord's Supper - left ambiguous in the Bible and a cause of discord among churches?

5. Why is the book of Revelation incomprehensible if it is really "not sealed" (Rev 22:10)? Why are the prophecies in the book of Daniel actually easier to understand, if they *are* sealed (Daniel 12:9)?

6. Why doesn't the Bible provide unambiguous answers for major divisive doctrines like efficacy of baptism, paedobaptism, mode of adult baptism, soteriology, Christology, trinitarianism, satanology, angelology, nature of the afterlife, eschatology, fundamentals of the faith, the standing of Jewish believers in relation to the Law, the standing of Gentile believers in relation to the Law?

Misinterpretation of Scripture by New Testament Figures

1. Why did the writers of the New Testament feel free to misquote and misinterpret the Old Testament and conflate verses?5

2. Why did the gospel writers use the Septuagint, an inferior translation of the Old Testament?6 Did the Holy Spirit fail to inspire them with the more accurate Hebrew text, the one accepted today?

3. Why did Matthew and Peter take Old Testament passages out of context to make them into prophecies, when they were never indicated to be prophetic by the Old Testament author (Acts 1:20 versus Psalm 69:25, for example)?

4. Why did Mark misreference an Old Testament prophet (Mark 1:2)?⁷ How can we rely on Mark to explain Old Testament prophecies to us if he is even mistaken about the source?
5. Why does Jude quote the non-canonical Book of Enoch as prophecy (Jude 14-15)? Did the Holy Spirit fail to inspire Jude with the fact that the Book of Enoch would not be accepted into the canon?
6. Why does Matthew quote a non-existent Old Testament prophecy (Matthew 2:23)? Was he using noncanonical writings, too?
7. Why does Matthew attribute a quote about the potter's field to Jeremiah, when Jeremiah has no such passage, and the closest one in the Old Testament is Zechariah (Matt 27:9-10; Zechariah 11:12)?
8. Why doesn't Paul ever quote Jesus from the gospel accounts, or show that he knew anything about Jesus's teachings and life as portrayed in the gospels?
9. Why is no single hermeneutic adequate for interpretation of scripture" Why were the New Testament authors so free and loose in their hermeneutics (the science of interpretation; esp., the study of the principles of biblical exegesis)? How could the meanings of some words and phrases have been lost? How could some cultural references have been lost? How can many books and passages admit of multiple interpretations. Doesn't God want us to understand his Word enough to protect the knowledge of its referents and use unambiguous diction and phraseology

Failed Biblical Promises

1. Why doesn't prayer work, when the Bible promises that it will (John 14:14, for example)?
- 2 Why aren't Christians doing greater works than Jesus did, since he himself said they would (John 14:12)? The context is clearly referring to miracles.

Failed Prophecies

1. Why have no prophecies been demonstrated to have been fulfilled? Why are many Old Testament prophecies too vague to be tested? Why are many Old Testament prophecies "yet to be" fulfilled? Why has it been impossible to demonstrate that the Old Testament prophecies were written prior to the events forecasted?
2. Why wasn't Tyre destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar as prophesied by Ezekiel (Ezekiel 26)? When it was destroyed by Alexander the Great, why didn't it remain desolate as prophesied by Ezekiel?⁸

3. How can it be that Isaiah prophesied a temporary destruction of Tyre, while Ezekiel prophesied a permanent destruction (Ezekiel 26:14,21; 27:36; 28:19 versus Isaiah 23:13-18)?
4. Why wasn't there a 40-year period in Egypt's history when the whole land was devoid of people and animals, as prophesied by Ezekiel (Ezekiel 29:11-12)?
5. Why is so much of New Testament prophecy incomprehensible? Why produce a prophecy at all, if it cannot be understood?

Problems with Miracles

1. Why haven't any of the miracles recorded in the Bible been independently confirmed?
2. Why don't verifiable miracles happen today? What better way is there to convince people of the Christian message, and isn't that the commission given to the church by Jesus?
3. Why don't evangelical Christians accept miracle stories recorded in ancient non-biblical works? Isn't it the case that evangelical Christians have decided a priori to accept biblical miracles and reject all others? Aren't the apologists' "objective standards" for accepting or rejecting extra-biblical miracles post hoc?

Origin and Transmission of the Scriptures

1. Why is the authorship of most books of the Bible disputed? Why do many books of the Bible have no statement of authorship? Why are some books in the canon pseudepigraphical (lie about authorship)?
2. Why did the early church not revere the scriptures as Christians do today, so that they added interpolations and made emendations?
3. Why hasn't the Bible been transmitted to us in perfect condition if it is so important and if God had his supernatural hand in it? Why did both Israel and the church add interpolations, emend, and conflate the texts?

The Canon

1. Why is the Mosaic injunction against false prophets ignored in the canon? Deuteronomy 18:20-22 should disqualify Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Jonah, Jesus, and Paul.
2. Why is the canon disputed by the church? Is God content to let uninspired writings falsely be proclaimed as his Word? Furthermore, how do we know the canon is complete?

3. Why has no one been able to describe a consistent objective basis for establishing the canon? Why was the canon established by vote instead of on objective principles? Why was the canon not directly revealed by God?

4. Why is so much of New Testament doctrine revealed through the use of occasional letters instead of in systematic books written, authorized, and canonized specifically to define Christian doctrine? Why didn't God deliver these himself, as he did the Law to Moses? Maybe this explains why the Old Testament Law has more clarity than the New Testament doctrines. Why did God leave the writing of systematic theologies to modern, uninspired writers, who cannot agree with one another?

Biblical Values

1. When Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, why did God lie about what the outcome would be (Genesis 2:17),⁹ while the serpent told the truth (Genesis 3:5, 22)?

2. Why are women treated as chattel and inferior to men throughout the Bible?¹⁰

3. Why is the Old Testament and most of the New Testament addressed only to free men, and not to women or slaves? Does God deal only with free males?¹¹

4. Why does the Bible condone slavery?¹²

5. Why does Yahweh command genocide,¹³ including the killing of infants? Why does he command that all women who have "known a man" be slaughtered, but the soldiers are to keep the young virgins for their own use (Numbers 31:14-18)? Why does the Bible portray Yahweh as worse than Hitler (Deuteronomy 20:16-17)? Isn't it blasphemous to call the Bible "God's Word," when it libels him so?

6. Why doesn't the Bible condemn polygamy? Is it not really a sin? In fact, the Bible seems to condone polygamy through examples of God blessing polygamists and by its explicit statements regarding David.

7. Why wasn't Lot condemned for giving his daughters to be abused by the men of Sodom (Genesis 19:8)?

The Bible actually calls him righteous (2 Peter 2:7)!

8. How can Christians say that the First Amendment guarantee of freedom of religion is based on Judeo-Christian ethics when Deuteronomy 13:6-10 and 17:2-7 flatly contradict this?

9. How can being mauled by a bear possibly be a just punishment for name-calling (2 Kings 2:23-24)? Doesn't this contradict God's own edict of "an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth?"

10. Why is faith - believing something for which there is no evidence - a virtue?

11. Why is rational skepticism a vice? If Christianity is true, won't the truth hold up under scrutiny? Shouldn't the church welcome and promote rational skepticism as a way of confirming and spreading the faith when people see that it fails to undermine Christianity? Why isn't skeptical literature studied and refuted in Sunday School classes?

Biblical Guidance

1. Why do Moses, Ezra, Jesus, and Paul all disagree on marriage and divorce? Moses allowed divorce, Jesus disallowed it and also allowed it, Paul allowed it, and Ezra actually commanded it to appease God (Ezra 10). How is an honest Christian supposed to know what to do in this area?

2. Why does the New Testament teach by example that major decisions should be decided by lot (in Acts chapter 1 when Matthias is chosen, for example)?

3. Why doesn't the Bible provide unambiguous guidance for major divisive issues like abortion, divorce, war, church discipline, lending and borrowing money, etc.? Doesn't God want the church to be uni-ted? Doesn't God want individual Christians to know how they should live?

Conflicts with Science

1. Why does the Bible teach that the sky is a solid dome of transparent material with water above it? (The water poured through the "windows of heaven" to cause Noah's flood, and then presumably poured off the edge of the disk-shaped earth into the abyss.)

2. Why does the Bible teach that goats will have striped offspring if they see stripes when they drink at the watering trough, when this has been discredited by modern genetics?

3. Why does the Bible record scientifically impossible events as factual? For example, the creation narrative, Noah's deluge, a solid dome over the sky, Earth supported by a foundation. Why has the evangelical church produced "Creation Science" explanations that are complete nonsense? Why is it that none of the more rational reconciliations of science and the Bible survives scrutiny?

4. How can it be that Psalm 16 and Romans 1 teach that the creation is a reliable means of knowing God ("natural theology"), but the scientific study of biological and geological origins contradicts the creation narrative in Genesis? Why does "natural theology" contradict "revealed theology" (the Bible)? Is the creation bearing false witness? Is the Bible bearing false witness?

Absurd Doctrines

1. Where is the justice in punishing us for Adam's sin? The Bible itself says that children will not be punished for the parents' sins (Deuteronomy 24:16). Furthermore,

if God really created Adam not knowing either good or evil (Genesis 3:22), how could such a harsh and enduring punishment as death for Adam and all his descendants possibly be just? Our secular courts are more just than God when they show mercy on people who cannot distinguish between right and wrong, such as children and the mentally handicapped. And why isn't this doctrine of original sin found anywhere in the Bible except in Paul's writings?

2. Where is the justice in punishing Jesus for our sins? If our courts of law were to accept the punishment of someone else in the place of the criminal, we would not say that justice has been done, but that injustice has been added to injustice. Would the church have me believe that two wrongs make a right?

3. How can sacrificing Jesus on behalf of the sinner atone for another's sin? This would be like killing my child to reconcile for the misbehavior of my neighbor's child. I have the capacity simply to forgive and forget without demanding compensation for small offenses. Why can't God do this? Does he simply want blood?

4. Why pray? If it changes God's mind then he is not sovereign. If it does not change God's mind then it is superfluous.

5. How can the doctrine of the Trinity possibly be true? Any attempt to make sense of it leads to contradictions. If it is so important, why isn't it clearly taught in the Bible? Why shouldn't an objective student of the doctrine conclude that it was created by the church to hide behind a shroud of mystery biblical inconsistencies about the nature of Christ?

6. Why is God concerned about humans at all? We are less than a speck in the universe. Christianity has the hallmarks of being a religion made by humans for humans.

7. Why have all the rational arguments for the existence of God been successfully refuted? If God exists, is it unreasonable to suppose that there would be at least one irrefutable proof of his existence?

8. Why haven't the existing proofs of God's non-existence been refuted? Surely believers, who have the advantage of an indwelling Holy Spirit with an "infinite mind," cannot be stumped by "finite minds" of unbelievers working within the confining limitations of reason, can they?

9. Why is it that some teachings are conveniently tautological (i.e., circular)? For example, you must pray the will of God in order for prayer to be answered; you must believe the Bible in order to understand the Bible; and the Bible is the Word of God, therefore it is true.

10. How exactly does "loving God and enjoying him forever" give meaning to life? Any satisfying secular activity can give meaning to life. Why does the Christian assume that a metaphysical meaning for life is necessary? Isn't it the Christian who

imposes meaninglessness on this present life, declaring that meaning depends for its existence on the life to come? And if Christians did not believe they will live forever, would they continue to love and serve God? Isn't it really eternal life that the Christian loves, and not God?

11. Where is objective, verifiable evidence that a soul or spirit exists and survives the body after death? Why does the Old Testament deny such an idea until the later writings, which show the influence of Greek ideas? The idea of "progressive Revelation" does not explain this.

End Notes

1 See, for example, the works of Thomas Paine, Robert Ingersoll, Joseph Wheless, Dennis McKinsey, Farrell Till, and others. Many of these writings can be found on the Secular Web at www.infidels.org.

2 Genesis 11:9; Exodus 14:24 and 23:27; Deuteronomy 7:23 and 28:20,28; Joshua 10:10.

3 Matthew 28, Mark 16, Luke 24, John 20-21, Acts 1:3-12, and I Corinthians 15:3-8.

4 Matthew 16:21, 17:22-23, 20:17-19, Mark 9:31, 10:34, and Luke 9:22, 18:33.

5 Matthew 3:3 versus Isaiah 40:3; Matthew 12:17-21 versus Isaiah 42:1-4; Matthew 13:35 versus Psalm 78:1-3; Acts 2:16-21 versus Joel 2:28-32; Acts 7:43 versus Amos 5:25-27; Romans 3:4 versus Psalm 51:4; Romans 9:33 versus Isaiah 28:16 and 8:14; Romans 10:6-8 versus Deuteronomy 30:12-14; Romans 11:9-10 versus Psalm 69:22-23; Romans 11:26-27 versus Isaiah 59:20-21; 1 Corinthians 2:9 versus Isaiah 64:4; 1 Corinthians 3:20 versus Psalm 94:11; 1 Corinthians 15:54-55 versus Isaiah 25:8 and Hosea 13:14.

6 Matthew 3:3; Luke 4:17-21; Acts 7:43; Acts 15:17; Romans 10:11.

7 This misreference is found in the critical text, but not in the Textus Receptus, illustrating that the early church was willing to emend the holy scriptures to remove difficulties.

8 Ezekiel 26:14, 27:36, 28:19; Wallace B. Fleming, *The History of Tyre*, Columbia University Press, 1915, p. 64.

9 Some modern translations soften Yahweh's statement that Adam would die "in that day," and so disguise the problem.

10 The evidence is too overwhelming to cite even a representative portion of the relevant scriptures, but a few of the more explicit examples are Deuteronomy 21:10-14, 24:1-4; Leviticus 12:2,5; 1 Corinthians 11:3,9; Ephesians 5:22-24; 1 Timothy 2:12-14. A good source of additional information on this topic is the Freedom From Religion Foundation, PO Box 750, Madison, Wisconsin 53701.

11 The fact that God dealt with Israel during their slavery does not weaken the force of this question. Israel's slavery was a temporary condition designed to underline Israel's dependence on Yahweh. Yahweh began to deal with Israel when he was a free man.

12 See, for example, Exodus 21:20-21, Deuteronomy 15:17, Leviticus 25:44-46, Ephesians 6:5-7, 1 Timothy 6:1, Colossians 3:22, Titus 2:9, and I Peter 2:18,21.

13 Number 21:34-35, Joshua 10:40, 1 Samuel 15:3,18, and Jeremiah 50:21, for example.

14 Paul H. Seely, The Firmament and the Water Above: Part 1: "The Meaning of raqiaa in Gen 1:6-8," Westminster Theological Journal 53:241-261 (Fall 1991), and ... Part II: "The Meaning of the water above the Firmament" in Gen. 1:6-8, 94:47-63 (1992).

(TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT MONTH)

Letter #789 from TO of Joliet, Illinois

... (After an extended paragraph denouncing biblicists for failing to acknowledge the Bible's inadequacies TO says--Ed.),

You quoted John 7:8-10 RSV as a contradiction in a sample issue you sent me awhile back. Yes, the RSV does say "...not going..." but the NIV says "...not yet going to this feast..." The NIV seems to have fixed the contradiction. I'm sure that you don't have space to quote every bible version and explain their choice of text and translation in all of your arguments. But how would you have us deal with this situation? In my studies into textual criticism and biblical languages I became aware of certain dishonest and deceptive uses of certain texts and translations by the people putting out these translations. I tend to believe that they are aware that they are "not" putting these bibles together using unbiased critical scholarship. These scholars are not beyond using late texts and questionable translations to throw the light off of biblical errors. My question is how do we deal with this problem when debating Christians? Your insight on this subject is much needed.

Editor's Response to Letter #789

Dear TO. The alteration of John 7:8-10 by some translators is one of the classic cases of apologetic expediency in action. The problem is quite simple. Jesus said he was not going to a feast but he later went secretly. In other words, he lied. In order to elude this dilemma many apologists have concluded that the most viable approach is to rewrite the script. When Jesus says in verse 8, "Go to the feast yourselves; I am not going up to this feast" some have chosen to insert the word "yet" into the text. It would then say, "I am not going up yet to this feast" which clearly implies he would be going later and, in fact, that's what happened.

How do you deal with a problem of this nature? Well, first you make sure everyone is aware of the textual conflicts between the various versions on the market. Versions such as the RSV, the JB, the ASV, the NEB, the NAB, the TEV, and the NASB are candid enough to admit the word "yet" has no business in the script; they don't have it. While those who created the the KJ, the ML, the NIV, the NWT and the LV opted for expediency.

And second, you require those who feel the word "yet" has been properly inserted to prove their arguments while disproving biblicists who disagree. It is their problem; so ask them to reconcile the conflict. The burden of proof is on their shoulders. I would recommend that you obtain issues 66 through 70 which cover issues like this in general and this problem in particular under the heading VERSIONS DIFFER.

Letter #790 from AG of Bradenton, Florida

Dear Dennis. I am new to reading Biblical Errancy but it couldn't have come at a better time. I work for a devout born-again Christian, and am surrounded by the same kind of people as well as a few Mennonites and an Episcopalian, and I am constantly under attack for my beliefs. I am by origin catholic but also went through the born-again stage with the Assembly of God for 2 years. Since then I am back to being a catholic but with many different beliefs. Anyway I have spent many hours reading back issues of Biblical Errancy and none of the hours have been wasted. I am grateful for people like you who shorten our study time by showing fallacies only much research could uncover. I am one of the few believers in God who has read the bible from beginning to end, but I was totally amazed at how many errors I easily overlooked. I appreciate the ammunition you have given me, and the last few days at work I have shut-up the hypocrites. I was able to show them that their inspired scriptures are full of bla-tant errors to which none could give any answer except "I don't know" & "you tell me." Isn't it funny that the one who brings up the question can be discounted, since he doesn't have the answer. Anyway I got the ole "you just haven't felt the power and glory of Jesus" at the end of our discussion, which is the Christian's last desperate attempt to validate his false teachings. We usually have moral discussions but the last few days have been a burning of believers. It's amazing how brainwashed good people can get and then totally deny the obvious for fear of the unknown. Anyway I am sending my annual subscription this week and hope to get a few back issues as well. It will make good bathroom reading material in our office and hopefully open a few minds. Keep up the good work. Maybe you're our savior from the evil of stupidity and closed- mindedness.

Editor's Response to Letter #790

Dear AG. I am glad to see you are slowly but surely making it up and out of the quagmire and using BE in the manner intended. Just send me your address and I will send you a free list of all the materials we have available.

Letter #791 from JDG of Buenos Aires, Argentina

Keep up the good work! Your point-of-view is very clear and stimulating. The chapter entitled "The Philosophy of Biblical Errancy" in your book is a must. I agree with you that "As long as people believe the Bible is God's word, conflicts will continue unabated.

Letter #792 from SS of Angels Camp, California

My regrets that the paper issue of BE is drawing to a close. You are to be commended for doing a fine job and bringing enlightenment to many more than you know.... I do not know when my subscription expires but, as you say, keep the change. If not, let me know and I will stay till the very end and then pick you up via the internet. Thanks again for a job well done.

Issue #190 October 1998, Editor: Dennis McKinsey

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

COMMENTARY

This month's issue will be devoted entirely to correspondence from our readers and begin by concluding the poignant letter from JB, that was discussed in the prior issue. As a result of having taught Sunday school for 23 years, JB has a series of well-considered questions that contributed mightily to his disillusionment with Christianity in general and the Bible in particular.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #788 from JB Via Email Concludes (Part b)

TOUGH QUESTIONS FOR THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH (CONCLUDES)

Intractable Theological Problems

1. How could Adam and Eve have ever sinned if God had actually created them perfect, even if they did have free will? If God created them imperfect, how could a perfect omnipotent being create anything imperfect.

2. How can evil exist in the world if God is simultaneously good, omnipotent, and loving? Why is it that no theodicy stands up under rational scrutiny?
3. Why does the church say God did not create evil, when he himself claims that he did in Isaiah 45:7, Lamentations 3:38, and Amos 3:6?15
4. Why does God expressly take credit for creating disabilities (Exodus 4:11)? If these are God's doing, then why does the evangelical church insist that disabilities are the result of the fall, or of Satan's work?
5. Why would a loving, omnipotent, benevolent god cause people to believe falsehoods so that he can condemn them (2 Thessalonians 2:11-12)?
6. Why is the Bible inconsistent on major theological issues such as the nature and existence of an afterlife, the efficacy of works of the Law with regard to salvation, and the distinction between soul and spirit?
7. Why does the evangelical church speak of absolute values when the Bible teaches situational ethics?16
8. Why is it not possible to formulate a systematic theology that agrees with the Bible on all points? Roman Catholic theology introduces unbiblical and irrational ideas; Calvinistic reformed theology stumbles at the existence of evil; covenantal theology muddles the biblical distinctions between Israel and the church; dispensational theology is too hopelessly complex to be credible because every major inconsistency is explained away by spuriously introducing a new "dispensation;" and Arminianism destroys the sovereignty of God.
9. Why doesn't the Bible itself present its own "revealed" systematic theology. Doesn't God want us to have a consistent and complete framework of theology to support right decision-making and teaching others?

Blemishes on the Church

1. Why does the church worship on Sunday, when the seventh day was established forever? There is no biblical support for Sunday worship; it is a tradition of the Catholic Church accepted by Protestants.
2. Why do many evangelical churches deny that baptism is essential for salvation, when the New Testament clearly teaches that it is essential?17
3. Why do some churches object to wine, since the Bible indicates that it is a gift from God (Psalm 104:14-15)?18 How can they continue to object, even when they acknowledge that Jesus turned water into wine? Is this anything more than a holdover from prohibition? In fact, the Bible promotes drunkenness in Proverbs 31:6-7.
4. Why does the modern evangelical church embrace the extra-biblical doctrines of "having a personal relationship with Christ," having a "quiet time," "journaling," and

the necessity of belonging to an "accountability group?" Doesn't the church understand its own religion? Why is it caught up in pop-religion? If these are not really doctrines of the church, then why is there social pressure to conform?

5. Why does the church teach tithing for Christians, when it is only commanded of Old Testament Israel? Why didn't Paul teach tithing to the New Testament church when he had the opportunity (2 Corinthians 9)?

6. Why do some churches ignore controversial teachings in the Bible, such as speaking in tongues, baptism for the dead, the requirement for women to wear head coverings and to remain silent, the identification of the "sons of God" in Genesis 6, the necessity of poverty in order to follow Jesus (Luke 14:33), etc? Doesn't the Holy Spirit reveal the true meaning of these passages to believers? If so, why do sincere believers come to opposite conclusions on their own, and why aren't they able to come to agreement when they dialog with each other? Surely Jesus is with them to guide them when two or three are gathered together in his name, isn't he, even if they misapprehended the Spirit's guidance when they were on their own?

7. Why must Christians resort to divination (looking for "guidance," looking for "doors of circumstance to open or close," etc.) if the Holy Spirit dwells within them? What is the benefit of an indwelling Holy Spirit if it doesn't manifest itself in day-to-day living and it has to be coaxed into revealing God's will in major decisions?

8. Why do Christians pray about whether to marry someone, when Paul says that if they want to get married, they should just do it (1 Corinthians 7)?

9. Why does the evangelical church rail against one-world government, since its members say it is in God's plan as revealed in Revelation? How can they justify speaking and acting against God's revealed plan?

The Headless Church

1. Why is the evangelical church subject to the same social movements as the rest of society? If the church is headed by the living Christ, shouldn't the institution be a steady keel in a stormy sea?

2. Why does the church trail rather than lead in social reforms? (For example: the rise of capitalism, rise of the scientific method and critical thinking, abolition of slavery, eradication of Nazism, women's suffrage, civil rights of African-Americans after the abolition of slavery.) And why does the church dishonestly claim leadership in these reforms after the fact?

3. Why are the church's day-to-day practices guided by cultural norms rather than by the perfect, absolute, unchangeable norms of God and the Bible? For example, why do churches separate children from their families and age-grade them like the schools, why does the church propagate self-help ideology when the message of the Bible is dependence upon God, why does the church accept and participate in competition

where it has rejected it in the past,19 why has the service of women in the church been addressed only after secular culture has addressed women's issues, why does the style of music in the church and church architecture follow cultural patterns instead of defining cultural patterns?

4. Why doesn't the church understand Jesus's teachings? Why are most preachers afraid to preach straight through a gospel from beginning to end? Why do they skip over Jesus's "difficult" sayings and the enigmatic passages?

Character of the Church

1. Why has the church done so little good and so much harm in 2000 years, while science has demonstrated remarkable progress in only 500 years? Why is the period when the church dominated western history universally referred to as the Dark Ages, while the period of breaking away from church dogma is called the Enlightenment?

2. Why are the Crusades and the Inquisition and other church-sponsored atrocities politely ignored in many church education programs, leaving church members to learn of these in other venues, or, more likely, to remain ignorant of the heritage of the institution to which they belong and contribute.

3. Why does the church conceal and ignore and misrepresent legitimate criticisms and critics? If Christianity is undoubtedly true, why doesn't the church demonstrate it by refuting the whole body of skeptical literature in Sunday School classes? The church isn't trying to hide something is it? How can the church possibly maintain credibility when it is so blatantly partisan on the side of dogma, and obviously not dispassionately seeking truth wherever the evidence may lead.

4. Why do so many members of the church dismiss the veracity of unbelief without even giving it a fair hearing, especially in light of biblical condemnations of this behavior, such as "He who answers before listening - that is his folly and his shame" (Proverbs 18:13, NIV), and "The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him" (Proverbs 18:17, NIV), for example.

Problems with the Credentials and Character of Jesus

1. Why are many Old Testament prophecies about Jesus referenced in the New Testament taken out of context, not being messianic prophecies at all?20 Why would Jesus's disciples, and Jesus himself in Matthew 4:13-16, misrepresent the Old Testament text? Surely the Son of God would not allow a disciple to persist in a distorted understanding of the scriptures, nor teach in a synagogue class an unjustified misinterpretation of scripture?

2. Why doesn't Jesus fit the real, clearly identifiable, messianic prophecies of the Old Testament? Why do the gospel writers ignore these prophecies? Why does the church condemn first century Jews for rejecting Jesus as the Messiah, when he clearly does

not fulfill the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah? Why must we wait until Jesus' second coming to see the clearest prophecies fulfilled?

3. Why do the two genealogies of Jesus in Matthew and Luke disagree? If someone is declared to be the son of God, surely his credentials must be impeccable, mustn't they? Two variant genealogies cast suspicion on the true origin of this man, don't they?

4. Why does the genealogy in Matthew 1 show that Jesus descended through a cursed line?²¹ Jeconiah (Jehoiachin) and his father Jehoiakim were both cursed by God himself, who said that neither of these men would have any descendent on the throne of David. How could Jesus possibly be the Messiah, destined to rule forever on the throne of David, if he descended through either of these men?

5. If the genealogy in Luke is that of Mary and not Joseph, then why does it list Joseph in the line rather than Mary? Why is no other genealogy of a woman recorded anywhere else in scripture? And if this is Mary's genealogy, then Jesus descended through Nathan, not Solomon, making the prophecies in 2 Samuel 7:12-16 and 1 Chronicles 22:10 false.

6. If, using the genealogy in Luke, Jesus's claim to descent from David, of the tribe of Judah, is through Mary rather than Joseph, then how can it be that Mary's cousin, Elizabeth, was descended from the house of Aaron, of the tribe of Levi (Luke 1:5)?

7. Why does Jesus misquote the Old Testament?²²

8. Why does Jesus refer to the writings of Moses (Mark 12:26), when it is clear that Moses could not possibly have written the Pentateuch?²³ Surely the son of God would know more about the Word of God than anyone else, wouldn't he?

9. How can it be that Jesus contradicts the Old Testament (1 Samuel 21:1-2), saying that Abiathar gave David the showbread instead of Ahimelech, and saying that David had men with him, when he was actually alone (Mark 2:25-26)? Does the church expect me to rely upon the teachings of a "son of God" who is demonstrably mistaken about what God's Word says?

10. Why does Jesus quote a non-existent verse of Old Testament scripture (John 7:38)? Is it possible that he considered other non-canonical writings also to be God's Word?

11. Why would Jesus deliberately obscure the gospel by speaking in parables so that people would not understand, turn, and be forgiven (Mark 4:11-12)? Did he not come that all men might be saved?

12. Why was Jesus in the tomb for only two and a half days at the most, when he said he would be there three days and three nights (Matthew 12:40)? Surely the son of God would say precisely what he means, wouldn't he?

13. Why would Jesus prophesy that his kingdom would come in glory before some of those listening to him died, but the kingdom still has not come (Matt 16:28, Matt 10:23, Mark 9:1, Luke 21:31-32)? Surely the son of God could not have spoken a false prophecy, could he?

14. Why did Jesus say his followers must hate their families? Surely, when the son of God said "hate" he meant "hate," didn't he? Why would the son of God confuse us by using hyperbole? How could the examples of Luke 9:59-62, even if allegorical, be hyperbole anyway? Jesus clearly called a man to the irresponsible, disrespectful action of leaving his father, implying that he was not even to attend his funeral, and he called another to leave his family without even saying farewell or letting them know he was deserting them.

15. Why was Jesus disrespectful of his mother?²⁴ In John 2:4, Jesus uses the same words with his mother that demons use when they meet Jesus.²⁵ Surely the son of God knew that Mary had the blessing of the Father, didn't he, (and she was the mother of God--Ed.) not to mention the fact that the son of God would never be rude?

16. Why did Jesus lie to his brothers about going to Jerusalem (John 7:8-10)?²⁶ Did God the Father send a lying spirit, as he did in 1 Kings? Like Father, like Son?

17. Why did Jesus, by his own admission, break the Sabbath law (John 5:16-18)?²⁷ This puts the lie to the Christian idea that the perfect Jesus fulfilled the whole Law, and therefore was a suitable unblemished sacrifice for our sins.

18. Why did Jesus say the ruler's daughter was not dead? (Matt 9:18-25; Luke 8:41-56) Either Jesus lied, or he performed no miracle, but the context clearly shows that it was understood to be a miracle.

Evolution of Religion by Naturalistic Social Processes

1. If Christian theology and the church have a supernatural origin in an omnipotent God, then why has theology and the church evolved through naturalistic social processes over time?

2. Why does theology change from the beginning of the the Bible to the end? Why are the later writings influenced by Greek thought (for example, immortality)? Why is there such a large theological gap between the Old and New Testaments? The changes are not explainable by the idea of "progressive Revelation," or by any systematic theology.

3. Why was the doctrine of the Trinity unknown to the church until the fourth century? Why was the doctrine established by vote instead of by Revelation? Why was the membership of the voting council loaded with Athanasians? Why was belief in this then-new doctrine made a condition for membership in the church? Why were Arians exiled and executed?

4. Why is Jesus so similar to the other 15 suffering saviors of mythology? Why don't Christians believe any of the other virgin births and savior stories recorded in ancient literature? How is it that the ritual of Christian communion existed in the prior pagan ceremonies of eating the body and drinking the blood of their gods? How is it that the Christian ritual of baptism also existed in the prior pagan cults? Weren't the very defining doctrines of Christianity actually assimilated from the endemic pagan cults? Likewise, why are Easter, Christmas, the Lenten season, Rogation days, and others, derived from pagan holidays. Didn't Christianity have any legitimate calendar of commemorations of its own?

5. How did liberal churches come to exist? If they are inclined to believe, why did they not continue to believe the "fundamentals?" Could it be because the fundamentals have insurmountable problems that discredit them?

Conclusion

1. Why hasn't the church answered any of these questions in the 23 years I have been a part of it?

2. Why hasn't the church answered any of these questions in 2000 years? I can only conclude that it is because the church has no answers.

End Notes

15 Despite the renderings in the modern translations, this is the same Hebrew word translated "evil" in numerous other passages. However, even with the modern renderings, how can the Christian explain God's taking credit for "calamity" (NASB) or "woe" (NRSV) or "disaster" (NIV)?

16 David's eating the showbread, for example, and Jesus's Golden Rule.

17 Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38, John 3:3, 3:5, 3:7, Acts 22:16; , Romans 6:3-6, Gal. 3:27, 1 Peter 3:21

18 See also, for example, Jeremiah 13:12, Joel 2:19, Deuteronomy 14:25-26, Isaiah 25:6, Deuteronomy 7:13.

19 The ancient Olympics were outlawed by the church through direct governmental influence, and the modern Olympics were not revived until the church lost its hold on secular government.

20 Matthew 3:3 versus Isaiah 40:3; Matthew 4:13-16 versus Isaiah 9:1-2; John 19:36 versus Psalm 34:20; John 19:37 versus Zechariah 12:10.

21 Matthew 1:11-12 + Jeremiah 22:28-30 and 1 Chronicles 3:16 + Jeremiah 36:30 versus Luke 1:32.

22 Matthew 4:10 versus Deuteronomy 6:13; Matthew 11:10 versus Malachi 3:1; Matthew 21:16 versus Psalm 8:2; Luke 4:17-21 versus Isaiah 61:1-2.

23 This is firmly established by Pentateuchal anachronisms detailed in numerous critical sources.

24 Matthew 12:46-50, Mark 3:31-35, Luke 8:19-21, John 2:4.

25 Compare John 2:4 with Matthew 8:29, Mark 5:7, Luke 4:34, and Luke 8:28 in literal translation

26 The "yet" inserted in some modern translations is not found in the earliest extant manuscripts. This is an example of modern emendation of holy scripture. The more honest translations, like the RSV, italicize "yet" in a footnote, indicating that the word has been added by some versions in translation. The New American Standard Bible does not insert the word, remaining true to the critical Greek text. But the New International Version inserts "yet" in normal typeset, relegating the explanation of its dubious character to a footnote, where many uncritical readers will miss it.

27 The point of this reference is that Jesus plainly said that he was working, in violation of the Sabbath law. If he was not really working, then he lied.

(The last issue will contain a final letter from JB that's quite heartening-Ed.)

Letter #793 from DM Via Email

Dear Dennis. A recent letter to the editor (DC of Minnesota) cited Luke 23:43 ("And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.") and suggested that the comma had been misplaced by translators. I have encountered this argument from Jehovah Witnesses and at one time believed it myself. However, to believe that the comma has been misplaced is to suggest that not only have scores of translators been incompetent but that Jesus himself misused an expression that was unique to him and him alone. The "misplaced" comma defense is unique to those who hold the view that at death the soul "sleeps" and the body goes to the grave to await the resurrection. This defense becomes essential to those holding that position because if Jesus and the dying repentant thief were truly united in Paradise that same day then the "soul sleep" doctrine takes a serious blow. However, every single translation that I know of in the English language, but one, translates that passage with the comma before the word "today." The one translation that doesn't render the passage like the others is the *New World Translation* printed by the Watchtower Society. We have to wonder why. Furthermore, this expression "Verily I tell you..." was unique to Jesus. No one else used it in the entire New Testament. Jesus uses it over seventy times in the gospels.

Note that very carefully, over seventy times. In every single case Jesus always says, "Verily I tell you,...." then follows with a statement. (In John's gospel the evangelist

adds an extra "Verily" to each of his sayings). Over seventy times...and yet we are expected to believe that on this one occasion Jesus changed an expression that was unique to him by saying, "Verily I tell you today,..." followed by a statement. A little reflection will show that surely the thief knew what day it was. It would have been unnecessary for Jesus to tell the thief what day he was speaking but it would have been significant to tell the thief that he would that very day be with Jesus in heavenly bliss. It would make no sense for Jesus to tell the thief what day he was speaking (as if the thief didn't already know) yet not tell him *when* he would be with him in Paradise.... The traditional, fundamental view of the placement of the Lucan comma is a sound one.

Editor's Response to Letter #793

Dear DM. Your analysis is good but I would make a significant modification. You say, "The 'misplaced' comma defense is unique to those...." I would say it is not unique but quite common to all those wanting to escape this contradiction any way they can.

Letter #794 from DH of Lebanon, Oregon

Dear Dennis. I experienced a broad spectrum of emotions while pondering BE #186. Your statement of Closure is complete and I find no fault with your desires to go on to other things which you feel might be more productive and enjoyable. I assume from what you've written in BE and in your Encyclopedia that much of what you have done, perhaps all of it, has been a voluntary effort for you rather than any means of making a living. You did it because you felt it had to be done (and I should quickly add that you did it, from my perspective, very well). I have worked all my life in the realm of nonprofits which exist primarily due to the dedicated effort of volunteers who believe in the "cause." I know from experience that there are very few people who are able or willing to step forward to a position of leadership and those who do assume leadership roles most often do so because they are confronted face-to-face with a situation where they cannot gracefully back out of a commitment! Call it human nature, habit, cultural conditioning, or whatever, people just don't as a rule stand up to the line and say "give me something to do." They won't accept the challenge and run with it unless they have to. So perhaps my observation would be that you were a bit too optimistic about your cause and its appeal to others. The fact that you have produced 189 issues of BE, the Encyclopedia, and the radio and TV tapes shows that there has been much interest and many of us have profited intellectually from what you have done.

I liked your response to letter #778; publication of your notebooks would be even another needed tool--I've often thought that a cross-referenced bible for us would be great; maybe the notebook idea is even better. You'll never know the overall effect of your work.

Unlike the bible thumpers, I cannot promise you a judgment day when the fruits of your labor will be revealed to you! I don't know what your circulation history has

been, but perhaps the Internet will reach more people in the long run. The chief problem about volunteers for our "cause" is that we lack the will to organize. Christianity has its churches with a local presence that can motivate people to act. With few exceptions, those of us who are unchurched do not. Efforts to set up structures have often met with failure because, frankly, most of us grew up in a church and feel relieved to be free of those types of commitments on our time, energy and money. Debunking the bible requires great commitment on our part to study a book which we have already determined is flawed and not the glorious document it is touted to be. Few of us like the challenge of telling people that what they believe is bunk (Of course, as you often say, your approach is much different from this). For you, however, it was apparently something that appealed to you very much. And many of us have benefited from that. So don't for a minute consider your few active participants a sign of failure. I for one, a relatively new subscriber [2-3 years?] look forward to your new endeavors, although I will regret the loss of BE.... My friend, it is with sadness that I acknowledge the cessation of BE, but may you not drop out of sight after the pressure of deadlines eases off. I admire and have profited from your work and wish you well.

Letter #795 from MB of Collinsville, Illinois

It has to be frustrating to have put such an effort into a project and not have much help from inactive supporters. I believe that your mission is not just to entertain or validate the anti-biblical readers but rather to make a change in a biblically-intoxicated society. Even so, I want you to know that you have made a world of difference in my life from the standpoint of gaining understanding relative to this modern day mythology. It is a privilege to read a sane viewpoint once a month after running into the religious slant permeated in my community. I am sure that I am not alone. My opinion may not matter much but I do not want you to give up on this important newsletter. If you have run out of things to write about, I believe that it would be a good opportunity to discuss other related issues.

The major problem is that BE is not exposed to the public enough, which limits its influence. I came upon your site on the Web almost by accident. Promotion takes money and participation to make happen. The religious community has become very good at spreading the "Good News." They do not have any qualms about asking for money and help. The material you have put out is superior to all others on the subject and most people do not have any idea that it exists. Even so, to get material out with which most people disagree requires a monumental effort as well as good strategies. I'm not rich but I want to help out. I will help with the video strategy. If you need any help with other projects I would like to contribute some of my time.

Editor's Response to Letter #795

Dear MB. Your willingness to assist is greatly appreciated, as are your kudos. Please contact me ASAP in regard to playing our video tapes. Rest assured I could never run out of material of which there is an abundance. I did, however, run low on other components.

Letter #796 from K Via Email

I am not a subscriber, but I wish I had been. Since I have cruised your website I have learned more about the bible and god than a life-time of being raised by a preacher for a father...and it saddens me to see and hear of the struggles you have had to keep BE going.... A friend sent me a link to your website, and though you will no longer have new entries, I do hope you will keep your site up and running, since I, along with others am still reading and learning all you...have to say about the bible and god.... Thank you so much for the work that you have done, and I hope to keep learning from you and your site in the future.

Letter #797 from RT via Email

It's a pleasure to have the opportunity to thank you for the profoundly beneficial work that you have accomplished. I was truly excited to find your web site while reading through the Errancy discussion group in Christianity Online. You and your work have fans everywhere!. My "recovery" experience is probably similar to other former fundamentalists, so I won't bore you with the by now all-too-familiar details. Suffice it to say that your efforts, in combination with others, have been "the lamp unto my feet" that led me out of the darkness of biblical superstition.... Again, my most heartfelt thanks.

Letter #798 from AN of Dallas, Oregon

Thank you for writing such a most needed book! I ordered your book through H. H. Waldo booksellers and it was definitely worth every penny. I am a former Pentecostal minister who has studied apologetics since I was 14 (now 27), but I found the grinding doubts, the anti-human teachings etc, to be too painful, and inherently evil. I'm just glad that I heard of your publication at an early age, so that I didn't inflict that poison on too many sincere people. I picked up my email address screen name, Job25:6, from your book. That's the verse where it calls the "son of man" a worm. I can't tell you how thankful I am for your Encyclopedia. As a former Pentecostal minister/intern trying to become a moralistic freethinker, your book has been pure Gold! Words cannot express it. Thank you. Your name will undoubtedly go down in history as one of the main heroes of a positive/moral humanism in much the same way as, if not surpassing, the greatness of Thomas Paine. I didn't know that your newsletter was still going, and I found out that you are (after 16 years) going to give it a rest. Well, understandable, but I want to thank you for having the courage to combat those crummy christian apologists, and for giving us regular good-natured humanists, some ammunition against their hellfire threats. You're appreciated. Thanks again.

Editor's Response to Letter #798

Dear AN. Thanks for your kind words and if my work turns out to be half as fruitful and influential as you portend, it will have been well worth the time, effort, and commitment.

Issue #191 November 1998, Editor: Dennis McKinsey

A national periodical focusing on Biblical errors, contradictions, and fallacies, while providing a hearing for apologists

COMMENTARY

BE has often been described as a publication devoted to exposing biblical contradictions and, although we have noted several times that more than just contradictions are emphasized, the impression endures. For that reason we can think of no more appropriate manner in which to conclude our 16 years than by returning to the notebooks from which it all began and devoting the last two issues to a book-by-book, verse-by-verse sequential litany entailing some of the most obvious biblical conflicts in the KJV. In so far as my memory serves me well, we will try to avoid repeating problems previously discussed, although an occasional repetition is not only unavoidable but desirable. Although by no means exhaustive, the following list should be reasonably overwhelming and act as an excellent reference source when short and sweet is needed.

Genesis

Gen. 6:4 RSV ("*The Nephilim were on the earth in those days*") and Gen. 7:21 ("*And all flesh died that moved upon the earth....*") say there were Nephilim BEFORE the Flood and all life died in the Flood; yet 13:33 RSV ("*And there we saw the Nephilim*") says there were Nephilim AFTER the Flood.

8:22 ("*While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease*") versus 41:56 ("*And the famine was over all the face of the earth and Joseph opened all the storehouses*")

9:21 (Noah "*drank of the wine, and was drunken*") versus 6:9 ("*Noah was a just man and perfect in his generations*").

In 10:5 we read, *"By these were the isles of the Gentiles divided in their land; every one after his tongue",* versus 11:1 (*"And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech"*) and 11:6 (*"And the Lord said, Behold, the people is one, and they all have one language"*).

According to 14:12 (*"And they took Lot, Abram's brother's son"*) Lot is Abraham's nephew; yet, 14:16 (*"And Abraham brought back all the goods, and also brought his brother Lot...."*) says he is his brother.

Lot said to a crowd in 19:8, *"Behold now, I have two daughters which have not known man; let me, I pray you, bring them out unto you, and do ye to them as is good in your eyes..."*, even though 2 Peter 2:8 says Lot was a righteous man.

22:1 (*"And it came to pass after these things that God did tempt Abraham...."*) versus James 1:13 (*"For God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man"*)

God said to Abraham in 22:2, *"Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac...."* when he had another son, Ishmael, according to 16:16 (*"And Abram was fourscore and six years old, when Hagar bare Ishmael to Abram"*), and Gal. 4:22 (*"For it is written, that Abraham had two sons 11)*

25:1 (*"Abraham took a wife, and her name was Keturah"*) versus I Chron. 1:32 (*"Now the sons of Keturah, Abraham's concubine"*)

Exodus

Moses' father-in-law was Reuel in (2:18 & 2:21), Jethro in Ex. 4:18 (*"now Moses kept the flock of Jethro his father-in-law"*), Raguel in Num. 10:29 (*"...the son of Raguel, the Midianite, Moses' father in law"*), and Hobab in Judges 4:11 (*"Now Heber the Kenite, which was of the children of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses"*)

Ex. 20:15 (*"Thou shalt not steal"*) versus Ex. 3:22 (*"...and ye shall spoil the Egyptians"*)

15:3 (*"The Lord is a man of war"*) versus Rom. 15:33 (*"Now the God of peace be with you all"*), 1 Cor. 14:33 (*"For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace"*) and 2 Cor. 13:11 (*"...and the God of peace and love shall be with you"*)

16:31 (*"...and the taste of manna was like wafers made with honey"*) versus Num. 11:8 (*"...and the taste of it<manna>was as the taste of fresh oil"*)

22:21 (*"Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt"*) and 23:9 versus 23:31 (*"And I will set thy bounds from the Red Sea even unto the sea of the Philistines...for I will deliver the inhabitants of the land into your hand; and thou shalt drive them out before thee"*)

25:8 (*"And let them make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them"*) versus Acts 7:48 (*"Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands...."*)

Isa. 40:28 (*"Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God...fainteth not, neither is weary?"*) versus 31:17 (*"...for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed"*)

32:27 (*"Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbor"*) versus Matt. 26:52 (*"...for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword"*) and Ex. 20:13 (*"Thou shalt not kill"*)

Leviticus

24:21 (*"...he that killeth a man, he shall be put to death"*) versus Ex. 20:13 (*"Thou shalt not kill"*)

Numbers

3:39 (*"All that were numbered of the Levites...were twenty and two thousand"*) versus 3:17 (*"And these were the sons of Levi by their names; Gershon, and Kohath, and Merari"*), combined with 3:21-22 (*"Of Gershon...were seven thousand and five hundred"*), 3:27-28 (*"Of Kohath...were eight thousand and six hundred"*), and 3:33-34 (*"Of Merari...were six thousand and two hundred"*) which total 22,300, not 22,000.

14:25 RSV (*"Now, since the Amalekites and the Canaanites dwell in the valleys...."*) versus 14:45 RSV (*"Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who dwelt in that hill country came down..."*)

18:23-24 (*"But the Levites shall do the service of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they shall bear their iniquity: it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations, that among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance.... Levites...among the children of Israel shall have no inheritance"*) versus Joshua 21:3 (*"And the children of Israel gave unto the Levites out of their inheritance, at the commandment of the Lord, these cities and their suburbs"*)

23:21 (*"He<God>hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither has he seen perverseness in Israel"*) versus Deut. 9:24 (*"Ye have been rebellious against the Lord from the day that I knew you"*), Neh. 9:16 (*"But they and our fathers dealt proudly, and hardened their necks, and hearkened not to thy commandments"*), Num. 14:10-12, 11:1, 21:5-6, Ex. 32:7-12, and many other verses.

16:32-33 (*"And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods. They and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation"*) versus 26:11 (*"Notwithstanding the children of Korah died not"*)

26:38 (*"The sons of Benjamin according to their respective clans were: Bela, Ashbek, Ahiram, Shephupham and Hupham"*) versus Gen. 46:21 (*"And the sons of Benjamin were Belah, Becher, Ashbel, Gera, Naaman, Ehi, Rosh, Muppim, Huppim, and Ard"*)

30:2 (*"If a man vow a vow unto the Lord, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth"*) versus Matt. 5:34-36 (*"But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven...nor by the earth...neither shalt thou swear by thy head"*)

Deuteronomy

2:7 (*"For the Lord hath blessed thee...he knoweth thy walking through this great wilderness these forty years the Lord hath been with thee; thou hast lacked nothing"*) versus Ex. 16:2-3 (*"And the whole congregation of the children of Israel murmured against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness. And the children of Israel said... Would to God we had died by the hand of the Lord in Egypt...when we did eat bread to the full; for ye have brought us forth into this wilderness, to kill this whole assembly with hunger"*) and Num. 11:5-6 (*"We remember the fish we ate in Egypt for nothing...but now our strength is dried up, and there is nothing at all but this manna to look at"*)

6:16 (*"Ye shall not tempt the Lord your God"*) versus Isa. 7:10-12 (*"Moreover the Lord spake again unto Ahaz, saying, 'Ask thee a sign of the Lord thy God'....But Ahaz said, 'I will not ask, neither will I tempt the Lord.'"*)

10:19 (*"Love ye therefore the stranger: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt"*) versus (*"Ye shall not eat of any thing that dieth of itself: thou shalt give it unto the stranger...that he may eat of it"*) and 23:20 (*"Unto a stranger thou mayest lend upon usury; but unto thy brother thou shalt not lend upon usury"*)

Was Moses excluded from Canaan because of: un-belief (Num. 20:12), rebellion (Num 27:14), or trespass (Deut. 32:51)?

Joshua

1 Cor. 3:8 (*"...and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour"*) versus 24:13 (*"And I have given you a land for which ye did not labour, and cities which ye built not, and ye dwell in them...."*)

Judges

2 Kings 6:22 (*"...wouldest thou smite those whom thou has taken captive with the sword..."*) versus 8:21 (*"And Gideon arose and slew Zebah and Zalmunna"--two prisoners--Ed.)*

Judges 14:19 (*"And the spirit of the Lord came upon him and he went down to Ashkelon, and slew 30 men of them and took their spoil..."*) versus Gal. 5:22 (*"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness..."*)

20:35 ("And the Lord smote Benjamin before Israel: and the children of Israel destroyed of the Benjaminites that day 25,100: all these drew the sword") versus 20:46 ("So that all which fell that day of Benjamin were 25,000 men that drew the sword....")

1 Sam.

8:1-2 ("And it came to pass when Samuel was old, that he made his sons judges over Israel. Now the name of his first-born was Joel....") versus 1 Chron. 6:28 ("And the sons of Samuel; the firstborn Vashni....")

9:1 ("Now there was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish, the son of Abiel....") versus I Chron. 8:33 ("And Ner begat Kish....")

9:1 ("...the son of Aphiah, a Benjamite, a mighty man of power. And he had a son, who name was Saul....") versus I Chron. 9:39 ("And Ner begat Kish; and Kish begat Saul....")

17:50 ("So David prevailed over the Philistine with a sling and with a stone, and struck the Philistine, and killed him; there was no sword in the hand of David") versus 17:51 ("Then David ran and stood over the Philistine, and took his sword and drew it out of its sheath, and killed him, and cut off his head with it")

According to 16:19 ("Saul sent messengers unto Jesse, and said, 'Send me David thy son, which is with the sheep'") Saul knew David; yet, 17:58 ("And Saul said unto him, 'Whose son art thou'...And David answered, 'I am the son of thy servant Jesse the Bethlehemite'") later shows he did not know David.

According to 15:35 RSV ("And Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death, but Samuel grieved over Saul...") Samuel and Saul did not meet until the day the latter died; yet, 19:24 ("And Saul stripped off his clothes, and he too prophesied before Samuel....") shows they did meet prior to Saul's death.

14:49 ("Now the sons of Saul were Jonathan, and Ishui, and Melchishua...") versus 31:2 ("...and the Philistines slew Jonathan, and Abinadab, and Melchishua, Saul's sons")

17:12-14 ("...whose name was Jesse; and he had 8 sons...And David was the youngest") versus 1 Chron-2:13-15 ("And Jesse begat his firstborn Eliab...David the 7th...")

2 Sam

1 Sam. 18:27 ("David arose...and slew of the Philistines two hundred men; and David brought their foreskins, and they gave them in full tale to the king, that he might be the king's son-in-law") versus 3:14 ("And David sent messengers to Saul's son, saying, Deliver me my wife Michal, which I espoused to me for an hundred foreskins of the Philistines")

6:6 (*"And when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put forth his hand..."*) versus 1 Chron. 13:9 (*"And when they came to the threshing floor of Chidon, Uzza put forth his hand...."*)

14:27 (*"And unto Absalom there were born three sons, and one daughter, whose name was Tamar..."*) versus 2 Chron. 11:20 (*"And after her he took Maachah the daughter of Absalom...."*)

17:25 (*"Amasa was a man's son, whose name was Ithra an Israelite...."*) versus I Chron. 2:17 (*"...and the father of Amasa was Jether the Ishmeelite"*)

17:25 (*"...that went in to Abigail the daughter of Nahash..."*) versus 2 Chron. 2:13, 16 (*"And Jesse begat his firstborn Eliab...and Abigail"*)

18:18 (*"Now Absalom said, I have no son to keep my name in remembrance..."*) versus 14:27 (*"And unto Absalom there were born three sons..."*)

24:13 (*"So Gad came to David, and told him...Shall 7 years of famine come unto thee in land? or wilt thou flee 3 months before thine enemies"*) versus 2 Chron 21:11-12 (*"So Gad came to David, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Choose thee. Either 3 years of famine; or 3 months to be destroyed before thy foes..."*)

5:5 (*"In Hebron David reigned over Judah 7 years and 6 months..."*) versus 1 Kings 2:11 (*"...7 years reigned David in Hebron..."*)

1 Kings

4:2 (*"Azariah the son of Zadok the priest"*) versus I Chron 6:8-9 (*"Zadok begat Ahimaaz, And Ahimaaz begat Azariah..."*)

9:28 (*"And they came to Ophir, and fetched from thence gold, 420 talents, and brought them to king Solomon"*) versus 2 Chron 8:18 (*"and they went with the servants of Solomon to Ophir, and took thence 450 talents of gold, and brought them to king Solomon"*)

14:30 (*"And there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all their days"*) versus 2 Chron. 11:1-4 (*"And when Rehoboam came to Jerusalem, he gathered 180,000 men..to fight against Israel.... But the word of the Lord came...saying...Speak to Rehoboam...Ye shall not go up, nor fight against your brethren.... And they obeyed the words of the Lord, and returned from going against Jeroboam"*)

15:14 (*"But the high places were not removed: nevertheless Asa's heart was perfect...."*) versus 2 Chron 14:2-3 (*"And Asa did that which was good and right...For he took away the high places...."*)

15:16 (*"And there was war between Asa and Baasha king of Israel all their days"*) versus 2 Chron. 14:1 (*"...and Asa his son reigned in his stead. In his days the land was quiet 10 years"*)

9:16 (*"And Jehu the son of Nimshi..."*) versus 2 Kings 9:2 (*"Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat the son of Nimshi...."*)

2 KINGS

8:25 (*"In the 12th year of Joram the son of Ahab ... did Ahaziah...begin to reign"*) versus 9:29 (*"And in the 11th year of Joram the son of Ahab began Ahaziah to reign"*)

1 Chron.

2:19 (*"...Caleb took unto him Ephrath, which bare him Hur"*) versus 2:50 (*"These were the sons of Caleb the son of Hur, the firstborn of Ephratah..."*). Who's the father: Caleb or Hur?

2 Chron.

20:35 (*"And after this did Jehoshaphat King of Judah"*) versus 21:2 (*"...all these were the sons of Jehoshaphat king of Israel"*)

Psalms

46:1 (*"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble"*) versus 22:1 (*"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"*)

51:16 (*"For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offerings"*) versus Isa. 56:7 (*"...their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar)* and Ezek.43:27 (*"...the priests shall make your burnt offerings upon the altar, and your peace offerings; and I will accept you saith the Lord God"*)

72:17(*"His name shall endure forever ... all nations shall call him blessed"*) versus Gal. 3:13 (*"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is everyone who hangeth on a tree"*)

In 86:2 (*"Preserve my soul; for I am holy...."*) a man says he is holy; yet, Rev. 15:4 (*"Who shall not fear thee, O Lord...for thou only are holy...."*) says only God is holy.

121:4 (*"Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep"*) versus 44:23 (*"Awake, why sleepest thou, O Lord? arise, cast us..."*) and 73:20 (*"O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image"*)

(TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT MONTH)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #799 from DS of Tiffin, Ohio

I have had this sinking feeling for sometime, that you, for what ever reason, were headed in a different direction.... Your decision must be a difficult one. I will miss BE, but you seemed to have moved on. Allow me to extend my thoughts on why some have "fallen, short of the glory."

I'm not sure if you are aware of local media (cable) and it's effects. Possibly in a larger market more leeway would be allowed, but I have tried to have both your tapes, and before that American Atheist programs, put on local cable. I did manage to get AA's on for three episodes till Continental Cable pulled the plug. They gave various excuses, but I knew the problem came from those who control the communities various social groups. Elk, Rotary, and Kiwanis, all of which the local manager belonged to, were "suggesting" that they (the shows) not be aired. So it was and still is tough sledding. I have managed over time to have eyes and ears, so I could see if and how anyone responded.... I know the opposition. I have felt it as have you. Recently, Media One has taken over, you know one of those mergers that would provide competition and lower rates. I thought I would ask again. After being phone tagged around and having meetings canceled, I got the message. I even offered to pay to have them on. No dice. Granted, there is nothing to fear, but there is also no place to which one can get the message out.

Others have this problem too. Lately, I have had none of my letters to the editor printed. I'm about ready to stand on the street corner and start wearing a sign that says: "The End is not coming!" The media, you know the...media, that controls our lives, is in the hands of very large and powerful organizations.... We, as a nation and as a world, will be divided up into two major classes, those who are useful and compliant to their wishes and those who are not. Religion really will be the opiate of the masses.... Religion will be given to the rest as a control device. Rome did it, why not do it again, but on a global scale?.... There is no reward in being right if no one cares about the truth. Talk about a voice crying in the wilderness. You have done great work and have pursued the path which few would follow. For your efforts I will always be grateful. Sometimes after an e-mail debate in which the person with whom one is discussing makes a contradiction in one paragraph which he can not even see, one starts to wonder what we are coming to. Then there's the ...fundamentalist preacher.... His tactic has been to identify and then get in or out, depending on whether or not you are a good candidate for contributing to his coffers. Every good salesman knows when to close or get out and find the next mark....

Another important point is that there is no central clearing house where freethinkers can exchange ideas.... I suggested a central clearing house over a decade ago. I still think a major problem is the lack of commitment and determination on the part of the anti-religious crowd. The fire in the belly is just not there among a sufficient number of people. Granted, obstacles are everywhere. But still, a lot more could be done by a whole lot of people that is not being accomplished.... I don't mean that we should have a "club" but at least a "phone book" or "directory" to which one can turn for information. Even an e-mail address book would be nice. But there is no such animal and as far as I can detect none in the making. There are directories, but, again, that

does no good when our numbers remain small and uncommitted. We are hither and thither. We have no direction....

You know this better than anyone; there is no emotional need to have the truth. "My husband is in heaven with God," is a hard thing to contradict, and that is where we are the weakest. Truth has no emotional importance when a myth makes one feel good. Last year's addict is this year's born again. That's hard to compete with.... But when you combine that with almost total lack of media support, what is one to do? I can't afford a national broadcast.... How do you compete when they control the microphone and the off-button. Ever since 1987 when the "Fairness Doctrine" was removed, conservative owners and "celebs" don't have to offer equal time to any dissenting opinions. Ten years later we are seeing the effects of this policy. ABC has a Religion Editor, CBS has its Angels....all exclaiming the good news. The trend is clear. I will miss your good news every month.... I fear that the electronic highway will soon be cut down to size and only messages of an accepted "value" will get through. ...I was recently told by a radio "personality" that not believing in God just proves there is a God. Thousands of people listen to this drivel and nod yes. The best to you and yours and keep in touch.

Editor's Response to Letter #799

Thanks for your compliments. I sympathize with your observations and I, too, am very saddened by the end of BE and our opposition's control of the media.

Letter #800 from ERB of Illinois

I'm writing to thank you for the enormous research effort and scholarship that you put into your book, "The Encyclopedia of Biblical Errancy!" I read the work from cover to cover, more like I would a novel, than the way I usually utilize books that I purchase as reference materials.... It was that captivating to me! You are to be congratulated on creating such a well-organized and useful tool for us free-thinkers to use in our discussions with the zealots who confront us at work and play to spread their narrow and one-dimensional views! Thank you so very much. Your book made me aware of other valuable resources, such as Gerald Sigal's "The Jew and the Christian Missionary," which I also studied and enjoyed.... Are you still available to do radio talk shows as a telephone guest? If so, I would like to arrange for you to be heard on the radio station that I work for! WJBC-AM is the top-rated station here in our community and, while I am not personally on the air much anymore, I am quite sure that our 9 a.m. to Noon host, on weekdays....or our 6 a.m. to Noon host on Sunday mornings would be happy to interview you on-the-air in whatever style you might prefer.... At the very least, I could deliver you a huge radio audience for the promotion of your book and the information it contains.... It is something few of us in this very conservative Judeo-Christian fundamentalist Midwestern community have ever had the chance to hear! I was raised in the Church of Christ, but was never the blindly accepting child my parents wanted me to be! Every time I questioned anything about "God" or "the Bible," I was immediately chastised and instructed to accept everything as truth or face eternal damnation in

"Hell"! Don't misunderstand me. My parents were wonderful people and I had a good childhood for the most part, but their religious views created a horrible fear of death in me that spoiled many years of my being able to just enjoy all the wonders and pleasures of life! I am 51 and only in the past several years have I been able to separate myself from their indoctrination, develop my own beliefs, and begin to live life as I wanted. Your book helped me do that!... I can't accept the masculine Jewish God of the Old Testament who supposedly fathered the "messiah," Jesus, with his earthly bride... nor can I accept the trinity, or any of that. I see "Mother Nature" in the beauty of a flower, for instance, but I also appreciate the abilities and talents of mortal men in their designs for automobiles and buildings, and all they have been able to accomplish in medicine, computers, communications, and science, using only the raw materials that have existed since whatever caused this universe to come into existence....

As for the afterlife, I am simply not going to worry about it any more! I really enjoyed your thoughts in this regard.... Would it really be "heaven" if I had to spend it with a bunch of people I couldn't spend 5 minutes with, let alone eternity? Do we escape death and enjoy eternal life by faith, grace, works, a combination of the three, or none of the above? I don't know and no longer care! All I really know for certain, is that my (expletive deleted--Ed.) detector has been buzzing at full volume for many years in regard to the "bible," and now I have a better understanding of "why." The "God" of the "bible" is a creation of man, not vice versa.... I would gladly work to further disseminate information of the type I discovered through your efforts. Too many have been, and continue to be, misled for too long.

Editor's Response to Letter #800

Dear ERB. Thanks for your support and willingness to spread the word, and we are always available for radio and TV talk shows. I would, however, recommend reconsideration of your belief that the universe came into existence and was caused" by something.

Letter #801 from LL Via the Internet

I was raised a Roman Catholic - very Catholic, was married in a church, and so on. We had a bible on our coffee table at all times. One day, while visiting my in-laws, I discovered that my father-in-law was an atheist. How could that be? I found a copy of BE in the magazine rack! I devoured it! Then, I devoured all of his back issues of BE! I then tore into whatever other publications he had on hand (I was pretty anti-social for the remainder of that visit!). When I got home, I did something that I, like so many other Christians, had never done - I cracked that book on the coffee table and actually began to READ it. My wife and I read the bible aloud EVERY NIGHT, and marveled with shock and dismay at the atrocities in the so-called "good" book. We didn't even make it through Judges before I knew that something was terribly wrong but not with my faith. I lost that near Ex. 4:24 (Zipporah was pretty quick with that stone, eh?...). There was something wrong with the millions of people who believed that (Expletive Deleted--Ed.)! So, I subscribed to BE and a few other publications. I started looking

into other sources as well. I read Paine and Jefferson.... I watched "Inherit the Wind!" I picked up "The Layman's Parallel Bible," in Nashville, Tennessee, wearing a Charles Darwin tee-shirt and drew wicked stares from the cashier who was obligated to give me a free coffee mug for making such a large purchase! I, too, began the long task of combing the book and writing down all of my questions, problems, and objections. But even more importantly, I began TALKING ABOUT IT to others. I talked to my uncles, two born- again Christians who once believed that the world would end in the year 2000. I talked to my mother, who was still scarred from the humiliation of excommunication. I talked to a friend who was writing his final term paper for a religion class. The priest teaching the class filled the back of each page (and had to add two more) with his rebuttals! I talked to another friend, who was getting ready to send a letter to a TV network to protest a show he had never seen, just because of what Dobson said on "Focus on the Family." One person I talked to formed a bible study group just to answer my persistent challenges! All of these people have been exposed to BE. Did any of these people become atheists? No. Will they? Perhaps, because now, with literature like BE, they are now doing the things that so many Christians don't do - and the things that made me an atheist - they are READING the book that they hold in such high esteem and are THINKING while doing it! For me, BE is a tool. A very, very useful tool that I would use even if you doubled the subscription price!

Put me in the "keep the change" category. And be sure to expect some orders for back issues. If BE won't be published in the future, I'll just have to work my way through its history to get my monthly "fix!"

Letter #802 from SS Via Email

You'll recall perhaps that I wrote you earlier. Got your book. WONDERFUL. Not only is it chocked full of information, it is EXTREMELY well written. What in the heck do you do for a living? I wish half the college textbooks I used as an undergrad had been that well drafted. Tight prose, good arguments. Given all the interest in Biblical controversies generated by The Jesus Seminar and Spong's book, I would think Prometheus would try to market your book in a more mainstream fashion (zippy dust cover, etc.). Maybe it's too controversial? If you ever come out with a briefer, cheaper, paperback version, let me know. I'd like to buy copies for my friends. If I hit the lottery, I'll buy a hundred copies. Again, great job.

Editor's Note: We would like to thank all those subscribers who have sent us "Keep the Change" letters because, among other considerations, that will reduce the amount of paperwork required to close all accounts. Those who chose otherwise will receive a refund check attached to next month's final issue.

Issue #192 December 1998, Editor: Dennis McKinsey

COMMENTARY

As was announced in June, this will be the last issue of Biblical Errancy. After presenting the second half of our listing of biblical contradictions begun last month and relating some concluding letters by our readers, we will consummate 16 years of publishing with our ultimate denouement.

Proverbs

6:19 (*"A false witness...is he that soweth discord among brethren"*) versus Gen. 11:7 in which God says, *"...let us go down and confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech."*

26:4 (*"Answer not a fool according to his folly...."*) versus 26:5 (*"Answer a fool according to his folly...."*)

30:30 (*"A lion which is strongest among beasts, and turneth not away for any"*) versus Gen. 9:2 (*"And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth...."*)

Ecclesiastes

3:2-3 (*"a time to be born , and a time to die...a time to kill, and a time to heal..."*) versus Ex. 20:13 (*"Thou shalt not kill"*)

Isaiah

2:4 (*"...and they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more"*) versus Joel 3:10 (*"Beat your plowshares into swords, your pruning hooks into spears: let the weak say I am strong"*)

6:1 (*"I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up...."*) and 6:5 (*"for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts"*) versus John 1:18 (*"No man hath seen God at any time"*)

39:1 (*"At that time Merodach-baladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon...."*) versus 2 Kings 20:12 (*"At that time Berodach-baladan, the son of Baladan, king of Babylon..."*)

54:7 (*"For a small moment have I<God>have forsaken thee...."*) versus Deut. 4:31 (*"For the Lord thy God is a merciful God; he will not forsake thee...."*) and 1 Sam. 12:22 (*"For the Lord will not forsake his people...."*)

Jeremiah

3:12 (*"...for I am merciful, saith the Lord, and I will not keep anger forever"*) and Micah 7:18 (*"...he retaineth not anger forever"*) versus 17:4 (*"...for ye have kindled a fire in mine anger, which shall burn forever"*)

4:2 (*"And thou shalt swear, The Lord liveth, in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness"*) versus Matt. 5:34 (*"But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven...."*)

4:14 (*"O Jerusalem, wash your heart from wickedness, that you may be saved"*) versus 2:22 (*"Though you wash yourself with lye and use much soap, the stain of your guilt is still before me"*)

13:14 (*"And I will dash them one against another, even the father and the son together, said the Lord: I will not pity, nor spare, nor have mercy, but destroy them"*) versus James 5:11 (*"...the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy"*) and 1 Chron. 16:34 (*"...the Lord; for he is good; for his mercy endureth forever"*)

31:34 (*"...saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more"*) versus Eccle. 12:14 (*"For God shall bring every work into judgment...whether it be good or bad"*)

32:4 (*"And Zedekiah king of Judah shall not escape out of the hand of the Chaldeans, but shall surely be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon, and shall speak with him mouth to mouth, and his eyes shall behold his eyes"*) versus Jer. 52:11 (*"Then he put out the eyes of Zedekiah; and the king of Babylon bound him in chains, and carried him to Babylon...."*). Zedekiah's eyes were put out but he later saw the king of Babylon.

42:17 (*"So shall it be with all the men that set their faces to go into Egypt to sojourn there; they shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence: and none of them shall remain or escape from the evil that I will bring upon them"*) versus 44:28 (*"Yet a small number that escape the sword shall return out of the land of Egypt into the land of Judah...."*)

52:25 (*"He took also out of the city an eunuch, which had the charge of the men of war; and seven men of them that were near the king's person...."*) versus 2 Kings 25:19 (*"And out of the city he took an officer that was set over the men of war, and five men of them that were in the king's presence...."*)

52:31 (*"And it came to pass in the seven and thirtieth year...in the five and twentieth day of the month, that Evil-merodach...."*) versus 2 Kings 25:27 (*"And it came to pass in the seven and thirtieth year...in the seven and twentieth day of the month, that Evil-merodach...."*)

Ezekiel

5:7 ("*...Because ye...have not walked in my statutes...neither have done according to the judgments of the nations that are round about you*") versus 11:12 ("*...for ye have not walked in my statutes...but have done after the manners of the heathen that are round about you*")

21:3 ("*Thus saith the Lord...I will draw forth my sword out of his sheath, and will cut off from thee the righteous and the wicked*") versus Psalm 37:17 ("*For the arms of the wicked shall be broken: but the Lord upholdeth the righteous*")

Daniel

12:2 ("*And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to everlasting contempt*") versus John 5:28-29 ("*...for the hour is coming in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And they shall come forth....*")

Hosea

8:13 ("*they<Ephraim>shall return to Egypt*") versus 11:5 ("*He<Ephraim>shall not return into the land of Egypt, but the Assyrian shall be his king....*")

Micah

7:18 ("*God does not retaineth his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy*") versus Matt. 25:46 ("*And these shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal*")

Zechariah

1:1 ("*...came the word of the Lord unto Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, the son of Iddo the prophet....*") versus Ezra 5:1 ("*...and Zechariah the son of Iddo....*")

Malachi

1:4 ("*...The people against whom the Lord hath indignation for ever*") versus Num. 14:18 ("*The Lord is long suffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression....*")

Matthew

1:11 ("*Josias<Josiah>begat Jechonias <Jeconiah>....*") versus 1 Chron. 3:15-16 ("*And the sons of Josiah were...the second Jehoiakim...And the sons of Jehoiakim: Jeconiah his son....*")

1:23 ("*...a virgin shall be with child...and they shall call his name Emmanuel....*") versus 1:25 ("*...till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and called his name JESUS*")

4:10 (*"Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve"*) versus Eph. 6:5 (*"Servants, be obedient to them who are your masters according to the flesh...."*)

5:45 (*"...your Father who is in heaven: for he...sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust"*) versus 2 Chron. 6:26 (*"When the heaven is shut up, and there is no rain, because they have sinned against thee"*)

6:6 (*"When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret"*) versus 1 Tim. 2:8 (*"I will therefore that men pray everywhere..."*)

6:19 (*"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth..."*) versus Prov. 15:6 (*"In the house of the righteous is much treasure...."*)

7:1 (*"Judge not, that ye be not judged"*) versus Lev. 19:15 (*"Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment...but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbor"*)

7:14 (*"Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth to life, and few there be that find it"*) versus Luke 3:6 (*"And all flesh shall see the salvation of God"*) and John 12:32 (*"And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me"*)

7:21 (*"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven...."*) versus Acts 2:21 (*"And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved"*) and Rom 10:13 (*"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved"*)

10:1 (*"And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease"*) versus 17:16 (*"And I brought him to thy disciples, and they could not cure him"*)

16:13 (*"Jesus asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?"*) versus Psalm 146:3 (*"Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help"*)

12:36 (*"But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof in the day of judgment"*) versus Psalm 103:3 (*"Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all diseases"*) and Psalm 103:12 (*"As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us"*)

21:7 Mod Lang. (*"They brought the donkey and the colt and placed their coats on them, and He seated himself on them"*) versus Mark 11:7 (*"And they brought the colt to Jesus, and cast their garments on him; and he sat upon him"*)

Mark

12:26 ("God spake to him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob") versus 12:27 ("He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living...."). Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were not living when this was said.

15:17 RSV ("And they clothed him in a purple cloak...") versus Matt. 27:28 ("And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe")

Luke

3:27 ("Salathiel, which was the son of Neri") versus Matt. 1:12 ("Jechonias begat Salathiel")

9:28 ("And it came to pass about eight days after these sayings, he took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray") versus Matt. 17:1 ("And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart")

10:25-28 ("And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? He said unto him, What is written in the law?.... And he<lawyer>answering said, Thou shalt love, the Lord thy God...and thy neighbor as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right....") versus Matt. 22:35- ("Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked him a question, tempting him, and saying, Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God...Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself"). Who said the commandment, Jesus or the lawyer?

22:34 ("And he said, I tell thee Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me") versus Matt. 26:34 ("Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice")

24:40 ("And when he had thus spoken, he shewed them his hands and his feet") versus John 20:20 ("And when he had so said, he shewed unto them his hand and his side")

20:23 RSV ("If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained") versus Mark 2:7 ("Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God only?")

Acts

1:1-2 ("In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began to do and teach, until the day when he was taken up....") versus John 21:25 ("And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written")

1:24 ("...Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men....") versus Deut. 8:2 ("...the Lord thy God led thee these forty years in the wilderness...to know what was in thine heart....")

16:6 (*"Now when they...were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia"*) versus 19:10 (*"...so that all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks"*) and 19:22 (*"So Paul sent into Macedonia two of them...but he himself stayed in Asia for a season"*)

20:22 RSV (*"I<Paul>am going to Jerusalem, bound in the Spirit, not knowing what shall befall me there"*) versus 21:4 RSV (*"And finding disciples...who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem"*)

27:10 RSV (*"And Paul said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the cargo...but also of our lives"*) versus 27:43-44 RSV (*"but the centurion, wishing to save Paul...ordered those who could swim to throw themselves overboard first and make for land...And so it was that all escaped to land"*)

Romans

(Heading=*The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*) versus Rom. 16:22 (*"I Tertius, who wrote this epistle...."*)

3:10 (*"As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one"*) versus James 5:16 (*"...The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much"*)

4:5 (*"But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness"*) versus Prov. 17:15 (*"He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the Lord"*). God justifies the ungodly; yet, considers those who justify the wicked to be abominable.

5:14 (*"...death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression...."*) versus Heb. 11:5 (*"By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him..."*)

9:18 RSV (*"So then he has mercy upon whomever he wills, and he hardens the heart of whomever he wills"*) versus 11:32 RSV (*"For God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all"*)

11:26 (*"And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written..."*) versus Matt. 8:12 (*"But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth"*) and Zech 13:8-9

15:33 (*"Now the God of peace...."*) versus Ex. 15:3 (*"The Lord is a man of war...."*) and Psalm 144:1 (*"Blessed by the Lord my strength, which teacheth my hands to war...."*)

1 Corinthians

2:15 (*"But he that is spiritual judgeth all things"*) versus Luke 6:37 (*"Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not...."*)

3:11 RSV (*"For no other foundation can any one lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ"*) versus Eph. 2:20 (*"And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone"*)

7:23 (*"...do not become slaves of men"*) versus Eph. 6:5 (*"Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters...."*) and 1 Peter 2:18

11:14 (*"Does not nature itself teach you that for a man to wear long hair is degrading to him"*) versus Num. 6:5 RSV (*"All the day of his vow of separation no razor shall come upon his head; until the time is completed for which he separates himself to the Lord, he shall be holy; he shall let the locks of hair of his head grow long"*)

12:10 (*"To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy...to another divers kinds of tongues; to another interpretation of tongues"*) versus 14:2 (*"For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him..."*)

2 Corinthians

6:17 (*"Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate...and touch nothing unclean"*) versus Mark 16:15 (*"And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature"*)

Galatians

1:10 Mod. Lang. (*"Am I now trying to win men's favor, or God's? Or do I seek to please men? If I were still pleasing men, I would not be a slave of Christ"*) versus Rom. 15:2 (*"To the weak I became as weak, that I might gain the weak; I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some"*) and 1 Cor. 10:33 (*"Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many...."*)

Colossians

2:9 (*"For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily"*) versus 1 Kings 8:27 (*"But will God indeed dwell on the earth? behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded"*)

2 Thess.

3:12 (*"...we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread"*) versus Matt. 6:31-33 (*"Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed...for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you"*)

1 Timothy

2:6 (*"Who gave himself a ransom for all...."*) versus Matt. 15:24 (*"...I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel"*)

Philemon

12 RSV (*"I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart"*) versus Deut. 23:15 (*"Thou shalt not deliver unto his master the servant which is escaped from his master unto thee"*)

Hebrews

6:2 (*"Of the doctrine of baptisms...."*) versus Eph. 4:5 (*"One Lord, one faith, one baptism..."*)

6:13 RSV (*"For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself"*) versus Matt. 5:34 (*"But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne"*)

6:18 (*"That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie"*) versus Matt. 19:26 (*"But Jesus...said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible"*)

7:19 (*"For the law made nothing perfect...."*) versus Psalm 19:7 (*"The law of the Lord is perfect...."*)

10:31 (*"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God"*) versus 2 Sam. 24:14 (*"And David said unto Gad...let us fall now into the hand of the Lord; for his mercies are great: and let me not fall into the hand of man"*)

11:17 (*"By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son"*) versus Gal. 4:22 (*"For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman"*)

13:14 (*"For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come"*) versus Matt. 5:5 (*"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth"*)

James

1:2 (*"My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations"*) versus Matt. 6:13 (*"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil"*)

4:11 (*"Speak not evil one of another...."*) versus Phil. 3:2 (*"Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers...."*)

1 John

1:10 (*"If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us"*) versus 1 John 3:9 (*"Whoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God"*)

4:9 (*"...God sent his only begotten Son into the world...."*) versus Job 1:6 (*"Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord...."*)

4:18 (*"There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear...."*) versus Deut. 6:5 (*"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart...."*) and Deut. 6:13 (*"Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God...."*)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letter #803 from LR from Oregon

Things have been a bit rocky this past week or so... The Public Access TV equipment suddenly started "acting up." The Public Access equipment would not work on Mondays or Thursdays, (the days I view our tapes), but would work at all other times. This unexplainable phenomenon had everyone here puzzled. The fact that the equipment would fail on only the days that I wanted to show our tapes, but would suddenly "repair" itself on all other occasions is, we all decided, proof of demons, and anybody who would deny that demons are at work here, is in denial of the facts! How else could you explain such an extra- ordinary happening? I told the local manager of the Cable service that I intended to talk to the City Attorney and the City Manager in hopes of getting city funding to hire an exorcist, with a rank of no less than Bishop, to expel the demons. The mere mention of the City Attorney was enough to clear up the problem almost that very day! Twas truly a miracle, as anyone can plainly see! Because of these extraordinary and unbelievable interruptions, obviously caused by "things not seen, nor known by man," I'm about two weeks behind. Will be starting tape #12 this coming Monday, demons permitting, and hope to be back on schedule....

I called a local religious radio program and asked them if they knew anything about the "terrible slanderous things being said about the beloved and inerrant Bible" on the Public Access Channel and learned that the local clergy are going to start a "refutation hour." ...You will be happy to know, that in this little town...I have 13 pastors, ministers, preachers, priest (one), deacons, and deaconesses ...copying your tapes in order that a proper and complete refutation can be made of all the "things taken out of context."

I am absolutely having a ball!..... I suspect that things are going to heat up considerably in the coming months... I hope you can keep the tapes coming!... I LOVE IT! ...Cheers and Hugs!

Letter #804 from JK of Honolulu, Hawaii

I have only recently discovered and begun studying your periodical.... It is truly a noble endeavor, and quite courageous, to openly criticize the central tome of a religion followed by virtually all of this nation's political leaders.... Your publication, to me, represents the epitome of first amendment freedom of expression. For that alone, you should be very proud.

I was raised an Episcopalian and attended Sunday school where I dutifully memorized songs about the sanctity of the Bible.... Although I was never devout, it never occurred to me to question this book until college.... Your periodical helped me clarify what bothered me so much about "Bible- thumping" -&endash; it's essentially the worship of a book in which critical thought is strictly forbidden.

I am writing to you now in response to some of your Closure remarks in the June Issue No. 186. The tone of your comments struck me as fatalist, even apocalyptic. I sincerely hope you believe, as I do, that your work will continue to reach and influence people all over the world, even after 1998. Remember that your periodical flourished for nearly two decades in a predominantly Christian nation. Through the web, it can continue to open minds and encourage honest, critical thought (as it did for me). "Biblical Errancy" can continue to educate far beyond its mere regularity.

Letter #805 from JB Via E-mail

I looked at BE on the web and I saw that you are discontinuing the publication. I understand your argument, and I don't take issue with your reasoning. I believe you are correct that unbelievers, for the most part, are unwilling to become activists for unbelief. However, I wanted to express my opinion to you, that your writings have a great deal of influence that is hidden from you -- influence that occurs when a believer quietly and covertly takes a look at your web pages, and influence that happens when an unbeliever uses your material in private conversations with believers, conversations that will never be repeated by either of them to anyone else because of their intimacy. The critical mass needed for a sweeping renunciation of Christian superstition by our society does not exist at this time in our history. Regrettable as this may be, there is definitely a quiet, almost invisible, undercurrent of skepticism which is being fueled by solitary and one-on-one use of your material, and other material like it.... I personally use your material, and other material like it, with believers whenever I have the opportunity. As a consequence, my rational unbelief has become widely known through whispered conversations and prayer requests among my relatives and their believing friends. Without material such as yours, they could easily dismiss my unbelief, but because of the existence of your material they have been left dumbfounded and confused, and very likely doubting, although they would never let me know this. I have become a constant and tangible reminder to them that their faith may indeed be groundless. I do not believe that I am an isolated case. I believe many new unbelievers are finding material like yours on the internet and using it the same way I'm using it. Don't misunderstand me. I'm not trying to convince you to go on with a project that will not meet your declared criteria for success. I'm simply remarking on something that you undoubtedly already know, but perhaps don't remind yourself of very often, namely, that much of the influence that your work has is ongoing, but quiet, and nearly invisible because it happens in corners through solitary browsing of the internet or in one-on-one interactions. Personally, I believe this kind of influence will prove the strongest, since fundamentalists and evangelicals, who are rather impervious to reason when it is presented by untrusted heathen, will often listen to a trusted friend or relative in a private setting. By no means is your work all for naught. It only seems to me that its influence is strongest in ways which you were not explicitly aiming for. If its flame hasn't swept the country, it is only because the tinder is wet, not because the match isn't hot. Since I hold different criteria for success than you do, I consider your work an unqualified

success. I hope that you will not be unduly discouraged with the fruit of your own labor simply because current popular sentiment causes society to be relatively unswayed by vital issues.

SOME FINAL WORDS

Well. We have come to the end of a long journey, a long journey, indeed. To say that it has been an enterprise well worth the effort is an understatement of the first magnitude. Not only do I feel a tremendous amount of enlightenment with respect to Scripture has been brought to thousands of people but from a purely personal standpoint I have not only increased my knowledge of the Bible's failings but honed my writing skills by a sizable factor. Our readers have ranged all the way from vociferous critics to staunch supporters, and I have welcomed the presence of each and every one. Without their letters, even those of a critical nature, we could never have highlighted so many issues so clearly. Over the years we have managed to create a vast body of knowledge with regard to Scripture that should be of tremendous value to untold numbers of people now living and yet to come. Hopefully they will be able to use it as effectively as have many of our subscribers. We have not discussed all of the inadequacies of Scripture because that would require many volumes and more time than I have available, but we have certainly accumulated far more than enough information to persuade any reasonably intelligent and fairly objective observer that the Bible is anything but the inerrant word of a perfect being.

We would be remiss were we not to offer a final word of gratitude to all those who have gone out of their way to aid us in oh so many ways, especially in regard to finances, time, research, playing video tapes, media interviews, TV recording sessions, and distribution of our tapes and materials. Without all of this selfless devotion to the cause, our efforts would have been considerably less successful. One of the most enjoyable by-products of this undertaking over the years has been that I have come to know a great many fine people on a purely personal level, people who sincerely seek the truth and care about the deleterious influence of religion in general and the Bible in particular on their fellow man. And I can say without reservation that I have never met a more decent community of admirable individuals. The assertion by many religionists that you must believe in some kind of supreme being or divinely-sanctioned holy book in order to be moral, honest, conscientious, humane, and fair is unable to withstand scrutiny and decidedly at odds with reality. Far too much data exists to the contrary. In fact, all too often the opposite is true.

Two of the most prominent newscasters in American history were Edward R. Murrow and Walter Cronkite. The former nearly always ended his programs by saying, "Good bye and Good luck," while the favorite closing remark of the latter was, "That's the way it is." With the inordinant and deleterious influence exercised by the Bible upon society being what it is, I can think of no more fitting final statement with which to conclude our sixteen years than by combining & paraphrasing the words of both to say, "Good bye and good luck, because, although that's the way it is, it need not be."