

Inside Life

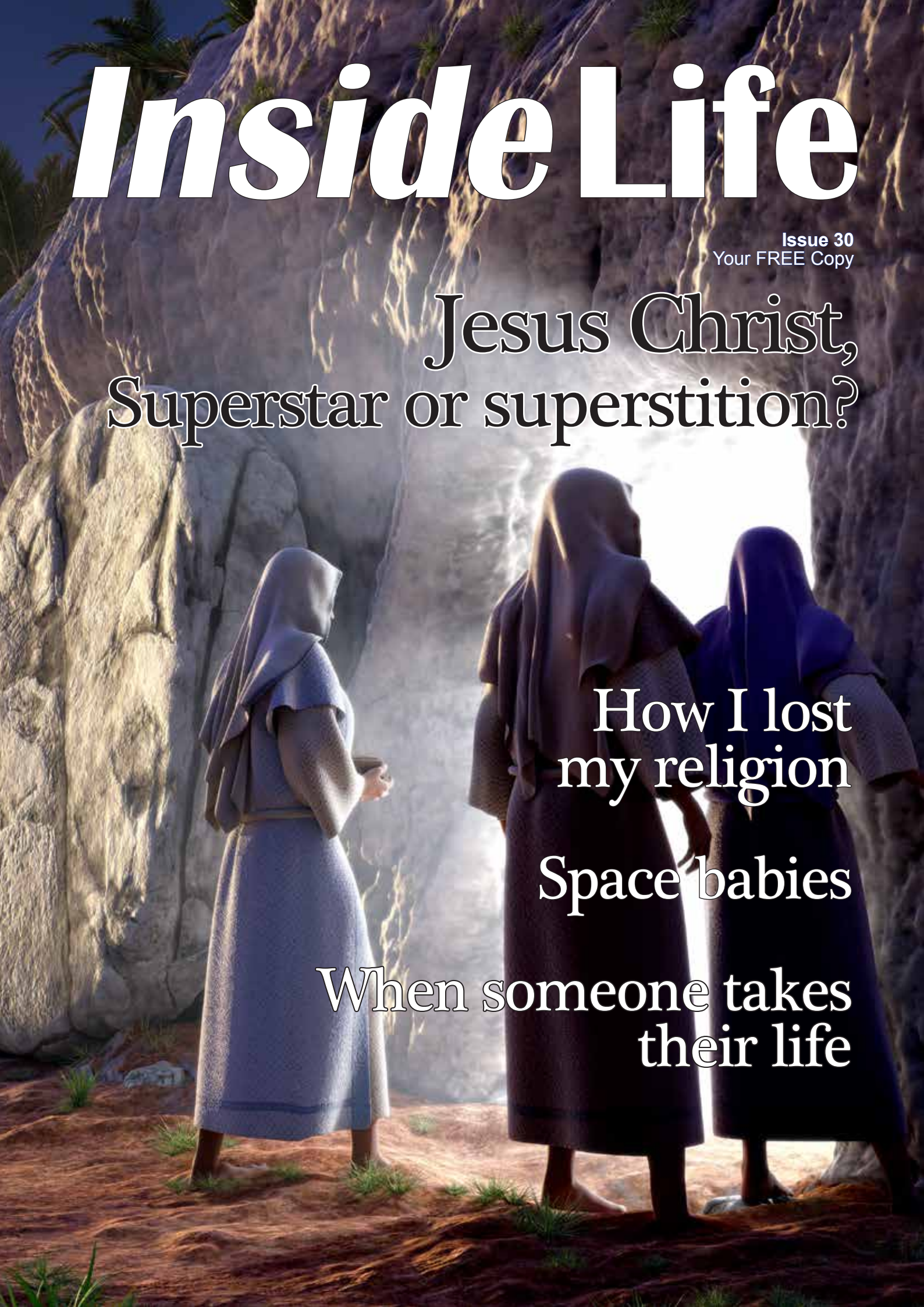
Issue 30
Your FREE Copy

Jesus Christ, Superstar or superstition?

How I lost
my religion

Space babies

When someone takes
their life



CONTENTS

3 Jesus Christ: Superstar or superstition?

8 Conversations on a plane

10 How I lost my religion

11 A bridge too far

12 When someone takes their life...

15 Space babies

Inside Life

PO Box 304055, Hauraki Corner, Auckland 0750

Phone: 09 489 8910

Email: insidelife@gci.org.nz

Website: www.insidelife.org.nz

Editor: Rex Morgan

Graphic Design: Philip Baldwin

Printed by PMP Limited

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.

Inside Life is published twice a year, free of charge, as a community service.

© Grace Communion International 2019.

All rights reserved.

ISSN: 1177-3693

Our Cover: Mary Magdalene, Mary, and Salome walking up to the bright empty tomb of Jesus Christ early Sunday morning after the crucifixion, with Golgotha in the background. But who was, or is, Jesus? Is he a superstar, the Son of God and Saviour of mankind, or is this all just superstition? Our lead article asks what is so special about Jesus Christ.

Photo Credits

Cover © James Steidl | Dreamstime.com ID 14390067

p. 3 © Rene Van Den Berg | 123RF ID 75128334

p. 4 © Mikhail Markovskiy | 123RF ID 24708724

p. 5 © Romolo Tavani | 123RF ID 97061457

p. 6 © Celso Diniz | 123RF ID 21558151

p. 8 Courtesy NASA/JPL-Caltech
photojournal.jpl.nasa.gov/gallery/universe
ID PIA22358

p. 9 © dizanna | 123RF ID 87884895

p.10 © rawpixel | 123RF ID 82092063

p.11 © Rex Morgan

p.12 © luckphotographer | 123RF ID 44369360

p.13 © Paul Radulescu | 123RF ID 16743060

p.14 © Harry Hu | 123RF ID 2264691

p.15 © Sergey Gavrilichev | 123RF ID 16493122

Jesus Christ: Superstar or superstition?

By Rex Morgan

It would be hard to find anyone who hasn't heard of Jesus Christ. His is probably the most famous name in history—the most influential person ever to have walked the earth.

But did he walk the earth? Was Jesus really an historical person, or is he just a legendary figure?

The 1970s rock opera *Jesus Christ Superstar* asked the question 'Do you think you're what they say you are?' Millions worship him as their 'Saviour', claiming that he was resurrected from the dead. Others say he was no more than a wise and respected teacher. Dan Brown's novel, *The Da Vinci Code*, posits that he was a mere mortal who married Mary Magdalene and fathered a child.

Who was, or is, Jesus? Is he a Superstar, the Son of God and Saviour of mankind, or is this all just superstition?

What does history say?

Jesus' life is recorded in some detail in the Bible, but that is no surprise as the writers were his followers. If such a significant person existed, surely other writers would have referred to him.

Actually, he wasn't all that important at the time. He was an itinerant preacher who enjoyed limited popularity for a very short time within a small community in a remote province on the eastern edge of the vast Roman Empire.

Very little literature of that time has survived to the modern day.

Is Jesus the superstar that the 1970s rock opera named him, or is his existence just superstition?

Issue 30

However, there are some notable references to Jesus in some of the oldest literature we possess.

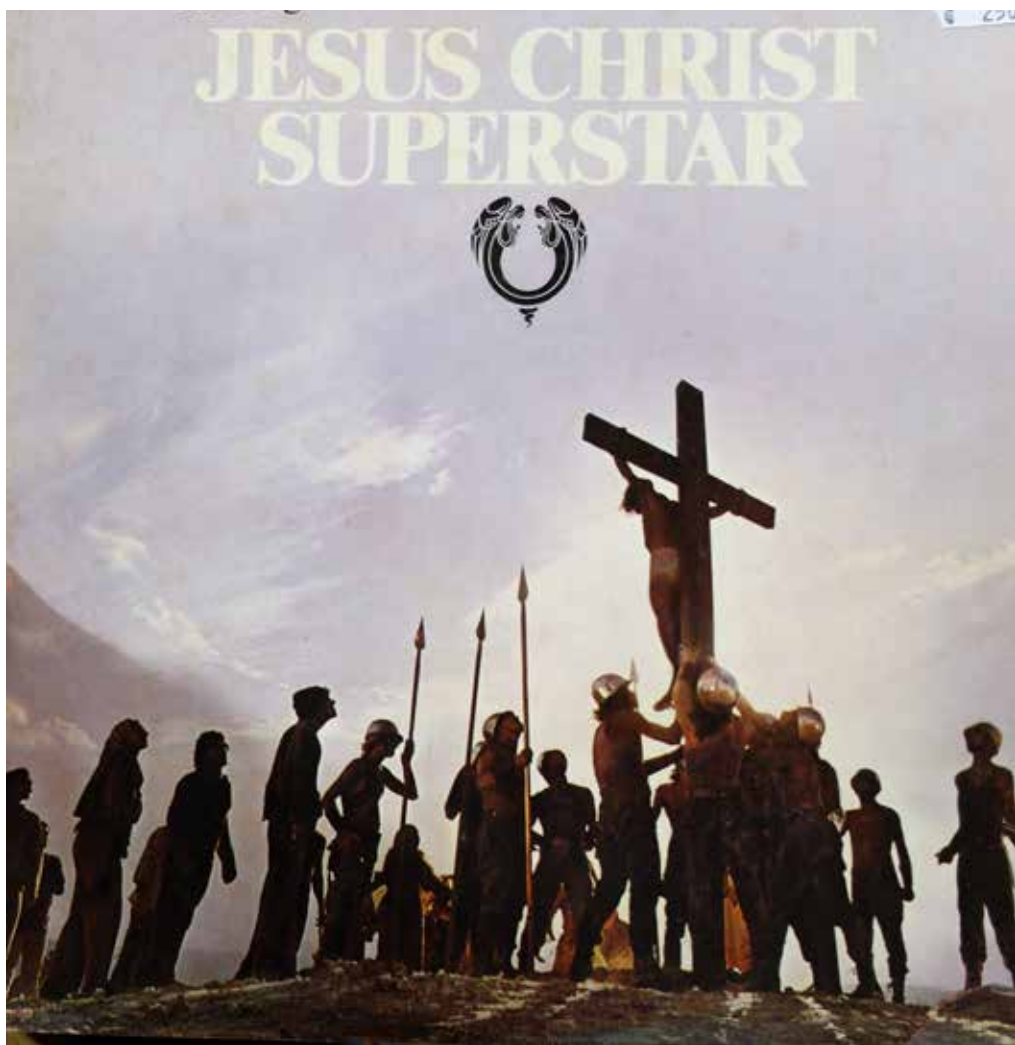
Tacitus, a Roman historian writing around AD 115, reported on the Emperor Nero's decision to blame the Christians for the fire that destroyed Rome in AD 64 in the following words: 'Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted tortures on the Christians. Christus (the Latin spelling of Christ), from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus...'¹

Suetonius, another Roman historian contemporary of Tacitus, tells us that in AD 49 'Since the Jews were constantly causing disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus (a

common misspelling of the name of Christ), he (the Emperor Claudius) expelled them from Rome'.²

Another Roman writer, Pliny the Younger, who was governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor, referred to the Christians in a letter to the Emperor Trajan in around AD 112: 'They were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verses a hymn to Christ, as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath...never to commit any fraud, theft or adultery...'³

The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, writing around AD 93, referred a couple of times to Jesus in his work, *Antiquities of the Jews*. In one section he referred to James, 'the brother of Jesus who was called





This statue of Flavius Josephus stands at the museum of the Masada fortress, Israel. The Jewish historian, writing around AD 93, referred to Jesus in his work, *Antiquities of the Jews*.

Christ'.⁴ Another passage states: 'About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man...When Pilate condemned him to be crucified, those who had come to love him did not give up their affection for him...And the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day'.⁵

There are also references to Jesus in the Talmud, a collection of Jewish rabbinical writings compiled from AD 200–500. Many of these references are derogatory, as the rabbis were antagonistic to his teachings, but they do help establish his historicity.

Lucian of Samosata, a second century Greek satirist, wrote: 'The Christians... worship a man to this day—the distinguished personage who introduced their novel rites, and was crucified on that account'.⁶

So there is indeed some historical evidence that Jesus actually did live, in addition to the many pages recorded in the New Testament gospels. These biblical references constitute valid evidence of Christ's historicity, too. The New Testament has been shown to be a genuine, accurately transmitted historical record, with thousands of manuscripts extant today, dating as far back as AD 100.

Now, let's return to the question posed in *Jesus Christ Superstar*: 'Do you think you're what they say you are?'

What, or who, did Jesus say he was? A quick overview of the New Testament reveals that Jesus made some startling claims about himself.

Amazing claims

What would you say if you heard someone on the street, or maybe one of our politicians in the Beehive, declare loudly: 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to God but by me'.⁷

What an outrageous claim! You would probably have

questions about the speaker's sanity.

But that was only one of the claims of Jesus. He also claimed to have shared the glory of God before the world began!⁸ He claimed to have been alive before Abraham, who lived around 2000 years earlier.⁹ He claimed to be a heavenly king.¹⁰ He claimed that he was going to die and come back to life,¹¹ and after that, he was going to return to earth again to judge the world.¹² He claimed to be able to forgive sins, something that only God can do.¹³ He even claimed that he could give people everlasting life.¹⁴

The list of staggering claims goes on and on! He claimed that he was 'the Christ, the son of God'.¹⁵ He claimed to be one with God.¹⁶ And he even claimed he was worthy of worship.¹⁷

A line from *Jesus Christ Superstar* says: 'He's a man, he's just a man'. If Jesus was just a man, all of the claims listed above are lies, because clearly he represented himself as more than just a man, he made himself out to be God.

Many people feel that Jesus was a good man, a wise and peace-loving teacher who taught helpful moral principles. But if he claimed to be God when he was only a man, he was telling a blatant lie, deceiving his followers, and therefore could not be an honest and good man.

The God Delusion?

Oxford University Professor, David Dawkins, published a bestseller entitled *The God Delusion* in 2006. The book contends that belief in a supernatural creator is a delusion.

To Dawkins, Jesus Christ is a superstition rather than a superstar. He says: 'Faith is the great copout, the great excuse to evade the need to think and evaluate evidence. Faith is belief in spite of, even perhaps because of, the lack of evidence'.

Christians hotly debate Dawkins' stance, and rather than evading evidence, they claim to provide abundant evidence for their beliefs. The accompanying article considers some of the evidence for Christian belief in the historicity of Jesus.

Noted author C.S. Lewis brought out this point tellingly in his book *Mere Christianity*: 'A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on the level with a man who says he is a poached egg—or he would be the devil of hell. You must take your choice. Either this was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us'.¹⁸

True or false?

Let's consider the possibilities logically. When Jesus said: 'I and the Father are one', he was claiming to be God. This statement was either true or false. There isn't any alternative. If it is true, then he is the Lord. If it is false, either he knew it was false, in which case he was a liar, or he didn't know, in which case he was a lunatic. There just isn't any alternative.

So we are left with three possibilities: because of what he said, Jesus was either the Lord, a liar, or a lunatic.

Let's look at the options. Firstly, was Jesus a liar? If he was, then he was

a particularly evil and villainous liar, deliberately misleading millions of people to trust their lives to him, and even to die for him. Of course, he died for his teachings himself, an incongruous thing to do if he was a liar, because he could have easily changed his story and lived. There was no motive for him to lie—his claims brought him hatred, rejection, misunderstanding, persecution, torture, and death.

Few people claim Jesus was a liar. Even sceptics agree that he had a pure and noble character. He taught high principles of honesty, love, and virtue, and by all accounts lived a morally faultless life. It doesn't make sense that such heartless hypocrisy and deceitfulness would come from someone who was as unselfish, loving, caring, compassionate, and careful about the truth as Jesus was. It just doesn't fit his psychological profile.

Was Jesus a lunatic? Once again, his character demonstrated the opposite. He was a man of wisdom, logic, mental health, and creativity. How could a madman possibly have come up with the consistently pure and noble teachings of Jesus? Those teachings, such as

the Sermon on the Mount, are still today regarded as a paragon of moral principles.

Jesus was continually challenged by the highly educated scholars and lawyers of his day, but he always responded with quick and intelligent answers that amazed and outwitted them. In the face of tremendous pressure he remained calm and composed. He didn't display any of the characteristics of imbalance or abnormality that point to insanity.

There isn't even a shred of evidence that Jesus was either a liar or a lunatic. This leaves just one alternative, that he is who he said he is, the Lord.

But let's examine this a little further. Is there any other evidence to demonstrate Jesus was more than just a normal human being? Yes, there are at least a couple of things that indicate he is divine. Firstly, he fulfilled hundreds of prophecies written about him prior to his birth. Secondly, after he died he came to life again.

Predicted centuries in advance

Books proved to have been written hundreds of years before Christ's birth state that a Messiah was



An artist's conception of the scene of Jesus' crucifixion, the tomb where he was laid, and where he was resurrected from the dead. The argument that the disciples made up the resurrection story doesn't add up because they themselves didn't believe it, until Jesus himself convinced them it had happened.



Christ the Redeemer?

The statue of Christ the Redeemer in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, was chosen on 7 July 2007 in an online poll of 100 million voters as one of the New Seven Wonders of the World. The statue weighs 700 tons and stands 38 metres tall.

The title 'Christ the Redeemer' refers to the Christian belief that Jesus came to earth as the Redeemer of mankind, saving humanity from the penalty of its sin.

The statue is truly a magnificent monument. But is Jesus Christ really the Redeemer of mankind? The accompanying article explores the historicity of Jesus, and the validity of his claims.

to come who would be a Jew,¹⁹ a descendant of King David,²⁰ and would be born to a virgin,²¹ in Bethlehem.²² Other predictions stated he would ride into Jerusalem on a donkey,²³ would speak in parables,²⁴ and would be betrayed by a friend²⁵ for 30 pieces of silver.²⁶ Yet other prophecies recorded that he would die with criminals, pierced in the hands and feet, with

his executioners gambling for his clothing,²⁷ that none of his bones would be broken,²⁸ and that he would be buried in a rich man's tomb.²⁹

There are literally hundreds of such predictions in the Old Testament, and Jesus fulfilled every one of them. Professor Emeritus of Science at Westmont College,

Peter Stoner, used the aid of 600 students to carefully calculate the probability of anyone conspiring to fulfil these prophecies. He conservatively estimated that the chance of one man fulfilling just 48 of the recorded predictions was one in 10 to the power of 157, an almost inconceivably large number.

One of the prophecies written by King David about 1000 years before Jesus was born stated that he would be resurrected from the dead.³⁰ This is probably the most difficult prophecy for someone to engineer of his own accord. If it is true, it is really worth sitting up and taking notice of. Think of it: do you know anyone who has come back to life after being dead several days? It is a stupendous proof that there is something very special about this man, that he is a superstar rather than a superstition, if it is true.

So is there any evidence for this astonishing claim, that Jesus was resurrected?

The tomb was empty

Jesus himself predicted his resurrection so clearly that the Romans made sure they carefully guarded the tomb in order to prevent the disciples stealing the body or claiming he had risen. When the disciples did start proclaiming that the tomb was empty, all the Romans needed to do was to reveal the body and the Christians would have been silenced. But realising the body was gone, the authorities tried to explain it away by concocting a lie that the disciples had stolen it.³¹

The argument that the disciples made up the resurrection story doesn't add up because they themselves didn't believe it, until Jesus himself convinced them it had happened. If they had invented the story, certainly they wouldn't have made women the first witnesses of the empty tomb and the risen Christ, as women's testimony wasn't accepted in that culture. And if they had made it up, would they really have died for such a lie? Each of the disciples was viciously persecuted and most were brutally murdered for their belief in Jesus.

Prior to Jesus' death, they had all deserted him in fear of their lives, with Peter even swearing in cowardly fashion that he didn't know him. Amazingly, all of them were suddenly transformed after the death of Jesus, from men who were terrified and desperately discouraged³² into men who confidently and boldly stood up, defying prison and death, for their master. How can that transformation be explained? The only way that makes sense is that they had seen that Jesus was indeed resurrected.

In a letter written to one of the churches in Greece soon after the resurrection, Paul claimed that 500 people had seen the risen Christ.³³ Many of those witnesses were still alive when Paul made this claim. If it was untrue, the sceptical Greeks could have easily disproved it.

Paul himself was a violent opponent of the Christians, vehemently terrorising and killing them. But overnight he suddenly changed and began risking his life for the message he had hated so much. The reason he gave for this was that he had seen the risen Christ, and indeed there is no other way to make sense of it.

Interestingly, millions of other people since that time have claimed they also have a relationship with Jesus and that he has transformed their lives.

It still happens regularly today. Former criminals, gangsters, liars, and thieves have suddenly changed their lifestyles and started trying to be kind-hearted, generous, and loving. This is only possible on such a wide scale because Jesus was resurrected, and is still alive today, and in a position where he can influence people's lives. If you'd like more information on how Jesus works today, why not visit your local church this weekend? Or if you prefer, feel free to write to *Inside Life*, P.O. Box 304055, Hauraki Corner, Auckland 0750, for more information.

You are invited to come and meet the sponsors of *Inside Life!*

Grace Communion International services are held weekly in the following locations:

- Auckland: Mt. Eden Senior Citizens' Club Hall, Balmoral (corner Dominion Rd and Brixton Rd)
Saturdays at 2.00 pm
Contact: Rex Morgan, ph. 09 489 8910
- Rotorua: Contact Peter Lindop, ph. 07 349 2272
- Wellington: Thumbs Up Hall
5 Elizabeth Street, Petone
Saturdays at 2:30 pm
Contact: Dennis Gordon, ph. 04 386 2094
- Masterton: Solway Primary School
302 Ngaumutawa Rd, Solway
Sundays at 10:00 am
Contact: Manny Ornejas, ph. 06 370 2916
- Invercargill: Contact: Les Evans, ph. 03 218 7020
- Other NZ locations: Small groups meet regularly in other cities nationwide.
For details, contact Dennis Richards, ph. 06 353 6224 or visit www.gci.org.nz

Jesus Christ is not a superstition. There is ample proof that he lived, died and was resurrected. He is indeed the Son of God, a Superstar, and the Saviour of mankind.

Endnotes

- ¹ Cornelius Tacitus, *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, 15.44.
- ² Suetonius, *The Lives of the Caesars*, book 5.25.
- ³ Pliny, *Letters*, 10.96.
- ⁴ Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 20.9.1.
- ⁵ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 18.3.3.
- ⁶ Lucian, *The Death of Peregrine*, 11.13.
- ⁷ John 14:6.
- ⁸ John 17:5.
- ⁹ John 8:58.
- ¹⁰ John 18:36–37.
- ¹¹ John 12:32–22.
- ¹² Mark 14:61–62.
- ¹³ Luke 5:20–21.
- ¹⁴ John 11:25.
- ¹⁵ Matthew 16:16–17.
- ¹⁶ John 10:30.
- ¹⁷ John 20:28–29.

¹⁸ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Glasgow, Collins Fount Paperbacks, May 1978), p. 52.

¹⁹ Genesis 49:10.

²⁰ 2 Samuel 7:12.

²¹ Isaiah 7:14.

²² Micah 5:2.

²³ Isaiah 62:11.

²⁴ Psalm 78:2.

²⁵ Psalm 41:9.

²⁶ Zechariah 11:12–13.

²⁷ Psalm 22:16–18.

²⁸ Psalm 34:20.

²⁹ Isaiah 53:9.

³⁰ Psalm 16:10.

³¹ Matthew 28:13.

³² John 20:19.

³³ 1 Corinthians 15:6.



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 40 years and has contributed articles to a number of international publications. Rex can be contacted at rex@gci.org.nz

Conversations on a plane

By Joseph Tkach

Do you have interesting conversations when you travel by plane? Or when you sit next to someone on a bus or on a train?

I'm half-way convinced that I should write a book titled *Transformed by Airplane Conversations*.¹ I've had some interesting conversations on airplanes with a variety of people. Let me share one of them with you.

As the flight was taking off, I began thanking God privately for the

first-class upgrade, which meant a more comfortable seat, some wine, and lunch. My thoughts were interrupted when the man seated next to me introduced himself as a Jewish lawyer. Before I could reply, the flight attendant started serving lunch. First, she brought us shrimp cocktail, revealing that my seatmate was not a practising Jew: he was eating his shrimp so fast that I decided to offer him mine. He gobbled it up right after telling me that his doctor had told him to cut back on cholesterol! As we continued eating, he asked what I

do for a living. I replied that I was a Christian pastor, fully expecting that he'd reply with silence, and I'd then be putting my earbuds back in to listen to an old Beatles' album. But to my surprise, he continued the conversation, telling me that he respected me for being a Christian pastor!

As the conversation continued, we talked about our favourite foods, wine, beer, and music. Then he asked me a question that seemed to come out of nowhere (though I suspect he had wanted



An artist's concept drawing of one galaxy 'eating' its neighbours, based on images from the Atacama Large Millimeter/ submillimeter Array (ALMA), the most complex astronomical observatory ever built on Earth. ALMA is capturing never-before-seen details about the very first stars and galaxies, probing the heart of our Milky Way Galaxy. Atheism, with its belief in blind chance as the origin of an unimaginably complex universe, takes as much or more faith than belief in a loving, sovereign God who created it all.

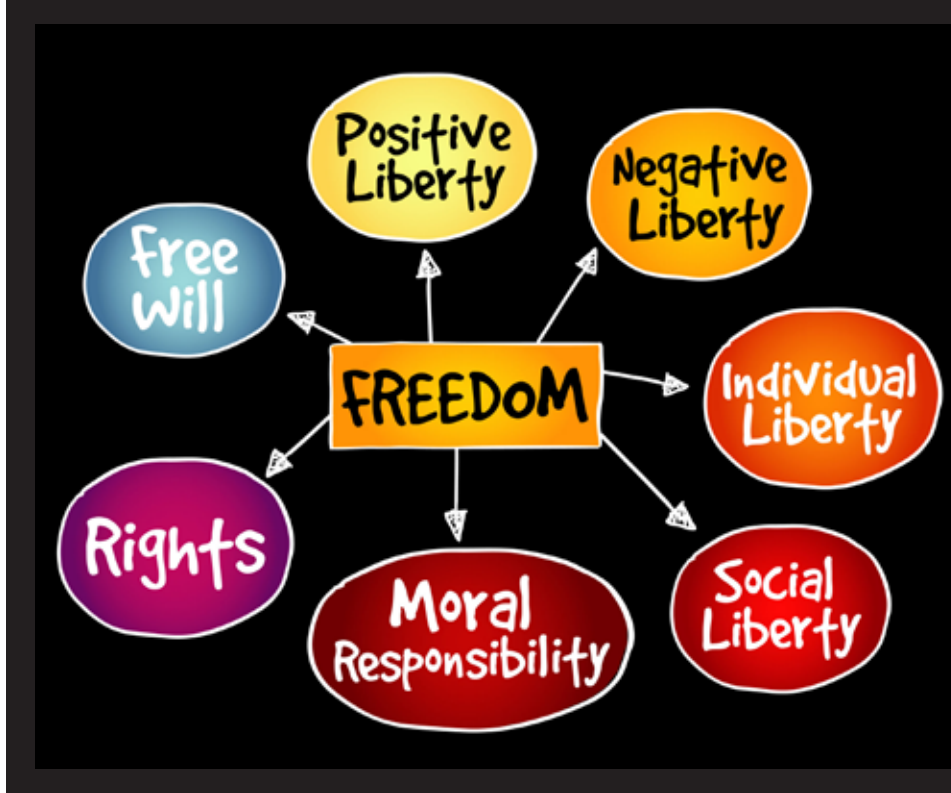
to ask it as soon as I mentioned I was Christian). ‘What reasons’, he asked, ‘would you give me for believing that God exists?’ Though I had not anticipated that question, I quickly replied: ‘Let me count the ways!’

Thinking that he probably was at least an agnostic, I began by noting that, from my perspective, apart from God there is no logical, philosophical, or reasonable explanation for how everything exists in our universe. I continued by noting that atheism is a false religion in that it requires an irrational faith commitment to believe that life comes from non-life, and that everything popped into existence on its own by accident, without any purpose. He agreed that the creation question was huge for him. I then attempted to illustrate the nature of atheism as a religion by showing that it makes its own faith statements and has its own evangelistic ministry. I mentioned the names of atheism’s two ‘apostles’: Stephen Hawking and Lawrence Krauss; and its four ‘evangelists’: Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, Daniel Dennett, and Christopher Hitchens.

Amidst our give-and-take, I made several points concerning atheism, noting that its belief in blind chance as the origin of an unimaginably complex universe takes as much or more faith than belief in a loving, sovereign God who created it all. I also mentioned that the atheism peddled by Dawkins and his cohorts focuses largely on what it doesn’t believe in and why it hates religion, especially Christianity. Though that approach might satisfy some people, it is not enough for me and many others who grapple with the great mysteries of life and reality.

He asked why I have concluded that atheism is inadequate as a rational worldview. I replied by noting that atheism is unable to provide a consistent explanation for the origin and order of the universe. If atheists argue that matter is eternal, they are going against modern science, which states that the universe had a beginning and is gradually running down. If they affirm that

Issue 30



Atheism is unable to account for the meaningful realities that people encounter in life, especially considering the atheistic view that we have no free will and all our choices are an illusion.

the universe had a beginning, then they must account for what caused that beginning. Either way, atheism cannot adequately explain the universe and a world full of complex life forms. From my perspective the atheistic worldview is incapable of providing the necessary preconditions to account for the universal laws of science and logic. In short, it is unable to account for the meaningful realities that people encounter in life, especially considering the atheistic view that we have no free will and all our choices are an illusion.

I then noted that, in my view, atheism cannot furnish a rational basis for determining good and evil, or the human need for absolute moral standards. If there is no God—who by definition is absolutely good—then there is no absolute standard for judging something to be good or evil. Ironically, atheism objects to the existence of God due to the presence of evil in the world, yet it is unable to account for the difference between good and evil, much less provide a solution, apart from God, to the problem of evil.

My seatmate and I had an enjoyable exchange, and he said

he appreciated most of my points. He confirmed that, while he is not an atheist, neither was he following any religion. He said he was searching, and that he felt he had not found the right place yet. Then he got up from his seat and headed for the restroom. While there, the smoke alarm sounded. Immediately, he was interrogated as to whether he had been trying to smoke a cigarette in the restroom. The flight attendant even asked me if I had seen him holding a cigarette when he entered and exited the restroom. When he was permitted to return to his seat, I told him that I know a good Jewish lawyer if he needed one! At first, he laughed, but then he asked who I was referring to. He laughed again when I replied that I was referring to Jesus Christ, though this time his laugh was somehow warmer.

As we deplaned and went our separate ways, I wondered what he had been thinking when I mentioned Jesus to him. I’ll never know, although I’m happy I had the chance to do so.

Endnotes

¹ Joseph Tkach published a book entitled *Transformed by Truth* in 1997.

How I lost my religion

By James Henderson

Glasgow. 'No mean city.'¹

Growing up was full of fun and conflict: late summer nights, playing with my pals in the streets, laughing, joking, both avoiding and flirting with the girls; nostalgic days interrupted by bouts of conflict, hostility, and danger. The conflict was over stupid religion.

I hope the word 'stupid' does not offend too much. But it's how I saw it and still do see it. The city was divided between orange and green, Protestants and Catholics, Good King Billy versus the Pope in Rome, Church versus Chapel. I don't think many of us knew the real differences. It was a tradition that had lasted centuries and we kids neither understood it nor cared about why. It was just how it was.

well. The Catholics had green and/or brown blazers, while we had blue, the Protestant colour, so you knew instantly who was who.

My aunt had married a Catholic and so my cousins were raised Catholic. Every week we'd visit them on a Saturday night and, if Rangers were playing Celtic, there'd be tension. If you went to one of the matches, you'd have to duck to avoid the broken bottles and other missiles, thrown with the intent to harm.

Glasgow was actually a mean place to live in. Thankfully, however, now it has changed for the better as have other once troubled cities, such as Belfast and Liverpool.

But these experiences put me off sectarianism and organised religion for life. How could it be that people who supposedly followed the same book, the same God, and the same

for myself in the very Bible that both Catholics and Protestants share (at least bits of it), and discovered that, yes, Christ did speak out against organised religion. Religion had been used to control people instead of releasing them to be who they could be. There were some sincere believers, but generally there was hypocrisy along with commandments about this, that, and the next thing. In fact, Christ told the priests, the religious leaders, and his own followers that, if they wanted commandments, he'd give them a special one to put into practice. 'A new commandment I give to you', he said, 'that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another'.²

What would Jesus have thought of the religious divisions in Glasgow when I was growing up? Or, for that matter, of all the various denominations and sects that claim his name today? Or of the religions that turn their followers against those who don't agree with them?

I think he'd say the same thing: 'A new commandment I give you, love one another'.

I still don't like religion. But I give Jesus a thumbs up. I agree with him. I follow him.



There used to be skirmishes and occasionally running battles between my Protestant school and the Catholic school a few blocks away. There were sticks, stones, sometimes knives. Mainly the boys, of course, but some of the girls as

values hate each other so intensely? It was, and is, plain stupid.

I heard once that Jesus Christ objected to the religion of his day. How could this be true? Did he not start all this mess? So, I looked it up

Endnotes

¹ Quoted from the title of the book *No Mean City* by A. McArthur & H. Kingsley Long, first published in 1935, which was set in Glasgow as it was then.

² The NKJ Bible, John 13:34, but look it up for yourself in any Bible version.

A BRIDGE TOO FAR

By Ian Woodley

I remember, as a young lad, being taken by my Dad to watch the film *A Bridge Too Far*.¹ This movie re-told the events of an unsuccessful Allied military operation in World War II. Operation Market Garden hoped to speed up the end of the war, but it ended in failure after strong resistance from the Nazis. The aim was to capture a road bridge over the river Rhine, which was acting as a formidable barrier to the advance of Allied forces.

We build bridges to overcome all kinds of hindrances to human advance and development. From my workplace I can see the magnificent Queensferry Bridge, which was opened in 2017 to replace the aging Forth Road Bridge. An incredible amount of ingenuity and artistry were combined to prevent the river Forth from becoming a barrier again to the everyday flow of traffic and commerce.

Recently I saw a poster that advertised a very different type of bridge. The advert was for a lady who calls herself Psychic Sally. As a medium, she was offering to contact the dead. Personally speaking, I remain unconvinced about the claims of mediums, especially as this type of 'bridge' often appears to communicate mainly lightweight information. In a world of so many problems, I would hope that the dead had something far more important to say to those who remain alive.

Are the dead in some way still conscious? If so, where are they? Do angels exist? Is there a heaven? Or more frighteningly, is there a hell? All of these questions pose great problems for many people.

Is there a 'bridge' to go over and find out the answers?

The history of the ancient nation of Israel includes an intriguing story of a man called Jacob, who dreamed of a ladder that reached from the earth into heaven. Angels were using the ladder to travel between the place of God and the place of humanity.² Is this a flight of fancy, or could such a bridge really exist?

Many centuries later, Jesus of Nazareth referred to this dream of Jacob. He said something very strange. There is a bridge to heaven. But it isn't some portal or a physical gateway. The ladder is a person—Jesus himself.³

Perhaps this brings your mind back to psychics and mediums. Is Jesus yet another person who claims to have some knowledge of what takes place 'on the other side'? But there is something in the story of Jesus that, if it's true, makes his statement more pertinent. All of those who knew Jesus claimed that he came back from the dead. Such an act really would make him the bridge between the earthly and the spiritual. Jesus told others to live on the basis that there is more to the universe than just this life.

But is all this just a bridge too far? Can we trust that Jesus reveals a glimpse of a heavenly-inspired life? From my own personal experience,



Even crossing the Capilano Suspension Bridge in Vancouver, Canada is 'a bridge too far' for some people. This article discusses a bridge safe enough to stretch as far as from death to life.

I have found Jesus' teachings give powerful insights into how to live, and as our cover article in this issue of *Inside Life* shows, there is substantial evidence that he was resurrected and indeed did become a bridge between death and a life beyond it.

Endnotes

¹ *A Bridge Too Far*, directed by Richard Attenborough, 1977.

² Genesis 28:10–17.

³ John 1:43–51.

This article was first published in the November 2018 issue of *Because* magazine (www.because.uk.com). Reprinted with permission.

When someone takes their life...

By Richard Fowler

Editor's note: In January 2019 the *NZ Herald* carried the story of three daring motorists who pulled to safety a man attempting to commit suicide on the Auckland Harbour Bridge.¹ Later in the month PM Jacinda Ardern stated in a panel discussion in Switzerland:

Unfortunately one of the sad facts about New Zealand is that

everyone knows someone who has taken their own life...We're a small country, less than five million people, but last year over 600 people committed suicide.²

In the following article Richard Fowler suggests some ideas about how to approach this heart-rending subject.

I was so young when I saw it, maybe too young to understand. I was at the beginning of my life, and he was trying to end his.

We lived in a secluded area of just four houses. That day, my parents had noticed something strange happening outside one of them. Even though I was young, I could tell something was not right. Our neighbour was sitting in his car with the engine on, and he seemed asleep. I was asked to stay inside, but I knew what was happening. I did not understand my emotions at the time, but I felt uncomfortable. Something had to be done. My dad intervened and stopped the exhaust fumes from filling up the car. This



A number of measures are in place to discourage people from jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge, including telephone hotlines and patrols by emergency personnel and bridge workers. In 2014 the Bridge's directors approved a proposal for a net below the bridge's deck, extending out on either side. Work on the net began in 2018 and is scheduled to be completed in 2021.

time, at least, a tragic death was avoided. Our neighbour eventually woke up and turned the engine off.

At that age, I found it hard to understand how someone could want to end his own life. Mentally and emotionally, I simply could not get what he had been thinking. And maybe I still can't. Perhaps we all find it hard to understand—to reach someone who is hurting from life so much that he or she does not want to carry on living.

Is there any way, or anyone, who can reach us in such a dark hour? And is there any hope beyond the tragedy?

Kevin Hines is a man that shares his story around the world of hope, healing, and recovery. In a powerful interview he shares how he survived his own suicide attempt when he jumped off the Golden Gate bridge.³ His story isn't just amazing because of his survival, but also because of what he can now tell us.

Kevin was someone who had suffered from a number of mental illnesses. In his late teens he felt he was a burden to all those who loved him. In 2001, after writing his suicide note, he travelled to the Golden Gate bridge. He simply felt nobody cared. But, as he retells his story of that day, he reflects: 'But the reality was, everybody cared, I just couldn't see it.'⁴ What he then tells us is what 19 other Golden Gate bridge jump survivors have also said: 'The millisecond my hands left the rail, it was an instant regret. And no one's going to know that I didn't want to die'. Four seconds later, he hit the water at 120kph.

When the Coast Guard officer pulled him from the water, astonished to find Kevin alive, he put his hand on Kevin's forehead and said: 'You're a miracle'. The next conversation Kevin had was when his dad walked into the hospital. His father took one step into the hospital room, Kevin looked up at him and said: 'Dad, I'm sorry'. His dad replied: 'No, I'm

Issue 30

sorry'. Both men's first reactions were guilt. Guilt, as Kevin explains, that did not belong to either of them.

As Kevin finishes telling us his story, he explains that, although he still has his mental health difficulties, he has learnt how to cope. He has built a support network around him. So often crises that we go through do end up passing, and better times replace them. He encourages us to remember: 'It's okay not to be

okay. But it's not okay to not ask for someone to help and back you up'.

Help. This is what Kevin wanted when he was going through his darkest hour. He said: 'All I wanted was for one person to look me in the eye and say: "Hey, kid, are you ok?"'

And that is exactly what did happen one day in 2008, at Waterloo Bridge, London. As Jonny Benjamin was going to take his own life, Neil



'Whatever you do, I'm going to stay with you.'



Laybourn walked by. Neil stopped and talked to Jonny, saying: 'It'll get better mate, you will get better'.⁵ His words encouraged Jonny not to jump. After this life-changing day, Jonny searched for this stranger who had helped him by launching a campaign that went global. Their reunion was turned into an award-winning documentary.⁶ When Jonny found Neil, they became friends. And then ran the London Marathon together, even passing under the spot where their journey had started, Waterloo Bridge. And in the most ironic of role reversals, during the marathon, it was Jonny this time who said to Neil, when he needed to stop due to cramp: 'Whatever you do, I'm going to stay with you'.⁷

I guess we all need someone to stay with us. Someone to run the race of life with. For every one person who dies by suicide there are many others who seriously think about suicide but don't go ahead with it.

Not all stories end like the three shared in this article. The pain

experienced by those who are affected by this tragedy is something our community cannot forget or ignore—life is not the same for them. Surely, we can grieve with them, and be sensitive in how

we do this. After all, when someone takes his or her own life, there are so many questions that remain. Why? What was the reason? Could we have done something that would have prevented it? For some there may be a spiritual question: is he or she lost forever? Is it the end of the story? Is there hope? Will I see him or her again?

That childhood experience when I saw our neighbour in his car left me confused and with many questions, but something within me has changed since then. Much later, when I was a teenager, my friend's sister took her life, but this time, my reaction was different. I'd like to share with you my own perspective, which I realise you may not hold: maybe for the first time, I knew I had a faith that claimed love conquers death, no matter how the death occurred. Our lives are not defined by how we might damage ourselves or by our self-image. For in us, there's so much more living. Even when things are at their most bleak, there is still hope. My faith

continues to grow in the God who grieves with us when we grieve. I believe that, although death may separate us from our loved ones, it cannot separate us from the author of life: the God who loves us, and who will bring us back from death to be a part of an eternal story with him.

A first century visionary writer called John tells us of a new chapter that is coming in the story of all those who have died or will die: 'And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life'.⁸ For all those who want a new life, a new story whose chapters are written alongside our co-author Jesus Christ, then their name can be written into the book of life: a life full of healing, hope and happiness.

Endnotes

- ¹ https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=12188811 .
- ² <https://www.nowtolove.co.nz/celebrity/royals/prince-william-jacinda-ardern-mental-health-world-economic-forum-40337> .
- ³ <http://www.kevinhinesstory.com/bio/> .
- ⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WcSUs9iZv-g> .
- ⁵ <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/04/22/marathon-men-suicidal-man-will-run-alongsidestranger-talked/> .
- ⁶ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/article/38477747/jonny-benjamin-how-i-went-from-suicide-attempt-tombe> .
- ⁷ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-39711655> .
- ⁸ Revelation 20:12 (NIV).

If you have been affected by the issues raised in this article, the following free helplines in New Zealand operate 24/7:

- Lifeline: 0800 543 354
- Suicide Crisis Helpline: 0508 828 865 (0508 TAUTOKO)
- Samaritans: 0800 726 666
- Youthline: 0800 376 633
- Kidsline: 0800 543 754
- Depression helpline: 0800 111 757

If it is an emergency and you feel like you or someone else is at risk, call 111.

Space babies

By Tony Goudie

Did you happen to read in some papers a few months back that we have taken a giant step in being able to create Space Babies?

What? I almost choked on my cornflakes!

One no less than Stephen Hawking claimed that the future of the human race is to occupy a different planet. After all, our planet may not last, bearing in mind how we've been destroying the environment. Would this be a way out of our dilemma?

But there is a problem with Space Babies. (Only one?)

In space, radiation is apparently 100 times stronger than here on earth, so babies could not be conceived and survive. A study published in the journal *Proceedings of the Natural Academy of Sciences* sent freeze-dried mouse sperm samples to be stored on the International Space Station for 288 days to see if radiation led to embryo death or mutations. While there was some damage to DNA, the samples produced the same birth rates as if they had never left Earth, and there were no detectable problems in the mice born.

This research led by the University of Yamanashi in Japan states: 'Our study demonstrates that generating human or animal offspring from space-preserved spermatozoa is a possibility which should be useful when the "space age" arrives'.¹

The researchers have hinted that this technology may 'aid in reproduction when humans reside in space for a continuous period in the near future',² and providing a possible 'doomsday vault' for Earth's species if things go really wrong.

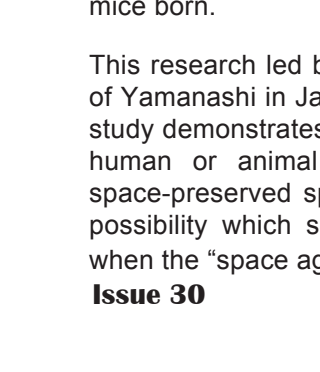
So, there we have it—our future all nicely sorted and taken care of once we have either wrecked this Good Earth or have been frozen/heated off it.

What would we do without such scientists? We should admire and appreciate the effort that goes into all of this. More research and scientific discovery provides humanity with ideas that give hope.

The only trouble is that this Space Babies answer represents a world without a loving God. If there is no such God, we still have trouble ahead. All the above is perfectly reasonable for humanity to have a future until we wreck the next planet and need to move on again.

But, what if there is a loving God? Would his solution involve Space Babies? Has he got something better for us in mind?

Well, a long time ago, so the Bible tells us, our progenitors had to make a move of their own. They were moved out of their God-given environmental paradise, called the Garden of Eden.³ You see, they did a bit of wrecking all by themselves. They choose to reject God's guidance when they ate the forbidden fruit of the Tree of the



Knowledge of Good and Evil. So began all our problems. As a result, humanity's negative impact on our precious Earth led eventually to our exploring the feasibility of Space Babies for when we get to our new planet. But before we think about colonising another patch of space, is there another solution? There is, and one not of our own making.

The answer that provides us with hope is that God sent us his Son, Jesus Christ—his own unique baby, a child born for us. Jesus gives us a message of hope, the hope of a better future beyond our imagination. It's a message that does not involve Space Babies and looking for another planet so that humankind might survive.

This future is discussed in the Bible as 'a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells'.⁴ But words fail to paint a sufficient picture of what it will be like. It's indescribable, too amazing for words: 'No mere man has ever seen, heard, or even imagined what wonderful things God has ready for those who love the Lord'.⁵

Our future is secure, not because of Space Babies, but because the baby Jesus was born for us so that we may be saved from the mess we've gotten ourselves into.

Endnotes

¹ www.pnas.org/content/114/23/5988.full .

² www.techtimes.com/articles/208023/20170524/doomsday-vault-in-space-baby-mice-born-on-earth-withperm-stored-on-iss.htm .

³ You can read the whole story in any Bible, Genesis chapter 3.

⁴ 2 Peter 3:13 (NIV).

⁵ 1 Corinthians 2:9 (The Living Bible).

This article was first published in the December 2017 issue of *Because* magazine (www.because.uk.com). Reprinted with permission.

Visit our website:

www.insidelife.org.nz

to access the articles previously published in **Inside Life**

Important questions covered in previous issues of **Inside Life**:

- ❖ Can We Solve the Mind-Body Problem?
- ❖ The Bible—Holy or Holey?
- ❖ Before the 'Big Bang'
- ❖ Why Does God Allow Suffering?
- ❖ Is Death the End?
- ❖ Creation, Evolution or Both?
- ❖ Does Life Have a Purpose?
- ❖ Who Are the Happiest People on Earth?



Yes, please send me a **FREE** subscription to **Inside Life**

Please send your request to: **Inside Life, PO Box 304055, Hauraki Corner, Auckland 0750**

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

Please include back copies on the following topics:

