

BIBLE 1109

ANSWERS TO AGNOSTIC QUESTIONS

CONTENTS

I. QUESTIONS ABOUT THE INTEGRITY	
OF THE BIBLE	2
Attitudes	3
Mistakes	4
Contradictions	6
Scientific Accuracy	10
II. QUESTIONS ABOUT THE DOCTRINES	
OF THE BIBLE	17
Christianity	17
God	19
Miracles	21
Jesus	23
Creation	24
Evil	25
Divine Silence	26
Unevangelized People	27
Infant Deaths	28
Heaven and Hell	28
III. THE INTERPRETATION AND APPLICATION	
OF THE BIBLE	33
Specific Biblical Texts	33
Practice and Experience	37
GLOSSARY	45

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ANSWERS TO AGNOSTIC QUESTIONS

Christians will always have opportunities to defend their faith. How do you reply to those who question your faith? Can your beliefs stand up under the challenge of non-Christians? First Peter 3:15 commands, "... be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear." Christian faith does not come by reasoning, but the Christian faith is not unreasonable.

Agnostic questions are those with answers that are not generally understood. We do not have to remain ignorant about their answers.

The Word of God supplies the answers we need (II Timothy 3:16-17): "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

In this **LIGHTUNIT** you will study three kinds of agnostic questions: questions about the integrity of the Bible, questions about the doctrines of the Bible, and questions about the interpretation and application of the Bible.

OBJECTIVES

Read these objectives. The objectives tell you what you will be able to do when you have successfully completed this **LIGHTUNIT**

When you have finished this **LIGHTUNIT** you should be able:

1. To classify those who question the integrity of the Bible.
2. To state what Christians should do about alleged mistakes in the Bible.
3. To name five categories of contradiction in the Bible.
4. To explain the Biblical approach to science.
5. To state four ways in which Christianity is unique from all other religions.
6. To list three arguments often used against Christianity's being the one true religion.
7. To name and explain two kinds of experiential evidence for God's existence.
8. To list and explain the three rational arguments for God's existence.
9. To describe four characteristics of genuine miracles.
10. To explain God's purpose in creating the world and mankind.
11. To list six attributes of God that are glorified by His dealing with evil.
12. To state three reasons why the heathen are without excuse according to Romans, Chapter 1.
13. To describe certain characteristics of heaven and hell.
14. To list four theoretical evidences, three geological evidences, and three facts from the Genesis account that support that there was a universal Flood.
15. To explain why Jesus did not know the time of His return to earth.
16. To name two bases on which we can have assurance of salvation.
17. To identify the five kinds of relationships that are required for answered prayer;
18. To contrast the role of the law and grace in our lives today.
19. To compare the Old Testament Sabbath observation with Jesus' concept of the Sabbath.
20. To list five purposes of suffering.

Survey the LIGHTUNIT Ask yourself some questions about this study. Write your questions here.

I. QUESTIONS ABOUT THE INTEGRITY OF THE BIBLE

Before we accept something as being true, we must make determinations about accuracy and value. Many people today question the accuracy of the Bible and seek to know on what basis they can accept the Bible as truth. Among Christians the Bible has stood through the ages as a book of integrity. Not only does the Bible itself claim to be the true Word of God, but many other factors also point to the validity of Scripture.

Knowing why we can accept the Bible as a factual account of God's revelation to man can help us in defending our faith. Throughout our lifetime many questions will be raised that we cannot answer. However, awareness of facts concerning the historical and scientific accuracy of the Bible will give you a good basis by which to answer those who question the integrity of the Bible.

SECTION OBJECTIVES

Read these objectives. When you have completed this section, you should be able:

1. To classify those who question the integrity of the Bible.
2. To state what Christians should do about alleged mistakes in the Bible.
3. To name five categories of contradiction in the Bible.
4. To explain the Biblical approach to science.

VOCABULARY

Study these words to enhance your learning success in this section.

agnostic

hyperbole

metaphor

deductive

inductive

uniformitarianism

entropy

integrity



Note: All vocabulary words in this LIGHTUNIT appear in **boldface** print the first time they are used. If you are unsure of the meaning when you are reading, study the definitions given in the Glossary.



Read II Peter 2:1 through 3.

Attitudes toward the Bible vary from one extreme to another. Some people actively oppose the Bible while others view it as God's Word to man. These attitudes are classified here as those who oppose Scripture, those who doubt Scripture, and those who examine Scripture.

Those who oppose Scripture. Active opponents of the Bible include atheists and infidels. Atheists claim that there is no God. Intellectual atheists use reasoning to attempt to disprove God's existence. Materialistic atheists reject all but natural realities. Some atheists, such as Madeline Murray O'Hare, seek to destroy all religions. She succeeded in having the Supreme Court of the United States rule against prayer and Bible reading in the public schools. More recently, her atheist son renounced atheism.

In Psalm 14:1 the Bible labels atheists as fools. Atheism is a foolish belief because proving a universal negative, such as the nonexistence of God, is a logical impossibility. Consequently, very few real atheists exist. Many people, however, are practical atheists who ignore God and live as if He did not exist.

An infidel is an unbeliever who has no faith or who holds a different faith. Some infidels of other religions, such as Islam, have actually gone against Christianity.

Those who doubt Scripture. People who doubt the truth of the Bible include skeptics

and **agnostics**. Skeptics tend to question any proposition. One of the ancient Greek philosophies excelled in this method. The average person with a skeptical attitude today may mistrust the Bible, often because of a suspicion toward religion.

Agnostic means literally *no knowledge*. Agnostics believe that we cannot know whether God exists. However, even believers experience some honest doubts and uncertainties at times. In such cases, a wise person, rather than denying the truth, suspends judgment until he can examine or study it through.

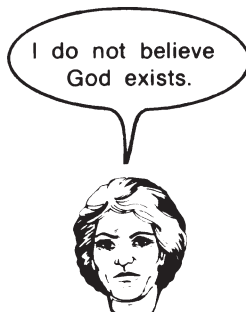
Those who examine Scripture. People who seek to learn about the Bible may also question its **integrity**, whether they are critics or inquirers. Not all critics are judgmental fault-finders. Constructive criticism seeks to render a fair judgment, whether favorable or otherwise. Many Bible scholars are skilled literary critics who seek to evaluate the merits of any writing.

Inquirers are those who search the Bible for truth. They may begin with a questioning attitude, but their search usually is rewarded with positive answers. An attitude of faith develops from an honest and receptive inquiry. God requires this kind of attitude from us (Hebrews 11:6): "But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe. . . ."

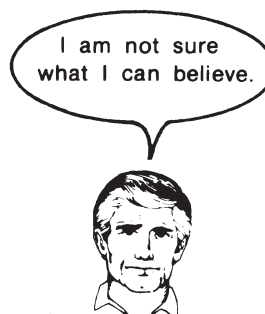


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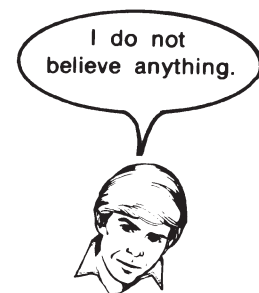
1.1 Label the following persons who question the integrity of the Bible.



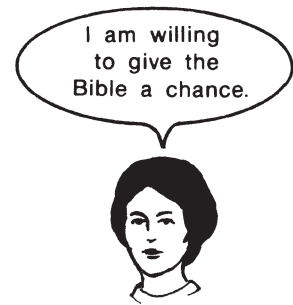
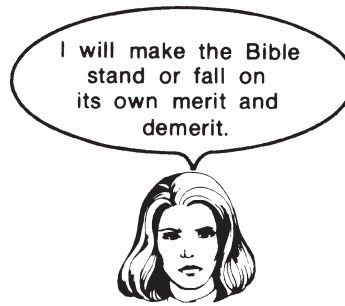
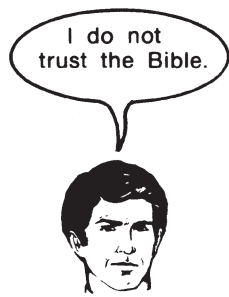
a. _____



b. _____



c. _____



d. _____ e. _____ f. _____



Read II Timothy 3:14 through 17.

MISTAKES

Accusations of error in the Bible are not at all valid. An understanding of Scripture and its background clears up most misunderstandings. However, a few difficult statements remain. These few passages can cause confusion to some either because they are difficult to interpret or because the background information about them is incomplete.

Difficult statements. A Christian needs to know how to react toward the difficult statements in Scripture. We should not ignore these statements, but should seek to understand them. Two steps lead us to a solution. First, **deductive** reasoning presupposes that the Bible, being the inspired Word of God, has no mistakes in it. This step exercises faith. Not knowing the explanation to a problem does not mean that no explanation exists. Second, **inductive** examination studies the problem passage to discover the answer. This step exercises scholarship. Assuming that we have taken the first step of deductive reasoning, let us examine and seek to answer a few historical and factual difficulties in the Bible.

Historical difficulties. One example from each Testament follows. In each case the background information is incomplete. Assuming that all of the known facts are true, the solution comes by filling the gap with an assumption.

The identity of Darius the Mede in Daniel does not appear in secular history. Daniel was living in Babylon when the Medes and Persians

conquered it and killed Belshazzar, the king of the Chaldeans (Daniel 5:30). According to Daniel 5:31, *Darius* the Mede then took over the kingdom. However, in the inscriptions of secular history, *Cyrus* the Persian conquered the Babylonian Empire. The name of Darius does not appear anywhere in the inscriptions. Did Daniel mistake the name of the king under whom he served? No, two good reasons can explain this difficulty: the use of different names in different languages and the position of Darius under Cyrus.

First, The Biblical name, *Darius*, is a Persian title for a ruler. This title occurs in secular history for Persian kings in a later period. The inscriptions of secular history during Daniel's time give the Median names of the various rulers. Scholars have identified one or two of them which they believe to be the Median name for Darius. The use of two names for the same person was so common that Daniel himself, a Hebrew, was given a Chaldean name, Belteshazzar (Daniel 1:7).

Second, Daniel 9:1 gives the position of Darius: he "... was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans." At the same time, Cyrus reigned as king of kings over the entire Persian Empire. Scholars assume, therefore, that Darius served as Cyrus's territorial ruler in Babylon while Cyrus himself reigned from Arabia. The two men were possibly related to each other. Daniel 5:31 may be translated, Darius "received" the kingdom. Evidence of the simultaneous rule of the Medes and the Persians appears in

Daniel, Chapter 6. In Verse 8 Darius enforced "... the law of the Medes and Persians." In Verse 28, "Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, and in the reign of Cyrus the Persian." Dual rulership was a common practice at that time; it was practiced when Belshazzar ruled Babylon under his father.

The time of the enrollment of Mary and Joseph does not correspond to those recorded in secular history. Luke 2:1-5 describes the incident that brought Mary to Bethlehem for the birth of Jesus. The Roman emperor, Caesar Augustus, decreed that everyone in the empire should be taxed. The word translated *taxed* literally means to write off, and it refers to an enrollment or registration. This actually was a census obtained in preparation for taxing the people. Each one had to register in the city of his family background, so Joseph went to Bethlehem. Verse 2 declares, "And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria." This statement presents two difficulties: the nearest enrollment recorded in secular history was in A.D. 6, and secular history identifies *Varus* as governor of Syria in the year of Jesus' birth. Did Luke make a historical mistake? No, for two reasons. (1) Luke was a highly educated physician and a scholarly historian. He explained in Luke 1:2-3 that he had perfect understanding of the history that he recorded in his Gospel so that the reader may know the certainty of what he wrote. (2) Luke knew about the census of A.D. 6, according to Acts 5:37 which he wrote; therefore, he could not have confused it with this one. We can rest assured then that the two difficulties of this verse have satisfactory explanations.

First, the word *first* in Verse 2, taken literally, identifies this enrollment as the first one, implying that other enrollments took place later. This enrollment, then, must have occurred before the one in A.D. 6. The silence of secular history about it does not mean it did not occur. Logically, such an "argument from silence" cannot prove or disprove an assertion.

Second, the word translated *governor* in

Verse 2 means literally *to lead*, and it is used for any official in charge of something. Scholars assume that while Varus governed Syria under the Roman emperor Caesar, Cyrenius served as the military leader under Varius who carried out his executive orders.

Factual difficulties. The quotation of Jeremiah in Matthew 27:9 deserves an explanation. When Judas returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, they used it to buy a potter's field to be used as a cemetery. Matthew 27:9-10 declares, "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." This quotation, however, does not appear in the book of Jeremiah. The closest statement to it occurs in Zechariah 11:12-13: "So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. And the Lord said to me, cast it unto the potter: a goodly price that I was prised of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the Lord." Did Matthew mistake which prophet he quoted? Admittedly this question is difficult to answer, but two good explanations provide the missing information, which Matthew may have known and which assuredly the Holy Spirit knew.

First, according to Hebrew tradition, the prophetic books were written in a scroll that began with the book of Jeremiah. Matthew may have been identifying this quotation by the name which headed the scroll of the prophetic writings.

Second, this prophecy in Zechariah itself may have quoted a saying or writing of Jeremiah that we do not possess today. Zechariah 1:4 quotes Jeremiah 18:11, and this verse may have done so also. Matthew may have quoted a saying or writing of Jeremiah that we do not possess. The prophets spoke and wrote much that was not preserved in the Bible as inspired Scripture.



Complete these activities.

- 1.2 State what a Christian should *not* do about alleged mistakes in the Bible and explain why. _____
