

Inside Life

Issue 39
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Is the Bible True?

You Don't Suffer Alone

And There Was Light

Where Do You Belong?

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Inside Life

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Inside Life is a magazine of understanding. Rather than just reporting on life, **Inside Life** seeks to delve inside the marvellous mystery that is life, to discover what it is all about. What does life mean? Where did it come from? How can we make the most of it?

Inside Life provides insight and answers to life's deep questions and challenges, and aims to provide articles of lasting hope, help, and encouragement for successful living in today's fast-moving world.

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Our Cover: The caves of Qumran in the Judean Desert have been instrumental in revealing dramatic evidence that the Bible has been accurately preserved down through the centuries. With the 1947 discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in caves near Jericho, the accuracy of the Old Testament versions passed down since the time of Jesus has been confirmed.

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Is the Bible True?

by Rex Morgan

The Bible is the world's best-selling book—by far. It has been translated into over 2000 languages, and is easily the most widely owned and distributed book in history, with hundreds of millions of copies sold every year.

But can the Bible be trusted? Is it really the word of God, as it claims to be? Or is it just a collection of ancient folk tales, fables, and superstitions? Is it just like any other book, written by men, containing some good ideas and some bad? Or was it divinely inspired by God? Is the Bible holy, or is it holey—riddled with mistakes, legends, and contradictions?

Let's take a look at some of the reasons people believe it is true.

1. The Unity of the Bible

The Bible isn't really just one book, but a library of 66 different volumes, written by more than 40 authors who lived over a span of 1500 years. These writers lived in 10 countries, on three continents, and represented 20 different occupations, from farmers and fishermen to statesmen and kings. They wrote in a variety of styles, from history and law to poetry and romance. The subject matter contains many controversial subjects capable of strongly opposing opinions. Yet the book has a remarkable consistency and unity throughout. It is bound together as one whole, with intricate themes interwoven all the way through it.

Imagine taking say half a dozen authors from just one country,



New Zealand, and giving them just one controversial subject, such as whether euthanasia should be legal. How much harmony and agreement would result? But take any subject you like, including difficult matters of morality and ethics, and the Bible contains statements all through it that add up to a harmonious picture. All the way through, it has one consistent central message, which is illuminated by the consistency of even the minor details. It begins with a garden, a river, a tree of life, and an invitation, and ends, many hundreds of pages (and years) later, with a garden, a river, a tree of life, and an invitation!

2. Historical Reliability

Thousands (not just hundreds!) of archaeological discoveries have verified things written in the Bible. Many of these finds have been catalogued in books such as *The Bible as History*, by Werner Keller. *Halley's Bible Handbook* includes a chapter listing discovery after discovery that corroborates the Bible writings.

Christianity Today publishes a list of the top 10 discoveries every year affirming the Bible's details about events and people.¹

Some of these findings have really confounded the critics. For example, it used to be claimed that the


Hittites mentioned in the Bible never existed—until the archaeologists found their capital and records at Bogazkoy, in Turkey.

It was also claimed there was no Assyrian king named Sargon as recorded in the biblical book of Isaiah, because this name was not known in any other record. Then Sargon's palace was discovered in Khorsabad, Iraq.

Another king who was in doubt was Belshazzar, king of Babylon, named in the book of Daniel. The last king of Babylon was Nabonidus, according to recorded history. But then tablets were found showing that Belshazzar was Nabonidus's son, and served as co-regent in Babylon.

One of the greatest archaeologists of all time, Sir William Ramsay, set out to prove the books of Luke and Acts were unreliable, but after 30 years of study he concluded that "Luke is a historian of the first rank; not merely are his statements of fact trustworthy...this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians".²

Another great archaeologist, William Albright, stated: "There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of Old Testament tradition. The excessive skepticism shown toward



*The Old Testament describes
the spherical shape
of the earth.*

the Bible...has been progressively discredited. Discovery after discovery has established the accuracy of innumerable details, and has brought increased recognition to the value of the Bible as a source of history".³

Nelson Glueck, a renowned Jewish archaeologist, wrote: "It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever contradicted a biblical reference".⁴

Not only archaeology, but also the writing of many historians backs up what was written in the Bible. For instance, the famous Jewish historian, Flavius Josephus, who was born in AD 37, wrote about "Jesus, a wise man, a doer of wonderful works",⁵ and recorded his crucifixion and resurrection.

A number of other non-Christian writers of the first and second centuries also wrote about Christ and the Christians, including Cornelius Tacitus, Plinius Secundus, Suetonius, Eusebius, Papias, Irenaeus, and Marcus Aurelius. Thousands of eyewitnesses of Jesus' life were still alive when the

New Testament was circulated, but we have no knowledge of anyone refuting the writings as "fairy tales".

If someone wrote a book today saying that New Zealand's former Prime Minister, David Lange, had been resurrected after his death, there would be lots of people around to deny it! The Christians were hated and brutally persecuted by both the Jews and the Roman government. If the New Testament writings were false, surely these two groups would have produced a great deal of evidence to stop the growth of this "sect", yet none exists.

3. Scientific Accuracy

Amazingly, the Bible referred to many facts hundreds or even thousands of years before scientists could explain them. For example, the Old Testament writings, dating from at least 2000 years ago, describe the circulation of the atmosphere and the hydrologic water cycles of the weather,⁶ the suspension of the earth in space,⁷ the spherical shape of the earth,⁸ the countless numbers of stars,⁹ the importance of blood circulation,¹⁰ and many

ground-breaking principles of good health.

For instance, do you have too many grey hairs? Would you like to do something about it? How about this for a recipe: "To prevent the hair from turning grey, anoint it with the blood of a black calf which has been boiled in oil, or with the fat of a rattlesnake." This recipe comes from the famous *Papyrus Ebers*, a medical book written in Egypt in about 1552 BC. Other remedies found in the *Papyrus Ebers* include lizard's blood, swine's teeth, putrid meat, stinking fat, moisture from pigs' ears and human excreta.

The biblical writer Moses lived in Egypt at about the time the *Papyrus Ebers* were written, but the principles of health and hygiene he recorded in the Bible have proved to be far ahead of their time, principles that are still valid today.

For example, Moses' writings provide for the careful disposal of human waste underground.¹¹ But in eighteenth century Europe human excrement was regularly cast into the streets of cities, giving rise to

epidemics of typhoid, cholera, and dysentery. One instruction recorded thousands of years earlier in the Bible pointed the way to deliverance from those scourges! The implementation of other principles of quarantine and sanitation outlined in the Bible also led to the control of the dreaded diseases of leprosy and bubonic plague, which over hundreds of years had killed millions of people in Europe.

In the 1840s Dr Ignaz Semmelweis began instructing those in the Vienna hospital where he worked to wash their hands thoroughly after patient examinations. There was a storm of protest at this “nuisance”, but the mortality rate at the hospital started reducing immediately. Opponents of his ideas attacked him fiercely, and it was only after his death that it became recognised that he was right. But thousands of years earlier, God had given Moses instructions about cleansing the hands under running water after handling the dead, or infected living patients.¹²

What should we do to avoid a heart attack? In relatively recent years the medical profession has warned against the build-up of cholesterol in our veins, since it may cause clogging and a heart attack. A major source of cholesterol is animal fat. Centuries ago, Moses spoke against the eating of fat.¹³

The very first sentence of the Bible says: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”. It is instructive to compare this enlightened statement with the writings of other ancient cultures. According to the teachings of the Egyptians, the earth hatched from a winged egg, and men originally emerged from worms found in the slime of the Nile after the annual rains.¹⁴ The Hindus are said to have taught that the world was flat and rested on the back of an elephant.¹⁵ The elephant stood on the back of a great tortoise, and what that rested on they didn’t venture to suggest! Later, among the Greek philosophers, it was taught that Atlas, one of the giants or Titans who warred with Zeus, was condemned to support the heavens,

What famous people have said about the Bible

Abraham Lincoln: I believe the Bible is the best gift God has ever given to man. All the good from the Saviour of the world is communicated to us through this book.

George Washington: It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible.

Queen Victoria: That book is the secret of Englands greatness.

Patrick Henry: The Bible is worth all the other books which have ever been printed.

Charles Dickens: The New Testament is the very best book that ever was or ever will be known in the world.

Woodrow Wilson: When you have read the Bible, you will know it is the word of God.

Theodore Roosevelt: A thorough knowledge of the Bible is worth more than a college education.

William Gladstone: I have known 95 of the worlds great men in my time, and of these, 87 were followers of the Bible. The Bible is stamped with a Specialty of Origin, and an immeasurable distance separates it from all competitors.

Napoleon Bonaparte: The Bible is far more than a book to me; it speaks to me as if it were a person. This book surpasses all others. I never omit to read it, and every day with some pleasure. Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne and I myself have founded great empires...upon force. Jesus alone founded his empire upon love. None else is like him; Jesus was more than man.

Sir Isaac Newton: There are more sure marks of authenticity in the Bible than in any profane history whatsoever.

Sir William Herschel: All human discoveries seem to be made only for the purpose of confirming more and more the truths contained in the Sacred Scriptures.

Jean Jacques Rousseau: Jewish authors would never have invented either that style nor that morality; and the Gospel has marks of truth so great, so striking, so utterly inimitable, that the invention of it would be more astonishing than the hero.

Lord Tennyson: Bible reading is an education in itself.

Immanuel Kant: I believe that the existence of the Bible is the greatest benefit to the human race. Any attempt to belittle it, I believe, is a crime against humanity.

Robert E. Lee: In all my perplexities and distresses, the Bible has never failed to give me light and strength.

Victor Hugo: England has two books; the Bible and Shakespeare. England made Shakespeare, but the Bible made England.

bearing the world on his neck and shoulders.¹⁶

It's fascinating to look up "Mythology" on the internet or in an encyclopaedia and read about the way the ancients of all civilisations believed in gods of the sun, moon, and stars, the sea god, the forest god, the god of war, and so on. Thor made thunder by throwing a hammer at his enemies, Maui pulled up the "fish" of the North Island when he was in a boat, which became the South Island. The Bible doesn't contain any legends like this. Yet many people have called the Bible "mythology".

4. Preservation and Survival

The Bible was written on perishable material such as papyrus and animal skins. It was copied and re-copied hundreds of times to preserve it throughout history, because there weren't any printing presses or computer discs in Old Testament times. But it was transmitted down through the generations in a unique way, and has been preserved much



Carefully encased within a climate-controlled cabinet in the John Rylands Library is the St. John's fragment, P52. Measuring only 8.9 cm by 6 cm, this fragment is part of a codex that was likely written in the mid-2nd century AD, the most ancient evidence of the existence of the gospel of John.

more accurately than any other ancient document.

The scriptures were very important to the Jews—being in effect their national law and constitution—so they guarded them with great care. They had special classes of men whose sole duty was to preserve and transmit these documents with practically perfect fidelity, who kept tabs on every letter, syllable, and word. The Talmudists who preserved the text from AD 100–500 had rules including the following: "A roll must be written on the skins of clean animals, the length of each column must not extend less than 48 or more than 80 lines, the breadth must consist of 30 letters. No word or letter must be written from memory, the scribe not having looked at the codex before him...Between every consonant the space of a hair or thread must intervene. Should a king address him while writing he must take no notice of him".¹⁷

The Massorettes, who copied the text from AD 500–900, treated it with great reverence, and devised a complex system of safeguards against scribal slips. For instance, they counted the number of times each letter of the alphabet occurs in each book, numbered the verses, words, and letters of every book, and calculated the middle word and middle letter of each.

There are about 25,000 manuscript copies of the New Testament or portions of it extant today. It is revealing to compare this with other ancient documents. Herodotus, known as "the father of history", wrote in about 450 BC, but only eight manuscripts of his work have survived, the earliest dated AD 900, about 1350 years after he wrote. Aristophanes, a Greek playwright, wrote 45 plays in about 400 BC, but only 11 copies of these have survived, the earliest dating from AD 900. Caesar's Gallic Wars was written about 50 BC and only 10 manuscripts have survived, the oldest some 900 years later than

Caesar's day. So it is with all of the ancient writers; only a handful of copies of their work have survived. An exception is Homer's *Iliad*, of which an amazing 643 manuscripts still survive. However, many scholars don't think Homer wrote it, and there are many differences between the copies. But there are a remarkable 25,000 manuscript copies of the New Testament, the oldest dating from around AD 125, only 50 years after it was written.

William Shakespeare wrote 37 plays in the seventeenth century. Not even one original manuscript has survived, and so the missing gaps in the copies of his works were filled in with educated guesses of textual scholars. There are differing documents of each of Shakespeare's plays, with items in dispute that materially affect the meanings of the passages involved. But the Bible only has a few disputed textual readings, none of them affecting any doctrines or important details.

No other book has withstood more vicious enemy efforts to stamp it out than the Bible. In AD 303 the Emperor Diocletian issued an edict to stop Christians from worshipping and to destroy their scriptures. All meeting places were destroyed, the property of Christians confiscated, and Bibles burned. Anyone found with a copy or even portions of the Bible received a death sentence. Just 25 years later the new Emperor, Constantine, instructed that 50 copies of the scriptures should be prepared at the expense of the Government.

The French literary genius Voltaire, who died in 1778, scoffed that 100 years after his time Christianity would have been swept from existence and the Bible would only exist in museums. Ironically, only 50 years after his death the Geneva Bible Society used his press and house to produce stacks of Bibles.

The greatest indication of how accurately the Bible has been preserved came in 1947 with the

discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls in caves near Jericho. These scrolls of the Old Testament had been hidden there for nearly 1900 years. Scholars waited with baited breath to see what the results would reveal when they were matched up with the manuscripts that had already been found. Amazingly, they proved to be almost exactly the same, with just minor spelling differences. The Dead Sea scrolls are dramatic evidence that the Bible has been accurately preserved down through the centuries.

5. Honesty and Character

The Bible is disarmingly candid in describing the lives of its heroes and heroines. It doesn't try to cover up their problems. King David of Israel is recorded as being a murderer, adulterer, and liar. Peter, one of Jesus' closest disciples and a leader of the Church, is famous for publicly denying his Lord three times. Discord and troubles in the early churches are openly admitted.

If the Bible writers were trying to encourage people to believe and follow something they had invented, it is very unlikely they would be so open about such problems. And it is difficult to believe so many of them would have died, often in excruciating agony, for what was just an invention.

The quality and character of the Bible's moral and ethical teaching is another strong evidence of divine inspiration. The Bible has formed the basis for much of our western world's legal system. Whether we read the Ten Commandments, the wisdom of the Proverbs, or Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, there is a clear standard of moral conduct presented that is timeless in its principles.

6. Fulfilled Prophecies

Suppose you were asked what you think world conditions will be like 2000 years from now, around the year 4000. Do you reckon you could make a pretty good guess?

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Will a nuclear war have destroyed everything by then, or will we be living on other planets? Who has a hope of knowing what will be happening at that time? It's hard enough to predict next week's weather, let alone conditions 2000 years ahead!

Yet 2000 years ago the Bible delivered stunningly accurate predictions of trends and events now occurring worldwide. At a time when the most powerful weapon was a two-edged sword or a battering ram, Jesus Christ forecast that mankind would develop the capability to destroy all human life.¹⁸ He prophesied wars and rumours of wars, famines and earthquakes in different places,¹⁹ and predicted that the Christian gospel would be published all over the world.²⁰ He said that many people would be hated, persecuted and killed because of him,²¹ and that is exactly what has happened, and is happening, in many places around the world right now. If Jesus was an ordinary human being, that would be a rather egotistical claim to make!

But Jesus didn't only make prophecies—he fulfilled them too! And not just one prophecy, but literally hundreds of them!

A prophecy by Micah in about 700 BC predicted Christ would be born in Bethlehem.²² Isaiah's prophecy of 650–750 BC said he would be born of a virgin.²³ And a prophecy made almost 2000 years before he was

born, saying he would come from the tribe of Judah, was right on the button!²⁴

Other prophecies said he would enter Jerusalem riding on a colt, he would be sold for 30 pieces of silver, which would be used to buy a potter's field, lots would be cast for his garments, his hands and feet would be pierced, and he would be raised from the dead.

Amazingly, Jesus fulfilled well over 300 Old Testament prophecies. How likely is it that this happened just by chance? Peter Stoner, in the book *Science Speaks*, used the science of probability to determine that the chance any person could fulfil say eight of the prophecies was 1 in 10 to the power of 17. The chance of one man fulfilling 48 of the prophecies was calculated at 1 in 10 to the power of 157, an almost infinite number!

It was clearly impossible for Jesus to deliberately go about fulfilling all of these prophecies. Firstly, he would have had to ensure he was born of a virgin. As if that wasn't hard enough, he would have to be sure it happened in Bethlehem, and of the line of David. Then, somehow he would need to engineer his crucifixion and burial in a rich man's tomb!

There are lots of other Bible prophecies we haven't considered yet. A number of prophets



Charles Wendell Colson (1931–2012) gained notoriety in the early 1970s as President Nixon’s “hatchet man”. “Chuck” Colson’s mid-life conversion to Christianity and a seven-month term in prison following the Watergate scandal sparked a radical transformation in him that led to the founding of the non-profit ministry, Prison Fellowship, and BreakPoint, a daily radio commentary that continues to be broadcast across the United States to this day.

accurately foretold the destruction of various cities and the rise and fall of empires. Imagine the difficulty of predicting the destruction of a city such as Auckland, and outlining exactly how and when. This is what a number of Bible prophets did, in the case of ancient cities such as Tyre, Sidon, Samaria, Petra, Nineveh, and Babylon, and it can be shown that the prophecies were fulfilled in remarkable detail.

7. Personal Experience

But the most telling reason Christians believe the Bible is true is that they have practised what it says, and have found that it works.

One thing the prophet Isaiah said about humanity was that “they do not know the way of peace”.²⁵ This has certainly proved to be an accurate statement over the many centuries since it was written.

The New Testament boldly asserts that “There is none righteous, not even one”.²⁶ This is also a true statement: we have all fallen short

of God’s standards and need forgiveness and help. And the Bible offers solutions to this problem, answers that have worked for millions of Christians. They have experienced the fact that if biblical principles are followed they bring peace of mind, amazing joy, and transformation to people’s lives.

The Bible presents a code of excellent spiritual laws, exhorting love, purity, peace, honesty, and faith. Millions of Christians have tried to live by these principles, and although no one is able to keep them perfectly, the Bible promises help for those who try to follow them, and people report that this really does happen. Millions of lives have been changed for the better because of the teachings of the Bible. And they have all been changed in very similar ways. Christians who believe in and try to follow the Bible all report that their lives are happier and more meaningful as a result. Thousands of criminals have reformed, drug addicts have been cured, selfish people have become generous—their lives have been transformed by the scriptures. The Bible talks about benefits that arise from a personal relationship with God, and for those who have experienced this, no further proof of the Bible is needed.

So, these are some of the reasons Christians believe the Bible is true. Any one of these can stand on its own as a strong argument, but when you add all seven of them together, it makes an extremely powerful case.

If you would like to learn more about the Bible and how to make sense of it in today’s world, why not pick up a copy and have a look at it? Try one of the modern versions translated into contemporary

English. If you have any questions or want further help, please feel free to contact us at *Inside Life*.

Notes

- 1 See for example: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2016/december-web-only/biblical-archaeology-top-ten-discoveries-of-2016.html> .
- 2 Sir WM Ramsay, *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament*, 1915, p.222.
- 3 William F. Albright, *The Archaeology and the Religions of Israel*, Baltimore, John Hopkins Press, 1956, p.176, and *The Archaeology of Palestine*, Pelican, 1960, pp.127–128.
- 4 Nelson Glueck, *Rivers in the Desert: History of Negev*, Philadelphia, JPS, 1969, p.176.
- 5 Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 18, Chapter 3, 3.
- 6 Job 36:26–29; Ecclesiastes 1:6–7.
- 7 Job 26:7.
- 8 Isaiah 40:22.
- 9 Genesis 15:5, 22:17.
- 10 Leviticus 17:11, 14.
- 11 Deuteronomy 23:13.
- 12 Leviticus 11:24–32; Numbers 19.
- 13 Leviticus 3:17.
- 14 www.native-science.net/Divine_Serpent.htm; <http://www.crystalinks.com/egyptcreation.html> .
- 15 *Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, 15th ed., HarperCollins, 1995, p.1087. See also Wikipedia article “World Turtle”.
- 16 www.ancient.eu/Atlas/ .
- 17 Davidson, *Hebrew Text of the Old Testament*, London, S. Bagster and Sons, 1855, p.89.
- 18 Matthew 24:22.
- 19 Matthew 24:6–7.
- 20 Matthew 24:14.
- 21 Matthew 24:9.
- 22 Micah 5:2.
- 23 Isaiah 7:14.
- 24 Genesis 49:10.
- 25 Isaiah 59:8.
- 26 Romans 3:10.



Rex Morgan, the editor of Inside Life, and his wife Marilyn, live on Auckland’s North Shore. Rex has worked in Christian ministry and office administration for over 30 years and has contributed articles to a number of international publications. He can be contacted at rex@gci.org.nz .

You Don't Suffer Alone

by Heber Ticas

Recently I visited the dentist due to a toothache. It turns out he had to extract one of my wisdom teeth. Man, I hate the dentist! Not the person, but I hate the experience—the scraping, the drilling sounds, the water being sucked out of (or sprayed into) my mouth, the residual pain. Even having to hold my mouth wide open for half an hour gives me a jaw ache.

I know I'll be okay when it's over and my mouth heals, but man, during the time when I'm in that chair, leaning

back and looking at a bright light, I'm suffering. I'm praying: "God, please help me get through this". It might seem silly, but I think you know what I'm talking about. Maybe you've felt like this in other situations, and maybe you prayed like I did.

It's natural for us to pray when we're in trouble. You've probably heard the saying: "There are no atheists in foxholes". Suffering turns our hearts toward God. We can read a number of examples in the Bible, but King David seems to write the best about how it feels to suffer. Check out this earnest request he made: "Listen closely to my prayer, O Lord,

hear my urgent cry. I will call to you whenever I'm in trouble, and you will answer me".¹

We can see that David believes God hears us when we pray, especially when we're suffering or in trouble. David promises to call out to God in prayer, and then he confidently says that God will answer him. We can do the same. But does this mean that our suffering will be removed? That some miracle will happen?

Though that's what we would like, we realise that prayer is not a gold coin inserted into a vending machine called God. It's possible that our suffering will go away, but the answer God often provides is an inner knowing or assurance that we are not alone in our suffering.

God's presence strengthens us and gives us courage and hope in the midst of difficulties. Sometimes other people come alongside us in our suffering and help us, and God ministers to us through their words and their actions.

Suffering is a part of being human. Even Jesus suffered. His example of patient endurance when mistreated, wrongly accused, beaten, and nailed to a cross can help us put our suffering in perspective. God never left Jesus while he suffered, and God will never leave us.

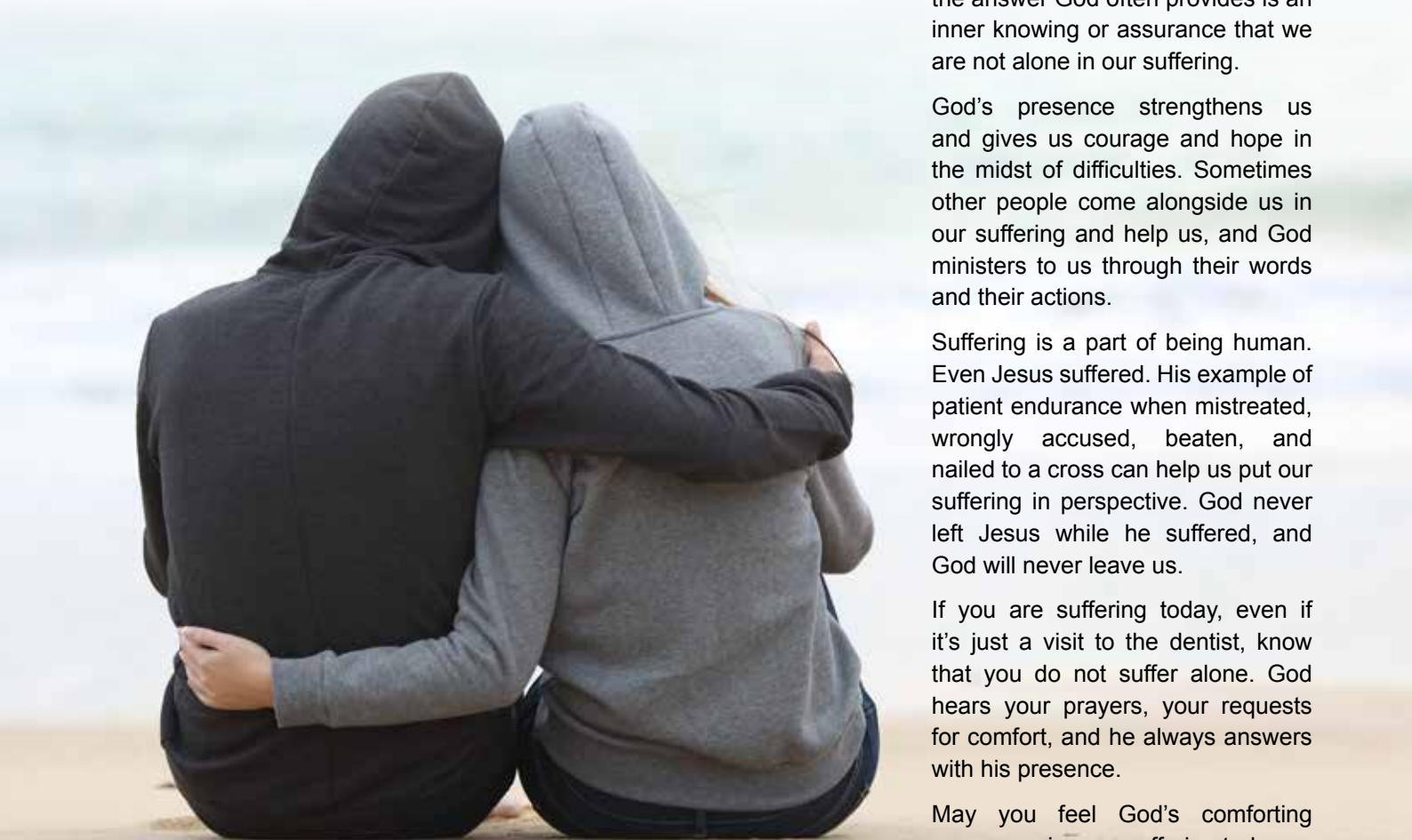
If you are suffering today, even if it's just a visit to the dentist, know that you do not suffer alone. God hears your prayers, your requests for comfort, and he always answers with his presence.

May you feel God's comforting assurance in your suffering today.

NOTES

¹ Psalm 86: 6–7 (New Living Translation).

Sometimes other people come alongside us in our suffering and help us, and God ministers to us through their words and their actions.



Nature Talks

by Helen Francis

The Coronavirus pandemic has made us all more aware of our own fragility. Feeling vulnerable, with more time to think than ever before, some of us have found ourselves considering the bigger, more spiritual questions of life, maybe even asking who or what God is, if there is a God.

During the lockdown, my 70-something neighbour and I chatted more regularly over the phone or the garden fence. She told me about her grandchildren dressing up as Santa Claus and Facetiming her to make

her smile. “Be good as if there was a real Santa”, she added wistfully. She had been thinking about the bigger, more spiritual questions too.

When it comes to notions of what we call God, Santa can sometimes be the image many have: a benign old man with white hair and a beard. This conversation with my neighbour reminded me of a statement the well-known atheist Richard Dawkins made about associating his disappointment in finding out that Santa wasn't real with his feelings about God's existence. Interestingly, Santa is a historical person called St

Nicholas, and he did go about giving presents, but was not the red-suited, plump, chimney-descending, sleigh-riding fellow we're all used to picturing.

Like Dawkins, coming to realise the non-existence of a much-loved benevolent character can make us sceptical about this God question. Certainly, it encouraged Dawkins' disbelief of other gods including Jesus, who is described as Emmanuel, meaning “God with us”. Ironically, like St Nicholas, scholars and historians do not dispute that Jesus existed, or that he was a good man and a great teacher. But is there any way of



knowing whether there really is a God of some sort out there?

Religious holy books have a lot to say about who God is, but I wonder if there is an even more obvious starting place. As a lover of the natural world, enjoying scenic walks, I have come to wonder whether God uses nature to talk about his existence. After all, as Creator you would expect his fingerprints to be all over it, wouldn't you? The symmetry and beauty, the symbiotic nature of cycles and systems leave me full of wonder.

No two snowflakes are the same. In the depths of the sea, where man is only just beginning to explore, creatures have lights. Many birds, fish, and mammals can navigate thousands of miles to return to their birthplace, somewhere they may have only been once before. I'm not into arguments about when

or how God created all this, but for me I can only see a benign, purposeful, intelligent, artistically beautiful mind behind it all.

Some people think science and God are at odds with each other. Sometimes this seems to be the case, but I have also noticed that so often science "discovers" God without meaning to. Recently I was reading a scientific study about the birthplace of life on earth. I was blown away by the scientists' explanation of how the fundamental building blocks of life, DNA and proteins, could have been produced from chemical reactions in clay and then preserved by the same clay.¹

So life may have actually started in clay? Why does this blow me away? Because in the first book of the Bible, Genesis, it suggests a similar birthplace for human life. The story goes like this:

"...and the Lord God formed man out of the dust [clay] of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul".² So maybe we should be seeing God in a white coat rather than on a white cloud?

Looking to discover more about who we are, and who God is, is a natural reaction to a crisis. For me, looking and listening to nature, whether you're on a walk or in a lab, is a good starting place in trying to discover God.

NOTES

¹ Cornell University. "Clay may have been birthplace of life on Earth, new study suggests." *Science Daily*, 5 November 2013. www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2013/11/131105132027.htm .

² Genesis 2:7.



“...and there was light”

*An artist's conception
of the Big Bang.*

by Richard Fowler

The idea of wanting to take a picture of a black hole comes with a tinge of irony. “I wonder what it looks like?” might be said with the slightest hint of sarcasm. If your mind's eye can't muster it, then you are in luck. In 2019, for the first time in human history, we got a snap of a black hole.¹

Spoiler alert! It's black and looks like a hole! Maybe no surprise there, but for the scientists who waited 20 years to get a glimpse, they noticed something else about the picture. There was a ring of light around the hole, which looked more like an orange glow. This got me thinking.

Eight telescopes positioned around the world were able to build up enough data to create this once-in-a-lifetime image. The light is nothing extraordinary, but I was made more curious when the lead scientist, Prof Heino Falcke, said: “We still have to understand how the light

is generated”.² Apparently, this 40 billion km (three million times the size of the Earth) cosmic vacuum cleaner's gravitational pull even drags light into its abyss. And that's something when you think that light has been around since the Big Bang, the beginning of the universe.

Light was on the scene at the grand opening of the universe, too (sorry, no pictures available). Steven Weinberg, a Nobel laureate in physics, describes this epic event: “At about one-hundredth of a second, the earliest time about which we can speak with any confidence, the temperature of the universe was about a hundred thousand million (10^{11}) degrees centigrade...The universe was filled with light”.³

We may not know why light is generated from black holes, but we do know those packets of energy have been around since the birth of this universe. One suggestion for the source of this light has a descriptive beginning that sounds awfully like

that of Steven Weinberg, except that it was written some three millennia ago.

Maybe you will find it curious that the beginning of the story of the universe by a scientist starts in the same way as the beginning of one of the greatest origin stories, the Bible. This is how the Bible describes the beginning of the universe:

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...And God said: ‘Let there be light’, and there was light”.⁴ Not much difference with how modern science puts it.

NOTES

¹ <https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-47873592> .

² <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-47873592> .

³ Steven Weinberg, *The First Three Minutes: A Modern View of the Origin of the Universe*. Basic Books, 1988, p. 5.

⁴ Genesis 1:1, 3.

BLOOD As Life

by Sophie Turfus

30,000,000,000,000! This is the number of red blood cells, the main ingredient, circulating in our “juice”. And this blood travels in the 100,000 miles or so of blood vessels in the human body. Our red blood cells contain the amazing protein haemoglobin (270 million molecules in each cell, designed to carry oxygen). They also carry carbon dioxide, a major waste product, and nitric oxide, which controls vessel relaxation. Blood also carries nutrients obtained from our diet and other substances produced in our body. A very efficient all-in-one plumbing-and-sewage system indeed!

If we can imagine a plumbing system not just delivering essential utilities and removing waste, but one which is also self-cleansing, self-fixing, and able to defend against intruders, its creator would have received the Nobel Prize long ago.

Red blood cells race around our bodies with their friends, the 50,000,000,000 white blood cells, which serve as a natural barrier to infection. Some of them (macrophages, types of white blood cells that engulf and digest unwanted substances) even resemble mouths that swallow foreign material—think video game Pac-Man! Then, when these blood cells reach the end of their life, special stem cells create new ones to replace the old or damaged ones.

You may be aware of the ABO blood group system and Rhesus positive and negative categories. In New Zealand, the most common blood

type is O positive, a characteristic of 38% of the population. There are, however, over 35 blood group systems giving rise to over 600 different blood types.

While AB positive blood can only be given to AB positive individuals, persons with the blood group O negative are universal donors. The latter are less susceptible to certain diseases, though mosquitos show a preference for that group. There are also genetic differences, for example in the production of Vitamin K levels that control the gentle balance between clotting (thrombosis) and bleeding (haemophilia). Scientists have long debated that particular groups may offer protection to individuals living in different geographical locations.

Personally, I'm one of those rare types, and I'm not referring to my

blood group. What I mean is that I'm a scientist who also happens to be a Christian, which in simple terms means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. Human blood is special, but to me, the blood of Jesus is exceptional.

There are so many analogies and metaphors that link to this thought, but the one I am thinking of right now is where it tells me in the Bible that his blood is somehow able to “purify us from all sin”.¹

Human blood can do all kinds of amazing things, but only the blood of Jesus can do that.

NOTES

¹ 1 John 1:7.

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Where Do You Belong?

by Irene Tibbenham

At primary school I was called racially derogatory names by fellow pupils. Once an influential youth leader said publicly to several hundred impressionable teenagers, including me, that “If all races were free to inter-marry, the world would be full of coffee-coloured children”. At 12 years of age and clearly a “coffee-coloured” child, this fact of biology¹ was impossible to hide from those around me. Why didn’t the ground swallow me up there and then?

The English teachers at my all-white grammar high school humiliated me regularly in blatantly racist terms. Strangers would think nothing of staring (rudely) at me, or demand to know “what I had got in me”. Their real question was: why did I look different from those around me? Consider that this was 40 years ago when England was a rather different place to what it is now!

As time went on, increasing travel, immigration and cross-fertilisation between countries increased; curry became England’s favourite dish; laws were introduced to make racial discrimination illegal. Now, just the occasional stranger will

tell me to go back to where I came from—wherever that is supposed to be! Born in the Himalayas to racially different parents who were living there temporarily, and influenced by three distinct cultures, where exactly did I belong? Personal identity is not simply racial taxonomy; it’s tied in to belonging; but where exactly is that?

“Identity” is from a Latin word meaning “same”. Besides the sense of who or what a person is and belongs to, identity is about “sameness”. Just think of the word “identical”. Being human, it is natural to focus on physical sameness, such as male/female,

Where does a “coffee-coloured child” with no identifiable community belong?





God became human, in the person of Jesus Christ, simply so he could identify with me and with you in every possible way.

skin-colour, hair, race, stature, age, and other aspects we have no control over. However, our identity is also made up of aspects we do have choice over, such as what we wear, our political leanings, our faith, how we spend our time, and so on. This sameness naturally draws us together: just think of hobbies, interests, lifestyles, and outlooks. Most of us are comfortable with people most like ourselves. We all instinctively want to belong somewhere, and this is tied in with our wellbeing.

Belonging to a community gives a group resilience and confidence, and strength, through engagement and friendship—perhaps, even love. People who don't feel they belong may become isolated, suffer loneliness, in some cases anxiety and depression. Young people who don't feel they belong anywhere may be targeted prey for the sex trade, violent gangs,

or radicalisation into extremist groups. Belonging is good, conceivably life-saving.

So, where did a “coffee-coloured child” with no identifiable community belong, you may well ask? As a child who attended church regularly, I was taught that I belonged to God. Actually, my view is still that we all do! Perhaps some of us exist in a form society may look down on: physically disabled, mentally ill, “special needs”, or even someone with a criminal record. Yet no matter who (or how) you are, God made each of us to be like him, to have his identity. How can this happen?

Well, at church I came to understand that God became human,² in the person of Jesus Christ, simply so he could identify with me and with you in every possible way. This Jesus died for us, too. Why? So that we could become permanent

members of that ultimate community, the diverse children of the wonderful God who made each of us uniquely different. This community is one that will always love me and to which I will always belong.³

Whoever you are, you're invited, so why not connect with the church community, too? After all...you already belong!

NOTES

- ¹ Race identity is socially derived from a person's physical features such as white or black skin tone. www.livescience.com/33903-difference-race-ethnicity.html.
- ² Philippians 2:6–7 “Christ had completely the same nature as God....He [Christ] became like men.” (EasyEnglish Bible)
- ³ Romans 8:38–39 “Nothing can make us separate from God, who loves us... There is nothing else in the whole world that can stop God from loving us.” (EasyEnglish Bible)

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