

# Evidence, reason and faith.

By. Kel Hammond – Revised - 9-Nov-17. The latest version of this file can be found [here](#)

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## 1. Introduction.

The aim of this essay is to explore the relationship between evidence, reason and faith from a Biblical perspective. We will show that the common assumption that faith is believing in something in the absence of evidence is not a correct summary of Bible based faith. But first, we will briefly review some history.

At the end of the dark ages, after the renaissance and the subsequent enlightenments, a new more rational approach to life and the world emerged. This ushered in the **scientific revolution**<sup>1</sup> which laid the foundations for our modern world and its world-view. Just shortly after the French Revolution, Thomas Paine published a work titled “**The Age of Reason**”<sup>2</sup>. Paine argued for reason in the place of revelation, which caused him to reject miracles and to view the Bible as an ordinary piece of literature rather than a divinely inspired text. He voiced the opinion of many deists<sup>3</sup> of the time when he wrote; “I believe in one God, and no more; and I hope for happiness beyond this life.” He stated his opinion of organized religion as follows; “I do not believe in the creed professed by the Jewish church, by the Roman church, by the Greek church, by the Turkish church, by the Protestant church, nor by any church that I know of. My own mind is my own church. All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions, set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit.”

Paine rejected “Faith” as irrelevant and wrote, “The Christian faith is built upon the heathen mythology.” He and many others since his time have generally defined faith as an irrational belief in superstition and mythology. Many now hold to this general philosophy. They often conclude that truth can only be discovered by the exercise of reason applied to the natural world.

In the rest of this essay we will examine many of the assumptions of these and similar philosophies, seeking to answer their criticism of the Bible and its teachings. To do this we will focus upon the question of Bible based faith. We will show that “faith” is not contrary to reason and rational thought, and that faith and confidence in the God of the Bible is reasonable and based upon knowledge that is supported by evidence.

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<sup>1</sup> The Scientific Revolution generally refers to historical changes in thought & belief that unfolded in Europe between roughly 1550-1700; beginning with Nicholas Copernicus (1473-1543), who asserted a heliocentric (sun-centered) cosmos, it ended with Isaac Newton (1642-1727), who proposed universal laws and a Mechanical Universe.

<sup>2</sup> “The Age of Reason” by Thomas Paine. Available freely on the Web in PDF form. Link is [here](#) and [here](#).

<sup>3</sup> A deist is one who professes a belief in the existence of a God on the evidence of reason and nature only, while rejecting the concept of supernatural revelation.

## Introduction.

Even a cursory reading of the Bible will show how important faith is. For example Heb.11:6 says; “But without faith it is impossible to please him (God).” Again we read in Rom.3:28 “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” And again we read in Eph.2:8 “For by grace are ye saved through faith.” There are many references like these and they likewise speak of the necessity of faith. But what is faith and where does it come from? How does it operate? Some may legitimately ask, if God exists, does he expect us to believe without evidence? Or is there a clear evidential approach available that gives us assurance that the things taught in the Bible are not mere fables?

Although these questions have exercised people for thousands of years, it is in this modern scientific era that the legitimacy of faith is being challenged on a larger, more organized scale often by the New Atheists<sup>4</sup>. Science has explained many of the mysteries of life and of the universe. Modern medicine and science have clearly shown that many things that were previously thought, in more superstitious times, to be the direct workings of supernatural forces are in fact the workings of predictable natural laws.

Contrary to the understanding of some, these superstitious attitudes were not based upon Bible faith or understanding but rather upon societal-wide ignorance. Also, contrary to popular myth, the modern scientific method<sup>5</sup> was actually developed by men who also claimed faith in the God of the Bible. These believed that God made the world and that it operates by set laws that he established<sup>6</sup>. It was the certainty of these laws that drove many of the pioneers of **the scientific revolution**. As Isaac Newton famously said, **“Gravity explains the motions of the planets, but it cannot explain who sets the planets in motion.”** And again, **“This most beautiful system of the sun, planets and comets, could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful Being.”**<sup>7</sup>

Modern education ignores this heritage and teaches us that the only acceptable way of looking at the world is through a purely naturistic lens. That is, everything that exists is the product of natural forces.

As the Judeo-Christian world-view has been the dominant underlying philosophy in many western societies most of the vocal advocates of naturalism and materialism have targeted their criticism directly against the teachings of the Bible, which is the obvious source of this world-view. This criticism is specifically directed against what are thought to be the underlying teachings of the Bible. These include its God focused world-view, its teaching that the world was the result of divinely directed purpose and activity, its moral perspective on living and the goals and aspirations it encourages. Today, there are many educated people who aggressively argue for a world-view and value system that is contrary to Biblical teaching.

In this context we may ask, can Bible based faith withstand close scrutiny? Upon what foundations does it stand and how reasonable are they? What exactly are the reasons and rationale behind NT Christian teachings? How can we, who are far removed from those days, develop and strengthen our faith in the face of this modern challenge? This short essay has been written to identify the issues and investigate the reasonableness of NT Bible based faith. We will briefly examine the questions of evidence, reason and faith from a Biblical perspective, and we will endeavor to draw our conclusions together based upon the same evidential approach and methodology used and advocated by Jesus and his Apostles in the NT.

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<sup>4</sup> Example; “The End of Faith” by Sam Harris. Harris calls “religious faith” an “Iron Age Philosophy” (Pg.21). He rails against God saying that “he seems to require no evidence whatsoever.” He goes further and suggests that some religious propositions are so dangerous that it may be ethical to kill people for believing them (Pg.52-53), which is rather ironic because he rails against certain aspects of the Law of Moses which commanded the same (Pg.18, 82).

<sup>5</sup> See “Christianity and the rise of western science” by Peter Harrison ABC Religion and Ethics 8 May 2012. Link [here](#). Also Harrison’s “The Bible, Protestantism and the Rise of Natural Science,” Cambridge University Press, 2001. See also Harrison’s response to critics, “The Bible, Protestantism and the Rise of Natural Science: A Rejoinder” Link [here](#). Also see, “The Genesis of Science: How the Christian Middle Ages Launched the Scientific Revolution” 2011-James Hannam.

<sup>6</sup> For example, God says that He “established the laws of heaven and earth” Jer.33:25, as Gen.1:1 implies.

<sup>7</sup> Isaac Newton, The Principia: Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy. Link to quotes is [here](#). Similar quotations are found in General Scholium. Link to the work is [here](#).

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## **2. Faith is not the opposite of reason.**<sup>8</sup>

Faith is not the opposite of reason. That is a false dichotomy. Faith is actually the opposite of unbelief, not reason. The Biblical definition of faith is of a well-placed and reasonable inference based on evidence. We should not be afraid of embracing this concept of faith. Jesus himself speaks of this in John.14:11, where he presents his works as evidence to persuade. The NIV expresses it this way, "... at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves." In like manner, after his resurrection Jesus stayed with his disciples for 40 days - "To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs" (Acts.1:2-3). Jesus clearly understood the value of knowledge and evidence, and the important position these have in the development of faith.

We will see in the examples of Bible based faith, that faith is not blind or based upon ignorance. It is based upon evidence – of being persuaded to the truth of the things revealed in the word of God. We will now examine the nature of evidence and the logical steps involved in believing something to be true or not.

### **i. Any reasonable belief depends upon evidence.**

We believe something to be true because of any number of reasons, each of which depends upon different types of evidence. For example, we may be persuaded to believe something because –

- The evidence comes from first hand observation
- The evidence comes from repeatable experimentation
- The evidence comes from reliable and trustworthy sources
- We are persuaded by the accumulation of indirect (circumstantial) evidence

In other words, there are a number of different ways to establish what is true. Also, there are logical steps that we generally follow before we believe something to be true. Solomon speaks about this when he says; "The simple believes everything, **but the prudent gives thought to his steps**" (Prov.14:15 ESV). It is by the application of careful and sensible thought that we weed out errors, half-truths or even the works of deception. As we will find, it is usually the assemblage of multiple facts that persuades us to believe something ... whether it be personal testimony, historical facts, moral facts, mathematical facts or scientific facts. The process of belief should always be reasonable, and the greater the importance and significance of the claim the stronger the evidence should be.

We will shortly see in the Bible's own examples of faith, that Biblical faith is based upon being persuaded by the evidence about the truthfulness of God's revelation, which today is contained in the word of God. The examples of men and women of faith that we have listed did not believe without good reason. They each made a rational decision to believe the evidence and thereby to believe the words spoken. Many of these examples required them to see things from a different and much larger perspective than is natural to us, and sometimes even to see beyond the set laws of nature itself, for faith often involved seeing things from God's perspective. Once we begin to see from God's perspective our world-view will inevitably change. Contrary to these examples of faith, God also held people accountable for their lack of faith when evidence was ignored or explained away (Rom.1:18-22). Ultimately, Biblical faith always comes down to a question of whom we believe, which means believing or not believing God.

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<sup>8</sup> Some of the structure in the chapter is based upon the format found in "Cold Case Christianity: A Homicide Detective Investigates the Claims of the Gospels" by J. Warner Wallace, which is a recommended read.

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ii. **Direct and indirect evidence.**

Evidence typically falls into two broad categories which we will now examine.

**Direct evidence.** Direct evidence is evidence that can prove something by itself. For example, if someone came in from outside and said that it was raining outside ... that is direct evidence (from the testimony of a reliable witness). Direct evidence may also include our own first-hand experience of something. In similar terms, the Apostle John speaks of bearing witness; “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, **and we have seen it, and bear witness**, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;)” (1.John.1:1-2).

**Indirect or Circumstantial evidence.** Circumstantial evidence does not prove something on its own, but points us in the right direction by proving something related to the question at hand. For example, if someone came in from outside wearing a wet raincoat ... that is indirect or circumstantial evidence that it is raining. But it is not conclusive evidence. We would need more factors to make the weight of evidence persuasive or overwhelming. If all the people that came in from outside had wet umbrellas, shoes or raincoats our body of evidence would grow significantly. From this we can see that the more pieces of consistent circumstantial evidence the more reasonable the conclusion. Furthermore, additional related cumulative (indirect) evidence makes the conclusion more certain.

**The Cumulating Nature of Circumstantial Evidence.**

Both direct and circumstantial (indirect) evidence are acceptable types of evidence. Courts most often have to deal with circumstantial evidence, as do many fields of science. But pieces of circumstantial evidence must be assembled so that the conclusion reached is beyond reasonable doubt. Moreover, before you can rely on circumstantial evidence you must be convinced that the object being proved is the ONLY reasonable conclusion supported by the evidence. That is, there aren't other ways to interpret it. When considering circumstantial evidence we must accept only reasonable conclusions and reject any that are unreasonable.

Circumstantial evidence usually accumulates in a powerful way, and each additional piece corroborates those that came before it, until they are all assembled into one whole consistent narrative. Circumstantial evidence, therefore, becomes more reasonable as the collection of corroborating evidence grows and any contrary explanation is deemed unreasonable. After assembling the evidence, it is still possible that there is another explanation - but is it reasonable? That is why jurors are asked to return a verdict upon what is reasonable, and not upon what is possible.

iii. **Distinguishing between what is Possible and what is Reasonable.**

We usually define a reasonable conclusion as one that shows sound judgement, and is fair and sensible. It is therefore both appropriate and fair to all the available evidence. Compared to reasonableness, speculation is based upon inconclusive evidence; conjecture or supposition or more formally any “hypothesis that has been formed by speculating or conjecturing, usually with little hard evidence.” Therefore, we should expect all important conclusions to display a strong level of reasonableness to be persuasive.

Furthermore, most of us have intuitively learnt the difference between the possible and the reasonable. Although we might think that almost anything is possible we would not think that everything is therefore reasonable. For example: one may attribute something to aliens – which may be possible but not really reasonable. Particularly if there are much simpler explanations. That is why judges instruct juries to refrain from “speculation.” Jurors' are also told to resist the temptation to stray from the evidence. They must

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limit themselves to what is reasonable in light of the evidence presented. In the end, courts place a high standard on reasonableness which is important when we think about the reasoning process.

**Abductive Reasoning.** When examining the past we are often not able to rely upon direct evidence. Many a crime is solved by the accumulation of indirect or circumstantial evidence. This methodology is called abductive reasoning, which is described as a form of logical inference which goes from an observation to a theory which accounts for the observation, ideally seeking to find the simplest and most likely explanation. All of us use abductive reasoning when we are trying to identify true causes for any known situation.

The following are the basic principles of abductive reasoning in ascertaining what is true.

- 1) The truth must be feasible (the conclusion must first be able to fit the evidence)
- 2) The truth will usually be straightforward (all the evidence should align)
- 3) The truth should be exhaustive (the conclusion should account for all the evidence)
- 4) The truth must be logical (the truth must be rational and reasonable)
- 5) The truth must be superior (the truth is the best choice - superior to other options)

When all criteria are met then we can be confident we have reached the most reasonable conclusion.

It is for these reasons that we should be suspicious of conspiracy theories that depend upon meager evidence and an unreasonable level of credulity. The more people allegedly involved in any alleged conspiracy the more suspicious we should be, as it is very difficult to keep any “secret” information secret, especially in a relatively open society. Remember, it is not about what is possible, it is about what is reasonable. This leads us to the next subject which is discerning between subjective and objective truths.

#### **iv. Discerning between Subjectivity and Objectivity.**

It is important to know the difference between subjective and objective facts/truths. As we shall see, it is self-evident that we must seek for objective truths, but subjective truths are only opinions and therefore not valid evidence. Therefore, we must learn to distinguish the one from the other. Confusion and distraction occurs when we are not able to clearly distinguish between the different types of facts/truths.

**Subjective Facts/Truths** - are simply matters of opinion. You can't falsify subjective claims.

Examples – Note how that none of the following claims can be falsified – all of them are just matters of opinion or personal preference.

- I've got the best car/job/friend/advisor in the world.
- I believe that I should be a vegetarian.
- Red is the best colour for a car.
- Maths is the best subject.

**Objective Facts/Truths** – are matters of fact, which are true for all of us whether we like them or not. Our opinions cannot change the facts or the outcome. Objective truths are testable and falsifiable. As believers in the Bible's message, we believe that objective truths can refer to material claims, conceptual claims, meta-physical claims and even moral claims.

Examples – Even if we don't know the answers to these questions or even if our statements are right or wrong, they remain objective because their truth or falsehood resides outside of us. They are testable and falsifiable even if we are incapable or unqualified to fully test them.

- My car is the fastest car in the world.
- I can do 100 push ups.
- Man didn't land on the moon.

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- Christianity is the only true religion and Jesus is the only way to God.
- There no such thing as moral or immoral.

**Post-modernism and The Moral Argument.** What is of special interest is that our society is being overrun by a new spirit that confuses objective and subjective truth. This is part of the subtle change that has been brought in by the influence of post-modernist thought. It is sometimes expressed as opinions like these –

- There is no objective truth
- Truth cannot be known
- Tolerance – all views and all religions have equal merit - none is better than another.

All three of these statement are actually objective statements which can be tested and falsified. What they also show is that one of the outcomes of materialism is that it can lead to a form of nihilism<sup>9</sup>. This reminds us of the comment by Alan Bloom, an American Philosopher and Academic, who wrote about the failures of higher education. He wrote - **“There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering university believes, or says that he believes, that truth is relative.”**<sup>10</sup> This question of relative truths also introduces us to the importance of “The Moral Argument.”<sup>11</sup>

#### v. The Need for Objectivity.

In the work titled; “God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics” C.S. Lewis correctly sums up the situation this way - **“Christianity is a statement which, if false, is of no importance, and if true, is of infinite importance. The one thing it cannot be is moderately important.”**<sup>12</sup> Although some philosophers may reject the negative side of Lewis’ argument, none can reject the point he makes about the infinite importance of Christianity, if it is true. What Lewis is claiming is that Christianity is an objective fact or truth, and must be understood and treated as such. This is the challenge that all people must face up to.

From the examples of faith in the Bible, **it is clear that the ancients had faith because of the evidence rather than in spite of the evidence.** If we are to follow their example then it is reasonable to conclude that we can do the same. Is there evidence to persuade us, evidence for a reasonable faith?

**The Bible’s Challenge.** Anyone who reads the Bible is immediately confronted with a challenge. They will need to decide if it is simply a record of ancient mythology, philosophy or theology that has no bearing upon actual events or is it what it claims to be, a true record of past events and the product of special revelation. The NT writers were clear on this point. They claimed that the Bible (OT) was the work of special revelation by means of divine inspiration (2.Tim.3:15-17, 2.Pet.1:19-21).

So far we have briefly noted the challenge that the Bible presents to us in its bold claims. The record claims to be a work that was inspired by God. Within its pages it records the words of God, and also the witness statements of those who were there in person as well as the assembled records that were gathered from other reliable witnesses. How are we to respond to this claim?

**Objectivity.** There’s one thing we must acknowledge before we weigh the evidence. We cannot enter into any fair investigation with a philosophy that dictates the outcome. Objectivity is paramount.

One of the greatest challenges we face is the concept of scientific naturalism. This rejects the existence of supernatural agents, powers, beings, or realities. It begins with the foundational premise that natural laws and forces alone can account for every phenomenon. If there is an answer to be discovered, naturalism dictates that we must find it by examining the relationship between material objects and natural forces –

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<sup>9</sup> Nihilism - the rejection of all religious and moral principles, often leading to the belief that life is meaningless.

<sup>10</sup> “Closing of the American Mind,” Alan Bloom (1987) – Page 25. Link to the book is [here](#).

<sup>11</sup> The Moral Argument – see the Youtube presentation [here](#).

<sup>12</sup> God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics, Pg.101 - 1970

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nothing else is allowable. Supernatural forces are excluded by definition. Many begin with this presupposition and therefore fail to consider any answer that is not strictly physical, material or natural.

This immediately places the holder of this world-view into conflict with the Bible's own testimony. Firstly, the account of creation has to be discounted because Genesis claims that creation was a special work of God. Furthermore, the Bible claims that the laws that govern the world were originally made by God and did not have a natural origin. Lastly, the Bible records many miraculous events that cannot be explained by natural laws alone. What does the honest enquirer do with these? Do we simply say "impossible" and therefore ignore them, or do we check our presuppositions at the door and ask "what if"?

The idea of personal presuppositions guiding ones interpretation and affecting objectivity is not a new idea. Naturalism is one of the foundation principles of modern science and medicine. No one can deny the reality, insights and benefits that this approach has produced. Old superstitions have been abandoned and the consistency of natural laws have been recognized. But where did these natural laws come from? Is God bound by natural laws? In seeking to find God is it fair and reasonable to limit the search to the natural world? Is it fair to measure and filter all witness statements by this naturalistic standard?

Some scientists are re-thinking naturalistic assumptions. "A few legitimate scientists are experiencing a bothersome suspicion that the apparent fine tuning for life exhibited by the cosmos is just a little too exquisite to attribute to blind coincidence. A number of philosophers of science now suspect that the conceptions of science underlying prohibitions on supernatural design are conceptually inadequate, and that making such prohibitions stand up may require work which no one at present knows how to do."<sup>13</sup>

#### vi. **Materialism and the Naturalistic Bias.**

**Naturalistic Bias.** Naturalists and atheists, while claiming to be rationalists, are often unable to embrace objectivity in this area. They begin their investigation as naturalists with the presupposition that nothing exists beyond natural laws, forces, and material objects. Can one really ask the question - "**Does God exist?**" and seek for a reasonable answer after having first excluded the possibility of anything supernatural? In other words, according to naturalism, unless God is part of the material universe he is automatically excluded as a possibility. A naturalistic approach to finding God will inevitably end up employing circular reasoning. It is no wonder that they cannot find God because they begin with naturalism in the premise. Their mind is already made up ... and they will filter all information to suit their assumption.

This is an important observation. When we read the first chapter of Genesis the first thing that should strike us is that God is presented as existing before the creation. Therefore, God is greater than the creation itself and cannot be measured or contained by it. This concept of God was well known by the ancients and is often mentioned in the Bible (1.Kg.8:27, Isaiah.40:22, Psalm.90:2), which makes Genesis a wonderfully appropriate place for God to begin our education.

Perhaps this same idea was also behind the prohibition against idolatry under the Law, where Moses reminded Israel that they "saw no similitude, only ye heard a voice" and again "Take ye therefore good heed unto yourselves; for ye saw no manner of similitude on the day that the LORD spake unto you in Horeb out of the midst of the fire" (Deut.4:12, 15). Humanity struggles to grasp this lesson, and has constantly "changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things" (Rom.1:23). This limited naturalistic perspective has corrupted man's thinking, so that he has repeatedly "changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen" (Rom.1:25).

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<sup>13</sup> Del Ratzsch, "Nature, Design and Science: The Status of Design in Natural Science" (2001). Introduction, Page ix. Link to the book is [here](#).

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**Presuppositions.** We all have opinions that affect how we think and look at the world. Anyone who tells you that they are completely objective and devoid of presuppositions has another more important problem: **they are either very naïve, totally deceived or lying.** The question is not whether or not we have ideas, opinions or pre-existing points of view; the question is whether or not we will allow these perspectives to prevent us from examining the evidence objectively.

It is possible to have a prior opinion yet leave this presupposition at the door in order to examine the evidence fairly. A good detective must do this when he investigates a crime scene. In the same way, a court asks jurors to do this all the time. The courts assume that people have biases, hold sympathies and prejudices, and are aware of public opinion. Yet jurors are asked to keep an open mind.

If God exists, and he is the creator of everything we see in the world and the universe, including life, time and space - then his works would not be bound by natural laws. If a person wants to learn about God they must, at the very least, be prepared to lay aside their presuppositions about the miraculous. This does not mean that we can now rush to supernatural explanations every time we fail to find some natural explanation. **It simply means that we must be prepared to follow the evidence wherever it leads, even if it points to the existence of a supernatural creator who has in the past worked outside of the laws of nature and who has revealed his ways in the Bible.**

**Science and Facts.** Many often fail to differentiate between science (the systematic, rational examination of phenomena) and naturalism (the refusal to consider anything other than natural causes). Many do not appreciate the powerful affect that this philosophical position has upon the mind and how it can colour our thinking and reasoning, and thereby how it affects the way we interpret evidence.

Likewise, we must not jump to supernatural explanations when natural causes are supported evidentially. Not all of God's activity is overtly miraculous. This is another of the great truths found in the Bible. Not only is God shown to be greater than his creation, he has also made the world to operate by laws that he established in the beginning (Jer.33:25 & Gen.1:1). In other words, God can work either directly by supernatural methods or he can work more subtly by proximate causes. Also, events may simply be the product of time and chance. It is important to understand this, as it explains why good and evil happens in ways that often seem indiscriminate and unfair to us (Eccl.9:11, Luke.13:1-5). However, God may also still be at work even by proximate causes if and when they are working towards his predetermined purpose (Psalm.148:8, Ezek.13:13). Great care is therefore needed when we think about the subject of causation.

**Occam's razor and The Law of Parsimony.** To infer means to deduce or conclude something from evidence and reasoning rather than from explicit statements. In logic, inference refers to the process of collecting data from numerous sources and then drawing conclusions on the basis of this evidence. In legal terms, an inference is sometimes defined as a deduction of fact that may logically and reasonably be drawn from another fact or group of facts found or otherwise established.

As noted earlier, all investigators employ a methodology known as abductive reasoning in order to determine what caused a particular outcome. They collect all the evidence and facts, from which they develop possible explanations that might account for a situation. **The most reasonable explanation is then selected.** Scientists do the same. Scientists use what is called "Occam's Razor", which is a methodology that seeks for the simplest explanation. This approach is called in Latin "lex parsimoniae," which means "law of parsimony." This is a problem-solving method which is interpreted as – **"Among competing hypothesis, the one with the fewest assumptions should be selected."** Anyone who has read peer reviewed scientific papers will recognize this terminology, as it is often added to the concluding summary.



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**Naturalism**<sup>14</sup>. This is where things get complicated. Investigators and scientists automatically discount the supernatural as they formulate their explanations for any particular phenomenon. This means, that even though they claim to apply the law of parsimony, they automatically exclude the supernatural. This is not normally a problem, but it becomes an issue when we are seeking to determine original causes. This is where philosophical constraints step in, particularly in the field of evolutionary biology.

We know that this is the case, as biologist Scott Todd said, **“Even if all the data point to an intelligent designer, such an hypothesis is excluded from science because it is not naturalistic.”**<sup>15</sup>

Again, as Evolutionary biologist Richard Lewontin said, “It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation of the phenomenal world, but, on the contrary, that **we are forced by our a priori adherence to material causes to create an apparatus of investigation and a set of concepts that produce material explanations**, no matter how counter-intuitive, no matter how mystifying to the uninitiated. **Moreover, that materialism is absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door.**”<sup>16</sup>

Philosopher, Daniel Dennett fairly sums up the situation this way, “Scientists sometimes deceive themselves into thinking that philosophical ideas are only, at best, decorations or parasitic commentaries on the hard, objective triumphs of science, and that they themselves are immune to the confusions that philosophers devote their lives to dissolving. **But there is no such thing as philosophy-free science; there is only science whose philosophical baggage is taken on board without examination.**”<sup>17</sup>

There is nothing wrong with this general scientific methodology EXCEPT that we cannot use this approach to measure or investigate God or the original works of God. To find God we must firstly be prepared to leave our naturalistic presuppositions at the door if we are to be truly objective.

#### vii. **Discerning between the Physical and the Metaphysical.**

The naturalistic presuppositions of scientists and modern thinkers are regularly declared. It definitely affects their world view, and their resistance to consider anything else besides the material universe. This was clearly articulated by one of contemporary science’s most popular writers, Carl Sagan, who said it this way: **“The cosmos is all there is or ever was or ever will be.”**<sup>18</sup>

Sagan voiced the opinion of many scientists and modern thinkers who believe that naturalism is the only way that scientific investigation has been done since before the time of the Scientific Revolution. The first rule of naturalism is to take a reasonable and philosophically neutral approach to an investigation, and then seeks to take the phenomena on their own terms to understand them as they actually are. This idea of “on

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<sup>14</sup> Naturalism. In general the view that everything is natural, i.e. that everything there is belongs to the world of nature, and so can be studied by the methods appropriate for studying that world, and the apparent exceptions can be somehow explained away. ... In metaphysics naturalism is perhaps most obviously akin to materialism, but it does not have to be materialistic. What it insists on is that the world of nature should form a single sphere without incursions from outside by souls or spirits, divine or human, and without having to accommodate strange entities like non-natural values or substantive abstract universals." (Lacey A., in Honderich T., ed., The Oxford Companion to Philosophy, Oxford University Press: Oxford UK, 1995, p.604) – **“Primer: Naturalism in Science”** located [here](#). Naturalism, as defined by Paul Draper, is; “the hypothesis that the natural world is a closed system, which means that nothing that is not a part of the natural world affects it.” Thus, “naturalism implies that there are no supernatural entities” – including God. – Paul Draper. "Natural Selection and the Problem of Evil (2007)

<sup>15</sup> Todd, Scott C., "A View from Kansas on the Evolution Debates," Nature (vol. 401. September 30, 1999), p. 423.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Lewontin, “Billions and billions of demons”, The New York Review, p. 31, 9 January 1997 (review of Carl Sagan's The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark).

<sup>17</sup> “Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meaning of Life” Pg.21. By Daniel C. Dennett, 1995.

<sup>18</sup> Sagan, C., Cosmos, p. 4, 1980. Link to the quote is [here](#).

Faith is not the opposite of reason.

their own terms” is interpreted by many scientists to mean that phenomena are to be understood and explained solely via material or physical causes, come what may, which categorically excludes causation by intelligent agency. The fatal defect of this approach is not hard to find. If researchers refuse, as a matter of principle, to consider anything outside of material existence then they will obviously miss any evidence that happens to support a metaphysical reality. One cannot fairly evaluate the available evidence to find God if all things supernatural have been ruled out by a prior position.

Contrary to the common assumptions about the origins of the scientific method, in an earlier time, when materialism was not all pervasive, one of the founders of modern science, Isaac Newton, expressed his understanding this way. **“He who thinks half-heartedly will not believe in God; but he who really thinks has to believe in God.”**<sup>19</sup> And again, “Blind metaphysical necessity, which is certainly the same always and every where, could produce no variety of things. **All that diversity of natural things which we find suited to different times and places could arise from nothing but the ideas and will of a Being, necessarily existing.**” In other words, nothing comes from nothing<sup>20</sup>. The complexity we see everywhere testifies to a first cause that existed before the material universe. He, and other founders of the scientific method, believed that this was a self-evident fact. They were not limited by materialistic philosophy.

Science is first and foremost a methodology for discovering accurate information about our world and the universe. It is not meant to be a philosophy in competition with other philosophies. As we have shown, science is limited by its methodology to perceiving and explaining physical things and systems. By any reasonable definition we can conclude that it is not possible to use the physical to define or explain the metaphysical. Again, by any reasonable definition, God is greater than and precedes his creation. From a physical perspective, we are not capable of seeing BEFORE the beginning or even fully understanding how the laws that govern the universe and the world came to be. In this context, the scientific method is only useful at looking at what exists but it is not able to give certain knowledge of how such things came to be.

As Solomon implies, no one can discover all the ways and works of God by looking only at the physical world, for God is greater than his creation. That type of knowledge only comes from revelation.

**Ecc1.8:17. Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: because though a man labour to seek it out, yet he shall not find it; yea further; though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it.**

**Psalm.66:5-6. Come and see the works of God:** he is terrible in his doing toward the children of men. **He turned the sea into dry land: they went through the flood on foot:** there did we rejoice in him.

**Metaphysics.** Metaphysics is a traditional branch of philosophy concerned with explaining the fundamental nature of being and the world that encompasses it, although the term is not easily defined. The word metaphysics means beyond, upon or after the physical, and refers to the domain of God whom we cannot define in material terms. In our context of looking for God, metaphysics must be compared and contrasted to the physical world. From this we can infer that God cannot be discovered in the natural world unless we view the world as the product of his purposeful work. Yet, even when we accept this, it will not tell us how things came to be as they are and for what purpose they were made.

**The need for revelation.** It is therefore reasonable to conclude that by observing the natural world we will always have limited understanding – for our perceptions are naturally limited as a consequence of our physical existence. All our primary senses are geared for existence and survival in this physical world. However, as humans we have a unique mental capacity to rise above our instinctive natural perspective to

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<sup>19</sup> Isaac Newton, The Principia: Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy. Link to quotes [here](#). Newton uses the term Metaphysics to describe what is above and beyond the physical world – i.e. which refers to first causes, God.

<sup>20</sup> “A Simple Refutation of the "Universe from Nothing" Kirk Durston, EN&V article, Aug.29, 2016. Link is [here](#).

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think and see on a higher plane. Yet, just as an observer may see a complex item and yet know little about its maker, so we may discern the work of intelligent design in creation but yet know nothing about the maker – including his world-view, intentions or why things are as they are.

We may therefore also logically conclude that this limitation is designed to prompt us to seek for revelation from God, because unless God reveals himself then we will simply speculate upon what is beyond our field of natural perception. Also, it is not reasonable to suggest that the physical is able to verify, establish or interpret the meta-physical. There is therefore a logical necessity for revelation.

### 3. What is Bible based Faith?

Before we look closer at faith it is important that we firstly distinguish between the Bible's definition of faith and what society generally says about it, as the two are not the same. A popular definition is that rationality is based upon reason or facts, while faith is based upon a belief in God or the Bible which is held without reason or evidence. The common assumption is that faith is totally blind and therefore the opposite of what is reasonable and rational. This is sometimes called "**fideism**" which generally means that knowledge exclusively depends upon faith or revelation without sound evidence. Although this definition may be true for many religions, it is not the Bible's definition of faith. Bible based faith is not blind, it is based upon evidence.

#### i. Faith Defined in the Bible

**There are reasons to believe.** The original Bible word for faith is derived from ideas which mean "belief or to believe", and it generally involves the idea of a person being persuaded by the evidence and thereby convicted to believe in something or someone. The reasons to believe may be established by either direct or indirect evidence. Also, faith often involves believing in something not seen, including a past or future event. This does not make faith blind. But it does make faith the product of important information that brings about personal conviction. In other words, **there are reasons to believe.**

**Faith is based upon believing God.** In the Bible Abraham is presented as an important example of someone who lived and was justified by faith. For this reason he is called the "father of them that believe" (Rom.4:11-12). So what does the Bible say about Abraham's faith? It says that when he and his wife (Sarah) were very old, God made a promise to them that they would have a son and through him a multitude would come. According to natural laws, the promise of God seemed impossible for they were both very old, and Sarah was no longer of a child bearing age. Yet we find it recorded of him; "**And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.** And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. **Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead;**" (Rom.4:19-24).

This reference holds important information. It tells us that Abraham was persuaded by his understanding of who God is – i.e. his unlimited power, and this caused him to trust and believe God. Therefore, when God promised what seemed naturally impossible because of their physical circumstances, Abraham was able to see beyond the obvious natural limitations and believe God's promise. **So here, we find that faith came from knowing God, believing his word and being convicted that God would do what he had promised.** Now it is important to recall that this promise was made many years after God had first revealed himself to

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Abraham. In other words, Abraham had grown in his knowledge and understanding of God. This spiritual growth had fortified his trust in God. His example is recorded for us because the basis of our justification is the same. Likewise the maturing of his faith is also recorded as an example of how faith works.

**God persuades us.** Faith operates when we are persuaded or convinced about the unseen works of God, which in turn is based upon the knowledge of God which comes from revelation. We see some of this in Heb.11:1-3. (ESV) **“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.** For by it the people of old received their commendation. By faith we understand that the universe (αἰῶνας = ages) was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.”

This reference is important as Biblical faith is both forward and rear looking, because both of these are realms that we cannot now observe and have limited understanding of. What this tells us is that faith allows us to see time in the same way that God sees it, both looking forward and backwards. God is both outside of time and space ... as both of these are created entities.

**Faith comes from believing the word of God.** There are many examples of faith mentioned in the Bible. When we examine each of these we find that they all have one thing in common. **They all revolve around believing in God AND in what God has said.** Both of these elements are essential to faith. Although at times there may often be different circumstances, reasons or evidences that helped some to believe, it is important to remember that these evidences always pointed to one essential factor. Paul expresses it this way in Rom.10:17 **“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”** What this means is that all other forms of evidence were simply signposts to direct people back to the revealed word of God.

We can see this point in 1.Thes.2:13 where Paul expresses the importance of the message this way: “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received **the word of God which ye heard of us,** ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, **the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.**” Here we again find that “the word of God” preached by Paul is described as working powerfully in the lives of believers. We see here the adequacy of the word preached to create faith. He says that it has the power to change our lives if we will receive it. This idea is closely bound up with the principles of repentance, a word that first of all means a change of mind. For God is trying to change our minds so that we think, see and understand the world as he sees it. This is why revelation is so important, otherwise we would simply have a world-view and life philosophy based upon human wisdom, which has a very limited perspective.

Therefore, we can confidently say that **Bible based faith has always been the same,** whether it existed before the time of Jesus or afterwards. All that has changed over time is the amount of information revealed by God. In all generations, faith itself has remained the same - **for faith always revolves around believing 1) in God, and 2) in what God has said.** Ultimately the question always comes back to the only true source of knowledge, which we are repeated told **is based upon believing the word of God.**

### ii. **Examples of Faith in the Bible**

The Bible provides many examples of faithful people as well as examples of people who would not believe. To help us understand how faith operates, it is important to closely assess these examples, as some are more applicable to our circumstances and some less so. When we read the Bible we are naturally drawn to the more dramatic examples of faith rather than to the less obvious ones. However, by doing this we can wrongly conclude that faith is always associated with some spectacular sign or wonder. To conclude this would be a mistake and one we should avoid. It is noteworthy that Abraham, who we have already considered, saw no great signs or wonders. He was persuaded by the word of God.

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What we find is that when miraculous events occurred it was often at a turning point in history. The miraculous events themselves were used to endorse the words spoken and to achieve a specific goal in changing the minds of people. We will examine some of these events now. Later, we will examine the less dramatic examples which may be more applicable to our own circumstances. We also note that both Jesus and Paul chastised the Jews for requiring signs - John.4:48 & 1.Cor.1:22? And furthermore, Jesus says blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed (John.20:29). We will see that faith is established, developed and matured – not by dramatic or miraculous signs and wonders, but by being persuaded to the truths of God.

### Examples where great signs were done.

We will only look at a few of these.

**Israel at the Exodus and Mt Sinai.** God revealed himself in an unprecedented manifestation of signs and wonders to the generation of Israel that came out of Egypt under Moses. Among other things, they witnessed the ten plagues upon Egypt, the Passover deliverance, the parting of the Red Sea, the manna in the wilderness, and the voice of God from Mount Sinai. All of these miraculous signs were to persuade them that God was really with them, and that he had delivered them according to his word and would bring them into the land of promise. They were given evidence in abundance and had plenty of reasons to believe God. They would need this depth of faith to do all that God had determined to do with them.

Of this time it is recalled that “Marvellous things did he in the sight of their fathers, in the land of Egypt” Psalm.78:12. The Psalmist speaks of this generation in very unflattering terms, warning his people not to be like those Israelites who came out of Egypt with Moses. Psalm.97:8-10 **“Harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my work. Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their heart, and they have not known my ways.”**

Psalm.103:6-7. **“The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed. He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel.”**

These two Psalms speak to the heart of their problem. They never came to know and understand the **“ways”** of God. They only every saw his acts. They refused to connect the works of God with the purpose of God. Their faith never matured or developed, and they therefore didn’t come to know God or his ways.

That whole generation rejected and turned their back upon God on more than one occasion. They resisted his words and would not trust him to bring them into the land. The writer to the Hebrews sums up their situation this way. Heb.3:9, 16-19 **“When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years.”** and **“For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses. But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.”**

This generation were repeatedly given miraculous signs as evidence to believe. Yet, they would not believe. Their problem is labelled as unbelief, the very opposite of faith. Why couldn’t they believe? It was not for lack of evidence, but because they hardened their heart against God and resisted the evidence that was in their plain sight (Heb.3:8, 12). He further adds in Heb.4:2 **“For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.”**

This tells us that the issues for them, like us, are about believing the gospel. The evidence of miracles and signs were of no value by themselves if the heart and mind is unaffected by the positive message of the gospel. One would naturally think that the two ideas are always connected, but history tells us that this not

so. Minds are rarely changed voluntarily by miraculous signs and wonders alone. The truth of God is mostly in the power of the ideas and concepts in the gospel message itself ... which are contrary to natural thinking. This type of faith depends upon a firm trust in the supernatural creator God and his revealed word. Such knowledge is foreign to us, for mankind has a natural tendency to resist change.

**Israel in the days of Jesus' ministry.** Jesus' ministry lasted about 3 ½ years and during that time he preached the gospel message to the Jews in the land. He did many miracles which confirmed that God was with him (John.3:2, 6:2, 7:31, 9:16, 20:30, Acts.2:22). He called upon them to believe him, for "The works that I do in my Father's name, they bear witness of me." (John.10:25). At one stage Jesus even said to the Jews that they should "... **believe me for the very works' sake.**" (John.14:11, John.5:35, 10:25). But the miracles themselves were not sufficient to persuade them, because their thinking was already blinded to his teaching (John.12:39-40). So we read; "But though he had done so many miracles before them, yet they believed not on him" (John.12:48). The miracles rather moved them to seek his death (John.11:47-50).

Jesus chastised this fickle generation when he said to them; "Except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe" John.4:48. Even though they had seen plenty of miracles they still would not believe. Jesus implies that even Sodom would have repented if they had seen the miracles that these Jews had seen (Matt.11:23). This reminds us of the power of beliefs, even wrong beliefs, and how they can blind us to the truth even if miraculous signs and wonders are plentiful. The multiplication of evidence was not sufficient to change this people's beliefs.

There is something quite telling in Jesus's words. He says - "If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead" (Luke.16:31). Again he says - "For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me" (John.5:41). By grasping this we begin to approach the core of their problem. Although they professed to honour Moses, yet they did not understand or believe what Moses wrote. They had replaced Moses' teachings with their own innovations, which he calls "**the commandments of men**" (Matt.15:7-9). From this we can conclude that preconceived ideas and concepts are sometimes more powerful than strong evidence. Therefore, ideas and beliefs are very powerful things. They can both enlighten us and they can blind us. We can also infer from Jesus' words that belief-faith is based upon revelation ... in this context it was God's revelation through Moses. If they didn't believe what Moses had said, then they could not believe what Jesus said.

**Thomas.** The Apostle Thomas is often called doubting Thomas because he did not at first believe that Jesus had been resurrected from the dead. The record of John.20:24-29 goes like this. Jesus was raised from the dead by God and appeared to individual disciples then finally to the larger assembly of disciples. They were at first afraid, but later rejoiced in full recognition of him as alive and in the knowledge of what his resurrection meant. Thomas had not been present when this occurred, and so; "The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, **Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe**" (John.20:25). What Thomas wanted was the type of direct evidence that comes from first-hand experience. However, Thomas should have known about Jesus' resurrection beforehand, for the Prophets had foretold it and Jesus himself had spoken about it (Matt.20:19, Mark.8:31, 10:34, Luke.18:31-34, 24:25-27, John.20:9, Acts.2:30-32). Furthermore, he should have believed the testimony of his fellow disciples.

Thomas' opportunity came some 8 days later when the disciples were again assembled, and Thomas was with them. On this occasion Jesus "stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: **and be not faithless, but believing**" (John.20:26-27). There was now no reason for Thomas to doubt, all doubts had vanished. Here was first hand tangible evidence that Jesus was indeed alive again. This is the strongest type of evidential faith that any single person can experience.

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However, what use is this type of faith going to be for those who did not know Jesus in the flesh and who would not have the same opportunities as his closest disciples and even as Thomas himself. It is for this reason that Jesus adds the following words. “Jesus saith unto him, **Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed**” (John20:29).

Jesus is not speaking about blind irrational faith, but rather a faith that is not based upon seeing with one’s own eyes through first-hand experience. We are familiar with this principle, as there are many things that we believe to be true and yet have not seen or witnessed them first-hand. We believe them because we are persuaded by indirect evidence. This is what Jesus is talking about and this is what we will look at in this essay. Jesus pronounces a blessing upon those who will believe the testimony of his resurrection, even when they have not seen it first-hand. Why? Because this type of faith takes more effort to establish.

**The Conversion of Paul.** When we think of Paul before his conversion, we see his zeal against the early believers – both persecuting and imprisoning them (Acts.9:1-2, 26:11, Phil.3:6). Yet Paul, on the road to Damascus, was stopped dead in his tracks and turned from being a persecutor to a preacher of Christ. But his conversion was not gentle - it was only after Christ appeared to him in the way (Acts.9:3-6, 26:12-17). Paul sometimes used this experience as part of his “evidence” to persuade others of the origin and truth of the gospel he preached and of his unique Apostleship (Acts.22:7-11, 26-11-23, Gal.1:15). Yet those who heard Paul were not present when he had this experience. They could only hear and weigh the evidence of his testimony. They had to decide whether his testimony was believable or not? When recalling Paul’s experience, we should see him as unique. Jesus calls him a “chosen vessel” and invested him with the enormous responsibility of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts.9:15, Rom.11:13, 2.Tim.1:11). He suffered much bearing witness to the truth of God (Acts.9:16, 2.Cor.11:22-33).

### **Examples where few if any great signs were done.**

As we noted earlier, we are naturally drawn to the examples of faith at the great turning points in history. At these times God gave many great signs and wonders to endorse the messengers he sent and to confirm the words that were spoken, so that people would be in no doubt that what was being said really was the word of God. Apart from these great times, the Bible records many examples of people being persuaded to the truth of God by less dramatic forms of evidence. However, we will show that their belief was not without evidence to persuade. But the evidence was much subtler and often the result of cumulative indirect / circumstantial evidence. **However, as we noted earlier, the type of faith generated was the same and the primary creator of their faith was similarly based upon a belief in the word of God.**

We also need to recognise that the Bible’s examples of faith did not always result in immediate victory over dire circumstances or in supernatural deliverance. In the following section of scripture we can see examples of those who overcame, yet some of these were victorious in life and others perished not willing to compromise their faith. It is important to appreciate the whole range of examples provided and to recognise that **the common factor here is their trust in God and their future hope in the resurrection to come.** In other words, they remained faithful irrespective of the circumstances they found themselves in.

Heb.11:32-40. And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: **Who through faith** subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; **that they might obtain a better resurrection:** And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and

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in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. (Of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. **And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.**

There is no doubt that the examples of faith recorded here is the result of strong convictions that are dependent upon the reliability of God, a trust in his word and the certainty of resurrection to come. In other words, they had all learnt to trust in God, come what may. As we noted earlier, in the final analysis faith only comes from hearing the word of God. The people in each of these examples heard and believed what had been revealed, and thereafter were persuaded to trust in God and in the fulfilment of his promises. Let's now look more closely at some specific cases.

**Joseph.** Joseph stands out in the OT record as a man of exceptional perseverance and faith. What gave Joseph the faith he needed to endure years of mistreatment and contrary circumstances? Was it the dreams he had or the word of promise that he had received from his fathers? Most likely it was a combination of these things. From the promises made to Abraham in Gen.15 he knew that Israel had to dwell in a foreign land for many years. He came to understand that his own captivity in Egypt was related to this prophecy which he alludes to in Gen.45:7 and speaks directly of in Gen.50:24-25. He also knew, from the dreams that he had that God would exalt him and that his family would bow down to him (Gen.37:10).

This must have been the source of his faithful endurance, even in dire times. We know this was the case, for we are told in - Heb.11:22 "By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones." This record is referring to Joseph's actions before his death and is telling us that he understood and believed God's promise to Abraham which was made many years before (Gen.15:13-16). Therefore, Joseph gave instructions concerning his own bones and spoke of the future exodus of Israel out of Egypt into the promised-land. **His instructions were an expression of his faith, and his faith was in God's word.** His own bones would be a memorial and a witness to those who came after, that God's word is trustworthy and always comes to pass.

**Moses.** Moses is marked out as the spiritual leader of Israel, their great lawgiver. In the Jewish estimation of things, Moses was of the highest rank. The writer to the Hebrews refers to Moses' faith this way. Heb.11:24 "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward. **By faith he forsook Egypt,** not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible."

When we think about Moses, most of us focus upon the events surrounding his dealings with Pharaoh, the Exodus from Egypt and the dramatic events of Mt Sinai. Yet here in Heb.11, the focus is upon the events that occurred 40 years before. Here the writer recalls the conscious and purposeful choice that Moses made to identify with his own downtrodden people, in defiance of Pharaoh. He put in jeopardy his Egyptian privileges and all that he was entitled to as the (adopted) son of Pharaoh's daughter. We ask, what motivated him to make this choice? This is hundreds of years after Joseph and Abraham. There are no miraculous signs or wonders mentioned at this time. His trust was in the promises made to Abraham in Gen.15:13-16, which were testified to by Joseph and evidenced by his coffin. He also had the prophesied reality of Israel's current captivity in Egypt. The simple answer seems to be that he was persuaded by the evidence of their captivity, of the promises made and of the nearness of the day of their deliverance. All of these things combined to create faith in him, a faith that moved him to make a stand for Israel that cost him his own ease and comfort. **Faith is here again based upon believing the word of God.**



**The fall of Jericho and the faith of Rahab.** We read about fall of Jericho and the deliverance of Rahab in Heb.11:30-31. “**By faith** the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days. **By faith** the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.” This section of scripture is commenting upon the record found in Joshua chapter six. In Vv2-5, we are told that the LORD gave precise instructions on how Jericho was to be conquered. Israel were to follow God’s instructions precisely, and then the walls would fall down and they would conquer the city. God would give them the victory. Here we have a model of how faith works. It begins with hearing, understanding and following the word of God. This aligns with what we have already concluded. There were no signs given immediately beforehand as evidence that the words were true ... but in their recent history they certainly had plenty of reasons to believe and trust in God.

**Rahab.** Let’s now look specifically at the example of Rahab. Rahab was one of the inhabitants of Jericho. She received the Israelite spies who entered into Jericho, and she hid them from the authorities to save their lives. She then helped them escape and return back to Joshua. Heb.11:31 says that it was by faith that she did not perish with the rest of the inhabitants of Jericho. What motivated her to - 1) receive the spies, 2) hide them, and 3) help them escape? The answer to these questions is in her words recorded in Josh.2:9-13. From the record it is obvious that she firstly recognised the spies as Israelites, and secondly, she made a conscious decision to help them and save their lives.

Furthermore, we know from her words that she had a surprisingly thorough knowledge of Israel’s history and of the promises of God. In her own words she recalled the promise of the land, Israel’s deliverance from Egypt, the crossing of the Red Sea some 40 years before, and of their recent victories against the two kings of the Amorites. From the way she recalls history, it would appear that this information was widely known. What was different with her was that she had heard and seen enough to be persuaded of the truth of these matters, and therefore she further confessed her belief in the LORD as the God of heaven and earth. In these words we have a record of her reasons for believing. We note that she had received all this information from second hand sources and had put the pieces together. In other words, her faith depended upon an accumulation of indirect evidence. **What we will find is that this is the normal way that people are persuaded and convinced to hear the word, which leads to faith.**

### **In Summary.**

Let us emphasise some of the points we have made. The examples of faith in the Bible, that we have examined, were always supported by evidence. Sometimes the evidence was plain and dramatic, but most times it was more subtle and indirect. Nevertheless, faith in all instances was not blind or based upon ignorance or superstition. Although evidence may have taken many different forms ... **there is only one type of faith that the scriptures speak about. Moreover, that one type of faith only comes from hearing and believing the word of God.**

#### **4. Evidence that leads to Faith.**

There are two main objectives that every person is challenged with when they search for God. These are basically summarized in following questions –

- 1) Does God exist?
- 2) How can we come to know God?

History shows us that many different religions and philosophies have emerged, many claiming to have special insights that answer these two questions. However it remains self-evident, that if we are to find God who is greater than his creation, then it cannot be via the subjective life experiences of creatures limited by the physical world. This subjective approach would inevitably lead to a multitude of opinions and philosophies, even as we find in the world. This brings us to the essential need for special revelation.

##### **i. The Need for Special Revelation.**

We are suggesting that beings like ourselves are limited in what we can understand and perceive by the constraints of our physical condition and situation. We are not capable of seeing beyond the physical realm in which we exist. If we are to know and find God, who is greater than what we can perceive with our senses, then it is reasonable to conclude that this is only possible if God reveals himself. In other words, there must be divine revelation to communicate the will and purpose of God, otherwise we will forever be stuck in the loop of subjective speculations.

In this light, there is no doubt that most religions and religious traditions came from men speculating and not from revelation. In like manner, philosophers and wise men have sought to find God through the exercise of rational thinking yet have ended up with conflicting ideas. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that if God is to be known, he can only be known by special revelation. This is what makes the Bible unique. As we have already shown, it repeatedly claims to contain the record of God's special revelation to mankind. As we should expect, it speaks about the past, the present and the future. It also reveals God's unique character and his purpose with mankind, as well as his ultimate goals.

Importantly, it is by standing back and looking at the bigger picture that we can appreciate the major themes of the first chapter of Genesis. Here we find God introduced as the creator of all and therefore greater than the creation. God is further revealed as the one who established the Laws by which this creation operates. Finally, God reveals himself as the one who uniquely created mankind and endowed him with intelligence and a capacity that is superior to all other creatures. We find this recorded in Gen.1:26-28.

Mankind were uniquely made with a capacity to rise above their natural environment and that of the animals. They were given the capacity to think, understand and see like God himself. Gen.1:27, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." No other creature has this unique capacity to think and act beyond his instinctive responses – to be conscious and self-aware. This is a gift from God provided to us so that we might be God's children, with the goal that we be - "renewed in knowledge after the image of him (God) that created him (Col.3:10). This is to be the unique quality of character that marks out all God's Sons (John.1:12, Rom.8:14, **Phil.2:12-15, 1.Jn.3:1-3**).

ii. **Evidence to believe – general overview.**

As the things spoken of in the Bible happened a long time ago, it is clear that today we must establish the veracity of the record by indirect methods using the evidence available. We cannot question live witnesses or travel back in time to observe the things recorded. They happened long ago, so we are left with the evidence of the record set within its historical framework. In the rest of this chapter we will briefly list some of the main evidences that are used to support belief, then in the next chapter we will look closely at the book of Acts and see why those who heard the Apostles' message were persuaded to believe it.

The following summary highlights, in general terms, the way many seek to establish the veracity of the Bible's teachings. This approach basically works by the accumulation of various lines of evidence. We will not be exploring many of these as most Bible students will be reasonably familiar with this approach. The books - "Evidence That Demands a Verdict,"<sup>21</sup> the "Cold Case Christianity"<sup>22</sup> series, "The Case for a Creator"<sup>23</sup> and "Who Moved the Stone"<sup>24</sup> all present variations of this rationale and a reasonable overview of the common arguments. The general rationale presented by the Bible appeals to the -

- Witness of the natural creation
- Witness of the historical record
- Witness that Archaeology has uncovered
- Witness of fulfilled Prophecy – e.g. Israel
- Witness of the consistency of the message
- Witness of Christ's resurrection from the dead
- Witness of the power of the word to change us
- Witness of the power of the Apostles' testimony

As noted earlier, most evidence based rationales revolve around two primary themes and objectives that set out to establish; 1) The Existence, identity and person of God, and 2) The Truthfulness of the Bible's claim to contain "the word of God" – through which we may come to know God.

Most of us will be aware that the Bible generally treats these two subjects as one. God is inseparable from his spoken word, and his word contains his revealed truth.

Psalm.138:2. "I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and **for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.**"

1.Sam.3:21. "And the LORD appeared again in Shiloh: **for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the LORD.**"

John.17:17. "**Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.**"

**The word of God claims to reveal the mind and purpose of God, which is designed to affect us so that we come to know God in a very personal way.** We are quite familiar with the idea of people building a relationship with someone who they come to know and trust. Relationships are also possible with people whom we have not personally met. This often works when we correspond and exchange information and ideas at a distance. God often operates in a similar way.

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<sup>21</sup> Evidence That Demands a Verdict – Josh McDowell

<sup>22</sup> Cold Case Christianity: A Homicide Detective Investigates the Claims of the Gospels – J. Warner Wallace

<sup>23</sup> The Case for a Creator – Lee Strobel. Link to a free PDF of the book is [here](#), a Youtube video link is [here](#).

<sup>24</sup> Who Moved the Stone - Frank Morison

iii. **The Teleological arguments – a basic overview.**

**The teleological argument**<sup>25</sup>, also known as the argument from design or the intelligent design argument, is an argument for the existence of God or, more generally, for an intelligent creator based on perceived evidence of deliberate design in the natural or physical world.

Paul uses this argument in Rom.1:20, “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world **are clearly seen**, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; **so that they are without excuse.**”<sup>26</sup>

Again, we see it in Acts.14:15-17. “And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, **and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein:** Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. **Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness**”

Again the Psalmist speaks in similar terms when he says, “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork” (Psalm.19:1). Furthermore, as we should expect, the Bible declares the same thing in the very first verse of Genesis, when it says; “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” The record then goes on to describe God speaking and the creation coming into existence. On ten separate occasions Genesis chapter one records, “And God said ...” The Psalmist picks up this thought in Psalm.33:9, “For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast.”

The general teleological argument is an argument for a creator based upon the evidence of design. The word comes from the Greek τέλος, telos (root: τελε-, "end, purpose") and λογία, logia, "a branch of learning." In other words, God has not “signed his work using invisible ink” as some suggest, but as Paul contends “the invisible things of him from the creation of the world **are clearly seen.**”

According to this summary of scripture, the creation is said to –

- Clearly show God’s eternal power and Godhead (Rom.1:20).
- Declare the glory of God (Ps.19:1).
- Utter speech and reveal knowledge (Ps.19:2-3)
- Witness to God’s goodness (Acts.14:15-17).

What we observe in the design of nature and of all the works of God can be clearly seen by all and stands as evidence of God’s past works. This in turn raises the question - If design is apparent, who is the designer? There are 3 main hypothesis advanced by philosophers.

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<sup>25</sup> The link leads to a 30 minute Youtube video which examines the Cosmological and Teleological Arguments. “I believe in God - the Cosmological & Teleological Arguments examined!” Link is [here](#).

<sup>26</sup> **Humans have a predisposition to see design and purpose.** Quoting from the book by Doug Axe (2016) - “Undeniable: How Biology Confirms Our Intuition That Life Is Designed.” Quotation: “Berkeley psychology professor Alison Gopnik described the challenge this causes for teachers of evolution in a recent Wall Street Journal column. “By elementary-school age,” she wrote, “children start to invoke an ultimate God-like designer to explain the complexity of the world around them—even children brought up as atheists.” In fact, Deborah Kelemen, a psychology professor at Boston University, found that even highly trained scientists are unable to fully rid themselves of the innate impression that there is purpose underlying the living world. According to her, “Even though advanced scientific training can reduce acceptance of scientifically inaccurate teleological explanations, it cannot erase a tenacious early-emerging human tendency to find purpose in nature.” Whether her materialistic presupposition will stand up to scrutiny remains to be seen, but her observation clearly affirms the universality and power of this design intuition.” Quoted from the book by Doug Axe (2016) - “Undeniable: How Biology Confirms Our Intuition That Life Is Designed.” This book is available from Amazon.

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It is speculated that the design hypothesis can point to three possible causes –

1. The extra-terrestrial design hypothesis (advanced aliens seeded life on earth)
2. The natural or intrinsic teleological design hypothesis (design is just built into all nature)
3. The theistic design hypothesis (a God greater than and outside nature created life)

All believers are theists and generally advance versions of the teleological argument. They reason that complex specified function is always the product of purposeful design. In other words, the complexity we see in the world is the product of special design and is the way it is for a purpose, even if we do not know every purpose. Furthermore, Paul says that the current condition of the creation is far removed from its original condition, having now been made subject to futility. (Rom.8:20) “For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope;”

### **The two sides of the teleological argument.**

**Atheism - Materialism.** The basic philosophy behind atheism goes like this. Atheists argue that humans are naturally programmed to see patterns and infer purpose. In their rationale, this ability arose through the process of natural selection. Those who were able to perceive agency had a distinct survival advantage. So when primitive man saw grass moving, he could infer a predator was approaching. His ability to perceive agency or purpose allowed him to escape predators. Those who couldn't perceive agency were killed. Even erring on the side of caution would confer a survival advantage. This means that we have inherited an intuitive capacity to believe in agency and purpose which leaves us susceptible to belief in the unseen hand of the supernatural. In other words, we have natural bias to believe ... and to be superstitious. Our natural biases direct us to seek the security of mind that come from believing in supernatural agents.

**Theism – Special Design.** The arguments for theism are both complex and simple. As we are only speaking about Biblical Faith, we will limit our examination to this field only and not counter atheistic speculations. As to the proposition that man has a natural bias to believe in God, we would agree with this conclusion. However, we reason that this is the result of a created capacity from the hand of God, who made man to share certain characteristics that belong to God. Man was made in God's image and likeness as a conscious self-aware creature with the unique ability to rise above his instinctive responses (Gen.1:26-28). Any tendency to believe in God was built into his psyche from the beginning – which means that the tendency to believe is actually evidence for special design.

**Debate<sup>27</sup>.** There is an interesting discussion between a Christian-scientist and an atheist-philosopher on this subject. The Christian-scientist, who is a biologist, argues for design using the scientific method – which infers to the best explanation from multiple competing hypothesis. He argues that design is the most causally adequate explanation for biological life, for we know from experience that information comes from intelligent sources. He says that scientists confuse patterns with processes in nature, and therefore seek natural original causes for all phenomenon. He suggests that Intelligent Design is the most causally adequate explanation of biological information. (The information in the link below may be of interest.)

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<sup>27</sup> “Unbelievable? Is God the best explanation for apparent design in nature?” – Jonathan McLatchie & Cory Markum, Podcast - 24th October 2015 - 02:30 pm, located [here](#). The video titled “The Information Enigma” is well worth considering. It is located [here](#) & [here](#). An amusing satirical view of this subject is found [here](#).

iv. **The design inference.**<sup>28</sup>

The design inference is a derivative of the teleological argument. It describes how we use information to identify design even in day to day experiences - in the following general terms. Human beings correctly detect the activity of intelligence whenever they observe a highly improbable object or event that also matches a recognizable pattern. One can immediately think of the examples of man-made **objects** fitting this criteria. Objects, such as a tool, a book, an ancient inscription, a carving or a painting. There are also **events** that fit this criteria, such the perfect alignment of numerous happenings. Examples such as winning an improbable lottery a dozen times in a row or of someone constantly winning a coin toss or at a casino.

This is called recognizing “complex specified information” or CSI. When we recognize design we are also recognizing intelligent and intelligible information. **The object or event is telling us something – it has meaning. It is telling us that we are observing the work of intelligence.** When we apply the design inference to the natural world, and specifically to the information inherent in DNA code, we see the same concepts at work. There is no known natural cause that creates intelligent information. (i.e. the initial creation of information, not the replications via the laws of reproduction). Importantly, biological life operates by intelligent information, which we can logically infer originally had an intelligent origin.

**The formal design argument**<sup>29</sup> is framed by Dr. Stephen Meyer like this -

- **Premise One:** Despite a thorough search, no material causes have been discovered with the demonstrated capacity to produce the functional (or specified) information present in living systems.
- **Premise Two:** Intelligent causes have demonstrated the power to produce large amounts of functional (or specified) information.
- **Conclusion:** Intelligent design constitutes the best, most causally adequate, explanation for the functional (or specified) information in the cell.

**The origin of information**<sup>30</sup>. We know intuitively from experience that specified complex information only comes from other information and, ultimately, from an information-giver. With origins, this is particularly interesting, because before the first information is created there must have been a mind that created it. In this, the basic assumptions of materialistic thinking (a philosophy) are contrary to reason, as we know from experience that specified complex structures are made by minds. Yet materialism insists that originally minds were made by simpler unthinking materials. In this the assumptions of materialism are contrary to our everyday experiences, driven by philosophical assumptions and not reasonable.

v. **The Biological argument.**

**The biological argument**<sup>31</sup> is a derivative of the teleological and design arguments. It rests upon the principles established by Pasteur, who basically disproved spontaneous generation. The law of biogenesis, attributed to Louis Pasteur, is the observation that living things come only from other living things, that - **“life only comes from previous life.”**

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<sup>28</sup> The Design Inference, William Dembski. Link to the book available at Amazon is [here](#). A further link to Dembski’s article – “In Defense of Intelligent Design” – as a free PDF copy is [here](#). Another view of this subject is found at the following EN&V link, which looks closely at the importance of the Second Law of Thermodynamics - found [here](#). A further well-reasoned and recommended book is – **“Undeniable: How Biology Confirms Our Intuition that Life Is Designed”** by Doug Axe. The book is available from Amazon.

<sup>29</sup> “Debating Darwin’s Doubt” (Chp. 42) – Stephen Meyer.

<sup>30</sup> The documentary titled “Unlocking the Mystery of Life” is well worth watching. Link is [here](#). Also the Youtube documentary “Darwin’s Dilemma” – which focusses upon the Cambrian explosion. Link is [here](#).

<sup>31</sup> The three DVDs produced by ‘Illustra Media’ have spectacular graphics and are well worth consideration. These are – “Living Waters”, “Design of Life” and “Metamorphosis.”

## Evidence that leads to Faith.

Furthermore, it is now well known that all living things carry complex information in their genomes. These codes control all cellular functions. This information operates on multiple levels, and as Dr Jonathan Wells states - **there are currently 6 known forms of biological code**<sup>32</sup>. The discovery of complex information is one of the great scientific discoveries of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, there is no known process or mechanism that is able to create brand new information of the type necessary for macro evolution. There are known processes that shuffle, delete, duplicate, or mutate genetic information, but there is no process known that creates the brand-new information necessary for producing either life from no-life or the information needed to drive macro evolutionary change. Some argue that genetic mutations and gene duplication can create new information, but they don't. All they do is work on already existing information.

Moreover, biology is currently undergoing an information revolution<sup>33</sup>. In a 2010 Nature article, Erika Check Hayden remarked that the "more biologists look, the more complexity there seems to be."<sup>34</sup> Biochemist Jennifer Doudna, cited in the same article, added that it "seems like we're climbing a mountain that keeps getting higher and higher ... The more we know, the more we realize there is to know."

### vi. The Cosmic Circumstantial Case.<sup>35</sup>

The cosmological argument for the existence of God runs something like this -

- 1) Anything that begins to exist has a cause
- 2) The universe began to exist
- 3) Therefore the universe must have a cause
- 4) This cause must be eternal and uncaused
- 5) God is the most reasonable explanation for such an uncaused first cause.

This can be formally framed as follows –

- **Premise One:** The universe has a beginning.
- **Premise Two:** Everything that has a beginning has a cause.
- **Conclusion:** The universe has a cause.

**The finely tuned universe.**<sup>36</sup> The universe is now known to be very finely tuned. There are many physical laws that need to be perfectly balanced for the universe itself and for life to exist. There are many variations of this argument, and we will not explore them as this time. The links below leads to an article and to a Youtube presentation that expands on this rationale.

### vii. Israel is God's witness.

The existence of Israel as a people testified to God's work in the past. The nations' history stretched back to the time of Abraham, who lived around 2,000 BC. About 400 years later under the hand of Moses, God worked a set of miraculous events and delivered the people from Egyptian slavery. This event marked their

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<sup>32</sup> In the following link there is an interview with Dr Jonathan Wells on the 6 main biological codes, Evolution News and View, Oct.22, 2015. Link is [here](#).

<sup>33</sup> See the article by Michael Denton, "Evolution: A Theory in Crisis Revisited (Part Two of Three)" See [here](#)

<sup>34</sup> Erica Check Hayden, "Human Genome at Ten: Life Is Complicated," Nature 464, no. 7,289 (2012): 664–67. See [here](#)

<sup>35</sup> For a brief overview of "The Kalam Cosmological Argument" - See [here](#)

<sup>36</sup> The Fine-Tuning Design Argument: A Scientific Argument for the Existence of God. Robin Collins, Sept 1, 1998. A link is to the fuller article is [here](#). "The Scientific Evidence for God is Growing, Not Shrinking" The Stream, Nov 13, 2013, Link is [here](#). See the Youtube documentary titled "The Privileged Planet" – Link is [here](#). A further documentary titled "Privileged Species" is interesting – Link is [here](#), and "The Fine-Tuning of the Universe" – Link is [here](#).

birth as a nation and as a kingdom under God (Gen.12:2, 46:3, Exod.19:6, 33:13, Ezek.16:13). This peoples' existence testifies to God's work in the past, and for this reason God calls Israel his witnesses.

Isaiah.43:10-12. **"Ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, and my servant whom I have chosen:** that ye may know and believe me, and understand that I am he: before me there was no God formed, neither shall there be after me. I, even I, am the LORD; and beside me there is no saviour. I have declared, and have saved, and I have shewed, when there was no strange god among you: **therefore ye are my witnesses, saith the LORD, that I am God."**

After their deliverance, God spoke directly to this people from Mt Sinai, and gave to them his Law. God said this, **"And the LORD said unto Moses, Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee for ever.** And Moses told the words of the people unto the LORD" (Exod.19:9). This has ever been the position that the Jewish people have adhered to. Even in the days of Jesus they referred to this event; John.9:29 **"We know that God spake unto Moses..."**

It is the combination of these things that makes Israel special among all nations. As Moses said, "For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for? And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?" Deut.4:7-8.

It is these things that makes Israel God's witnesses to all generations. Their continuance as a people, even to this day, testifies to the promises made to Abraham, their miraculous deliverance under Moses and the Law they received at Mt Sinai. It is for this reason that their future restoration to divine favour is guaranteed – "For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" Rom.11:29.

Israel therefore stands as a witness to the works of God – past, present and future.

### **viii. The importance of the internal witness.**

While evaluating evidence it is important that we do not overlook the importance of the internal witness that is designed to assure us and give us confidence. In the following reference, Jesus himself speaks about this direct relationship that disciples are to develop with God and Christ. Jesus says that we are to have one master and teacher, even Christ. And we are to have one father, even God. There are to be no mediators or intermediaries in this relationship, which means that it is designed to be very personal.

Matt.23:8-10. **"But be not ye called Rabbi: for one is your Master, even Christ;** and all ye are brethren. And call no man your father upon the earth: **for one is your Father, which is in heaven.** Neither be ye called masters: **for one is your Master, even Christ."**

This leads us to the next point.

In the Bible we have a revelation of God who introduces himself to us. Here he reveals his character, his values, his purpose and his active hand in bringing to pass that purpose. He invites us to be part of his family (John.1:12) and share with him in the completion of that purpose. Although this may be classed as a subjective experience, it is nevertheless real and tangible to all who experience it.

Jesus speaks about this when he says; "Jesus answered them, and said, My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. **If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine,** whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself" (John.7:16-17).

The Apostle John also speaks about this internal witness, in these terms; **"He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself:** he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son" (1.John.5:10).



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This type of evidence is personally experienced and yet we cannot use it to persuade others - other than by the evident power it has to change us for good. Nevertheless, it stands as part of the cumulative body of evidence that each and every individual can access on a personal level. It tells us of the truthfulness of Christ's teachings for it is through knowing and doing God's will that we come to understand the truth in a very deep and personal way. This re-assures our hearts so that we confidence before God.

1.John.3:18-21. "My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; **but in deed and in truth. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.** For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God."

It is clear that we are persuaded by evidence that is both externally reasoned and internally experienced. As we should expect - this is by design. What we find is that the external evidence comes first, when we hear the word and weigh its meaning and reasonableness. The internal witness confirms what we have rationally concluded, and comes after we hear the word and allow it to affect us. It is by these two witnesses that we become personally persuaded to the truth of the word of God. Those who only allow one of these witnesses to affect them will inevitably end up with either an academic faith or an emotional faith. Bible based faith is to be efficacious, it is designed to effect a transformational change in those who hear.

## 5. The NT approach to Faith.

Although many use aspects of the approach outlined in the previous chapter, the NT offers a unique perspective on evidence and faith. What we find is that the Apostles did not rely upon the various teleological arguments we outlined but rather upon what they had seen and heard as eye-witnesses.

After Jesus' resurrection he commissioned his disciples to preach the gospel "for obedience to the faith among all nations" (Rom.1:6, 16:26). The NT marks a dispensational change, as the Law of Moses was fulfilled and no longer operative. The gospel was now preached to Gentiles who were accepted on the same basis as Jews, i.e. on the basis of their faith (Rom.1:16-17, 3:22). Belief was the basis of acceptance: "And he said unto them, **Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned**" (Mark.16:15-16).

### i. The Apostles chosen to bear witness.

The Apostles were chosen by Christ and had been with him since the beginning. They were witnesses who testified to all that they had seen and heard (Acts.1:8, 15-28, 22:15). Luke mentions the fact that "many" records of Jesus' life had been written from eyewitness accounts. He speaks of these other records as a "declaration" which means "a narration or a narrative" of what was preached and believed by the NT Christians. These accounts were accepted and believed because of the testimony of these eye witnesses.

Luke.1:1-4 "**Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.**"

Luke says that these claims were genuine and that he also had a complete understanding of the NT Christian teaching, and that this record he produced (The Gospel of Luke) is the product of his own investigation and research – and therefore trustworthy – "That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed." This is the basic structure of many NT writings, i.e. they were based upon eye witness accounts and statements. These were either taught verbally or read from written accounts. We are now familiar with some of these as they make up the bulk of the NT writings.

We can see that this was a common NT practice by considering the final comments made by the Apostle John, who declares; "**And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe**" John.19:35, and again "**This is the disciple which testifieth of these things, and wrote these things: and we know that his testimony is true**" John.21:24.

From records like these we conclude that many of the NT writings are meant to be understood as witness statements similar to the type we are familiar with. For example, John's record is similar to an "**Affidavit**" or a "**Statutory Declaration.**" An affidavit has written statements that are really true and are sworn in front of a legal testifying authority. It contains the written facts of certain events as the author recalls them into memory. We have other NT examples of this type of testimony, declared as true before God, in - Gal.1:20, "Now the things which I write unto you, behold, **before God, I lie not,**" and Rom.9:1 "**I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost.**" In Australian Law, if you intentionally make a false statement you can be charged with perjury. The penalty for perjury can result in lengthy imprisonment. The Bible calls this bearing false witness (Exod.20:16, Deut.5:20), and the penalty under the Law was very severe and could even end in death (Deut.19:15-21).

ii. **Preaching in the book of Acts.**

There are many examples of the gospel being preached to non-believers in the book of Acts. In these there are no examples that speak in terms of Jesus dying for our sins or for the sins of the whole world. In all of the preaching efforts there is little or no mention of his ‘blood’ or of his ‘sacrifice’ or of his ‘offering.’ Neither is the word ‘love’ used in the book of Acts. These concepts are only found in the letters written to those who were disciples already. The record testifies to the use of reasonable and rational testimony being presented in clear themes, without special appeals to emotional guilt. The only partial exceptions are found in the very early chapters of Acts where the gospel was first preached to Jews who bear some responsibility for their rejection and crucifixion of Christ. Generally, the testimony was logically presented with all the essential themes necessary for the development of faith, repentance and baptism into Christ.

The following table summarizes the main preaching efforts recorded in the book of Acts. These are the ones that contain more than just a passing reference to the location where they preached. It is noteworthy that signs and wonders were not often done before the gospel was preached. Moreover, even when miraculous signs were done they did not contribute to the number who responded. The power was not in the miracles, but in the word preached and in the witness statements made.

	Reference	Audience	Where	Was a sign or miracle done?
1	Acts.2:4-40	Jews	Jerusalem	Yes - multiple languages
2	Act.3:12-26 & 4:8-12	Jews	Jerusalem	Yes - the lame man healed
3	Acts.8:4-5,12,14,25	Samaritans	Samaria	No - not before they believed
4	Acts.8:35-38	Ethiopian	In transit	No
5	Acts.9:20,22	Jews	Damascus	No
6	Acts.10:34-43	Gentiles	Joppa	Yes – but not before belief
7	Acts.13:14-43	Jews	Antioch	No
8	Acts.14:1	Jews	Iconium	No
9	Acts.14:2-5	Gentiles	Iconium	Yes – many signs were done
10	Acts.14:6-20	Gentiles	Lystra	Yes – healed a cripple man
11	Acts.14:20-28	Gentiles	Derbe etc	No – nothing is mentioned
12	Acts.16:30-33	Gentiles	Philippi	No – it wasn’t the earthquake that affected the jailer – it was the character of Paul & Silas
13	Acts.17:2-3	Jews	Thessalonica	No
14	Acts.17:22-31	Gentiles	Athens	No
15	Acts.18:5	Jews	Corinth	No
16	Acts.18:25-28	Jew	Ephesus	No
17	Acts.19:8	Gentiles	Ephesus	No
18	Acts.26:1-23	Gentiles	Jerusalem	No
19	Acts.28:20	Jews	Rome	No

In the following reference Paul makes an interesting comment on signs among the Jews and the pursuit of wisdom among the Greeks. Even though we might think that the evidence of a miraculous sign would be totally persuasive to convert people to the faith, the reality is that this rarely happened.

1.Cor.1:21-24. “For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, **it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.”**

When Paul and Barnabas came to Lystra they healed a crippled man (Acts.14:6-20). The locals, rather than hear what they were preaching, immediately treated them as gods and sought to offer sacrifices to them. Later, when others persuaded them that Paul was a trouble maker, they stoned him and left him for dead. This shows the fickle nature of humans, the power of normalcy bias, man's innate resistance to change, and the impotence of signs and wonders to change the hearts of people.

In the book of Acts some of the records present quite a lot of detail. In these, **the resurrection of Jesus is used as a major point of evidence** to support the preaching work. **All of the Apostles and many disciples were eye witnesses of the resurrected Christ and they refer to this fact when establishing the certainty of their mission and the word they preached.** This knowledge energized and compelled them to fearlessly bear witness to that they had seen and heard (Acts.2:32, 3:15, 4:20, 5:32, 10:39, 1.Pet.5:1).

Acts.5:30-32. **"The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins. And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him."**

Acts.10:38-42. "How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him. **And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem;** whom they slew and hanged on a tree: **Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.**"

Acts.13:30-33. **"But God raised him from the dead: And he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people.** And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee."

What we find in the book of Acts is that the gospel was preached to many people, some of whom listened with an open mind and carefully considered the message. It is clear that they were weighing the evidence and deciding if it was persuasive, for Biblical faith is always the product of a conscious choice that we must personally make. As noted, the Apostles' eye witness testimony played an important part in persuading people. In like manner, most of the things that we come to believe are the result of education or instruction at the hand of those who know more than us, whom we come to trust.

Today, as a society, we set a high value on witness statements from trusted sources. In ancient times, they were even more dependent than we are on this. As the various audiences heard the Apostles' speaking, there is no doubt that the following questions would have come to mind. How do we qualify this person to decide if he is a credible witness? Is he trustworthy? Is he believable? Is he gaining financially from his testimony and his efforts? Is he prepared to stand by his message on pain of persecution or death?

To assist in the preaching efforts and to certify the veracity of the speaker and his message, the Apostles and early disciples were given the Holy Spirit gifts. This allowed them to do many miraculous things which established beyond doubt that God was with them (John.3:2, Acts.2:43, 3:6-11, 4:16, 30, 5:12, 14:3, Rom.15:19). Even in this we must remember that the unique gifts were mainly given to verify that the messenger and his message was from God, and therefore trustworthy. The real power was not in the signs, but in the gospel message preached. As we noted already, **faith always depends upon believing the word.**

It is very important to note that the Apostles themselves did not obtain any personal advantage from their preaching or witnessing efforts. They were not financially advantaged and did not live in luxury. For the most part they were persecuted, imprisoned and killed for their testimony. These experiences worked to confirm the veracity of their testimony, for what group of men will suffer this way to support what they know to be a blatant falsehood. Paul describes their situation this way –

1.Cor.4:9-13. **“For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised. Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace; And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day.”**

The Apostles' endurance in the face of terrible circumstances and death instilled confidence in the early disciples, for this vouched for the truth of their message and what they stood for. They were not intimidated or cowed by those with power.

Acts.4:20-21 “And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, **Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.** So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done.”

Phil.1:14. “And many of the brethren in the Lord, **waxing confident by my bonds,** are much more bold to speak the word without fear.”

### iii. Assessing the reasonableness of the Apostle's teachings today.

About 2,000 years have passed since the days of the Apostles. We cannot observe the miracles and signs they did. We cannot speak with them first hand to quiz them about their experiences. We only have the record of their words, works and testimony recorded in the NT documents. How then can we evaluate their message and what evidence makes their testimony reasonable and believable?

As we noted earlier, it is both reasonable and acceptable to evaluate indirect evidence and allow its cumulative force to direct us to an assured outcome. We can use this investigative technique to examine the evidence concerning the resurrection of Christ and thereby the validity of the Apostles' teachings.

We should not underestimate the importance of this approach. The early disciples were considered part of household of God, having been **“built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone”** (Eph.2:20). It is for this reason that the early disciples are also said to have **“continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship”** (Acts.2:42). Therefore, discipleship and faith are based upon believing the Apostles' teachings, which in practical terms involves believing the same things that they believed. Hearing the Apostles was the same as hearing Christ (Luke.16:10), for they were Christ's ambassadors sent with his message. Paul goes further than this and presents the negative side of this proposition when he says; **“But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed”** (Gal.1:8).

**The resurrection of Christ.** Firstly, we should note that - "The standards of evidence do not require that the case for something is irrefutable. Such 100 percent certainty is only possible in the rarest of circumstances. Rather, the standard requires proof beyond a reasonable doubt in criminal cases and proof that makes the truth of an accusation more probable than not in civil cases. If this is not understood, our criteria for proof may be unrealistic. Applying this to the facts about Jesus, scholar Graham Twelftree observes that "A position is demonstrated, when the reasons for accepting it 'significantly' outweigh the reasons for not accepting it.... This leaves a large gray area where positions are held to be 'likely' or 'probable.' ... A finding of historicity is essentially a default position, meaning that we have no other reasonable way to account for the presence of a story in the text." ..... If there are no reasonable opposing theories, a finding of historicity is the default position."<sup>37</sup>

Therefore, when we consider the evidence for Christ's resurrection, we need to consider a number of possible explanations about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ – as it is upon this declared fact that everything else in the NT relies.

In general, historians accept that Jesus of Nazareth was a real person and that the history recorded in the book of Acts is accurate. Many first-century and early second-century unfriendly Roman sources (i.e. Thallus, Tacitus, Mara Bar-Serapion, and Phlegon) and Jewish sources (ie. Josephus and the Babylonian Talmud) confirm that Jesus was crucified and died. There are other contemporary 2<sup>nd</sup> century records about the early Christian community found in the writings of Pliny the Younger, Suetonius, and Lucian. These testify to the early emergence of NT Christianity.<sup>38</sup> This was necessary to establish the chain of custody that ensured the accuracy and survival of the NT writings.

There are four facts about Jesus that are generally accepted by both friends and foes –

- 1) Jesus died on the cross and was buried.
- 2) Jesus' tomb was empty and no one ever produced his body.
- 3) Jesus' disciples believed that they saw Jesus resurrected from the dead
- 4) Jesus' disciples were transformed following their alleged meeting with the resurrected Jesus.

None of these "minimal evidences" necessitates that Jesus rose from the dead. Some suggest that perhaps any number of explanations may account for the facts. So let's list the main options about the Apostles' claimed witness testimony –

- 1) The Apostles were wrong about Jesus dying.
- 2) The Apostles were lying about Jesus resurrection.
- 3) The Apostles were delusional and hallucinating about Jesus' resurrection.
- 4) The Apostles were fooled by an imposter pretending to be the resurrected Jesus.
- 5) The Apostles testimony was later distorted.
- 6) The Apostles told the truth and their record is accurate.

When evaluating these options and comparing them to the written NT records, it is difficult to accept that the first four of them would pass the requirement for reasonableness. Firstly, each account records the death of Jesus with lots of detail. Secondly, they had been with Jesus for over 3 years and knew him. They would not be easily fooled. The multiple appearances of Jesus over the 40 days following his resurrection would have removed all doubts. To suggest that the disciples were lying is difficult to rationalize, as it would have involved a massive conspiracy seeing that on one occasion there were over 500 witnesses to his resurrection, the greater part were still alive when Paul wrote his letter to the Corinthians (1.Cor.15:6).

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<sup>37</sup> The Case for the Resurrection of Jesus by Gary R. Habermas, Michael R. Licona

<sup>38</sup> See the summary reference list of Non-Christian writings about Jesus, Blue Letter Bible Link is [here](#).

## The NT approach to Faith.

This leaves the option that the record was later tampered with. Internally, we can establish that much of the NT record was written within a few decades of Jesus' death, which means that those who witnessed the events first hand were still alive when the records were compiled. This is Paul's argument in 1.Cor.15:1-8 and the basis of the factual account that Luke testifies he compiled in Luke.1:1-4. Moreover, historians know that the background information supplied in the NT, and particularly the book of Acts, is very accurate.

The most reasonable conclusion is that the record is true, and the things it records are a true account. This means that Jesus really did die on the cross and he really did rise again on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day. In addition to this, he really did endow his Apostles with the responsibility of preaching the gospel and he really did give them the Holy Spirit gifts to assist them in discharging this responsibility. Given all the information we have, this is a reasonable conclusion and one that is designed to persuade us to believe the Apostles' testimony.

The main objection to this conclusion is that it requires a belief in the supernatural, for no man can be brought back to life three days after he dies. However, as we have seen, the conclusion that Jesus was resurrected can be inferred from the available evidence. The resurrection is a reasonable explanation that results from looking at all the evidence and considering all options. This is why we need to check our naturalistic presuppositions, and consider this whole record within the overarching framework of divine revelation. All the pieces fit together, which is a primary requirement when assembling indirect evidence.

### iv. The NT as history and the book of Acts.<sup>39</sup>

Historians now generally accept the historicity of the New Testament Gospels and particularly the book of Acts, yet they reject the miracles that are recorded alongside the events that scholars accept as historical. Why? Because they have a presuppositional bias against the supernatural. They reject the idea that any historical evidence could demonstrate a miracle because it invokes something outside of our natural experiences. This rationale is also used by some scholars who reject the essential Christian teaching about the resurrection of Jesus. Yet this rejection is based up naturalistic presuppositions which are relied upon because they will not allow themselves any other option, even though the evidence might be better explained by the very thing they reject. This approach lacks objectivity.

Jesus and his Apostles used and thereby endorsed the truthfulness of many of the OT writings. This approach and example provides us with a useful methodology that we can imitate. From their approach we can learn how to interpret the scriptures and rely on the OT writings. This also provides believers with a valuable insight into how to understand the Bible, i.e. allowing the NT to interpret the OT.

**Acts.** In the NT we are told that the early Disciples “.. devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship ..” (Acts.2:42 NIV. The Apostles’ were the agents chosen by Christ, to bear witness and to communicate his message to all nations after his resurrection (Acts.1:8). Therefore, by establishing the truth of their witness we can thereby establish the truth of the things that they trusted and believed in.

As for Luke’s authorship of the gospel account, the Papyrus Bodmer XIV<sup>40</sup>, which is the oldest known manuscript containing the ending of Luke’s gospel (dating to around 200 AD), uses the subscription "The Gospel According to Luke". Nearly all ancient sources also shared this theory of authorship.

Luke’s gospel record is later referred to in Acts.1:1-3, which then proceeds to show what happened after the resurrection of Jesus. Using the internal evidence we find in Acts, we can roughly date when it was compiled. This then allows us to date Luke’s gospel account, as it was written before Acts.

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<sup>39</sup> The video “The Case for Christ” by Lee Strobel investigates these questions & is well worth considering. Link is [here](#).

<sup>40</sup> “Early Christian Writings” – Gospel of Luke. See the web link [here](#)

## The NT approach to Faith.

From internal evidence we know that part of Acts was written as a first-hand witness account. We can see this by the way the personal pronoun “**they**” is changed to “**we**” about half way through the record. In Acts.16 compare “they” in Vv.4,6,7,8 with “we” in Vv.10,11,12,13 and “us” in Vv.15,16,17. See also Acts.20:5-15, 21:1-18, and 27.1-28:1. This indicates the time when Luke joined Paul and probably cared for his needs as his helper and personal physician. We are told elsewhere that Luke stayed close to Paul, even to the very end (Col.4:14, Phil.V24, 2.Tim.4:11).

The final verses in Acts end with the imprisonment of Paul in Rome with no comment about the outcome of the imprisonment. From this we can assume that Acts was completed after Paul was arrested but before he was martyred (AD 64), and extrapolate back to an even earlier date for the Gospel of Luke (who wrote Acts as a sequel). To strengthen this point, Acts mentions neither the fall of Jerusalem (70AD), the horrific persecutions under Nero (mid 60s) even though other persecutions are mentioned. So based on this and other internal evidence the record of Acts is generally thought to have been completed around 62AD.

### v. Summary – The NT approach to faith.

We have looked at the basic evidential structure of the NT scriptures. We have access to a large body of historical information that allows us to understand the NT times. From these we can verify the basic historicity of the NT writings. Importantly, what we have seen is that NT faith was primarily based upon the teachings of the Apostles. They had been with Jesus during his ministry and were therefore uniquely qualified as eye-witnesses to testify to all that they had seen and heard. Their teachings were based upon what he had taught and revealed to them. They were also given the gift of the Holy Spirit to assist them and to bring to remembrance all that he had taught them (John.14:26).

In the NT records we have the written testimony of those who witnessed the things recorded. They often testified to the truthfulness of their accounts. They had been with Jesus. They had heard his words and seen his works. They had seen his brutal death and were witnesses to the fact that he had been resurrected from the dead. They had spoken with the risen Christ, they had touched him and were with him for 40 days after his resurrection. In this they were absolutely certain.

The Apostles’ words are NOT presented as subjective opinions, but as objective and truthful testimony verified by multiple witnesses who were alive decades after the events. The records we have clearly bear witness to the truth of their message. Furthermore, the fact that these witnesses received no reward for their testimony, but rather their witness was always at the cost of great hardship and often their own lives - which is the seal of their authenticity.

Even though we cannot now hear with our own ears or see with our own eyes what the Apostles’ heard and saw, we can consider their testimony and weigh its reasonableness. There is no reason to suspect that they were deceived or lying, or that their testimony was later changed. There is sufficient evidence to believe that their testimony is trustworthy, and that the NT account is a factual record of actual events. This being so, we recall again the comments of Lewis Carroll who said, “**Christianity is a statement which, if false, is of no importance, and if true, is of infinite importance. The one thing it cannot be is moderately important.**” The NT message is designed to move us to believe.



## 6. Why is Faith required?

We are told that Biblical faith is the basis of acceptance and justification with God (Rom.3:22, 5:1-2), and without faith it is impossible to please him (Heb.11:6). Why is this so and why does God place such emphasis and importance upon faith? To have faith in someone is to know them, to believe in them, to trust them and to trust that they are telling you the truth. The Bible claims that God has revealed himself and his plan and purpose with man and with the earth. He has also revealed the past, the present and the future. He wants us to hear, understand and believe the complete revelation of his testimony, as spoken by his ambassadors – His Son, the Apostles and the Prophets. The Apostles' themselves acknowledge the certainty of what the Prophets before them has written (2.Pet.1:19-21). We have received adequate evidence to believe their words. God has placed information and power in his word that we can be both inwardly convinced and outwardly confident of the truth revealed (1.Thes.2:13).

Paul reminded the disciples at Corinth that **“we walk by faith, not by sight”** (2.Cor.5:7). The immediate context of his words refers to the struggle that all genuine disciples experience in life. Paul had said earlier, “For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened” ... hoping for the time when “mortality might be swallowed up of life.” In these words Paul speaks of the challenge that every disciple faces after being made aware of the great things that God has revealed in his word. We all must make a choice about whom we believe. Do we believe God, who has spoken through his chosen agents, or do we believe the world or even ourselves and doubt God. There is no middle ground.

Although, there is a weak faith which needs to be strengthened in the things of God, there is also unbelief that leads to rejection and death. The Apostle John presents this as a moral question –

**1.John.5:10. “He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.”**

Why does John frame his words this way? Because what God did in Christ is unlike anything he has done in the history of mankind. Jesus spoke like no other man. Jesus did signs and miracles like no other man. Jesus' character was shown to be like that of no other man. This exceptional man was raised up by God to declare his truth (John.1:14-18), as God was at work in and through him reconciling the world to himself (2.Cor.5:19). Furthermore, we have the first hand eye-witness records of those who heard, saw and touched him (1.John.1:1-2). These were men who were persecuted and died bearing witness to the truth of these things. Who are we to ignore, question or even doubt their integrity and their words? Who are we to shun or ignore God and the clear demonstration of his love and grace seen in the Lord Jesus Christ?

### **i. Scriptural Inspiration.**

Paul says that **“all Scripture is given by inspiration of God”** (2.Tim.3:16).

We take this to mean that God inspired the original documents of Scripture. The idea of inspiration covers anything from outright dictation, as in parts of Revelation where John is told, “Write this” (Rev.1:11, 19; 2:8, 12, 18; 3:7, 14; 14:13; 21:5), to the Gospels where Luke tells Theophilus that he did research to verify and confirm his account (Luke.1:1–4). It also includes the letters where Paul, James, Peter, John, and Jude are writing apparently from their own minds, but in all cases, the Holy Spirit is superintending the process so that the result is factual and in accord with what God wanted (2 Peter 1:21, 3:15-16).

This same approach is seen in the OT writings. Early on we find the LORD instructing Moses to “write ..” (Exod.17:14, 34:27) and later on the LORD said the same to Jeremiah, “Thus speaketh the LORD God of Israel, saying, Write thee all the words that I have spoken unto thee in a book” (Jer.30:2, 36:2, 28).

## Why is Faith required?

At this distance, we do not fully understand how the spirit moved these people to write what they did. However, we have the NT assurance that these OT scriptures were given by inspiration of God. Peter treats the OT scriptures with great reverence when he reminds the disciples in 2.Pet.1:20-21 (NIV) “**Above all, you must understand** that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet’s own interpretation of things. **For prophecy never had its origin in the human will, but prophets, though human, spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.**” In like manner, Jesus treats these OT writings with same high regard and respect (Matt.4:4).

### ii. Faith should produce virtue.

Jesus says that there would be false prophets who claim to speak for God. He says of them, “Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them” (Matt.7:20). What he means is that the truth that comes from God must bear good fruit, and that which comes from evil men will be evident by the type of behaviour they manifest. “For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. For every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes. **A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh**” (Luke.6:43-45). It is evident then, that good words and behaviour springs from the heart, as our heart is the place where God is trying to reach.

Rather than focus upon the negative here, what we can conclude is that there is an important virtuous element to true faith. It is not simply a philosophical or academic belief, but it must be seen in practical ways. To live a virtuous life means having or showing high moral standards – living by ethical principles and showing moral excellence. The word “virtue” here means more than simply chastity. Paul speaks of the need for moral excellence in Phil.4:8 “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; **if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.**”

How is faith connected to virtue? The virtues that Paul speaks of are seen in how we live. Virtuous behaviour is the fruit of a changed mind, one that is persuaded by the words and example of the Lord Jesus Christ and of his Apostles and the Prophets. The term “disciple” means a follower, and disciples are to be followers of Christ (Luke.9:23, 1.Cor.11:1, 2.Thes.3:7,9, 1.Tim.6:11).

We must also remember that Paul, and the other NT writers, are always only speaking in terms of Biblical Faith, and not on any other faith claim. Jude speaks about the importance of this type of faith, which was being corrupted by contrary ideas even in his own times, when he says; “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, **and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints**” (Jude.Vv3).

### iii. Faith allows us to see with the eyes of God.

Paul makes the following comment in 2.Cor.4:18 - “While we look not at the things which are seen, **but at the things which are not seen**: for the things which are seen are temporal; **but the things which are not seen are eternal.**” His choice of words requires careful thought. He is comparing natural sight and perceptions of reality, which depend upon our primary senses, with spiritual sight. Our eyes allow us see the world as it is, and our natural senses allow us to live and interact with this world. Although this is normal human behaviour, it is insufficient if we are to see the things of God. These are invisible to our natural sight and senses. As we have already considered, God is both before and superior to this creation and cannot be seen, measured or limited by it.

## Why is Faith required?

We are regularly reminded that faith comes from hearing and understanding the word of God (Rom.10:17, Acts.4:4, 15:7, Eph.1:13, Gal.3:2, 5). The word spoken by his ambassadors contains information about God that is not available from any other source. Without this, we would have no certain understanding of God, or of his past, present or future (direct) works. Special revelation alone delivers this information, and in the word of God is the truth and power of God to change us by changing our thinking. This is the most difficult challenge any of us face in life, as we are naturally trained from childhood to trust our senses. The world rewards those who trust their senses. Yet God has given us information that is not recognized as authoritative by the world. This information is in his word, and it is designed to change how we see the world - both past, present and future. This also affects how we live and the choices we make in life.

We generally acknowledge these things concerning Faith –

- Faith is believing what God says, and promises
- That Faith is based upon the knowledge of God
- That Christ Dwells in us by Faith
- That without Faith it is impossible to please God
- That Faith comes from hearing the word of God

Yet there is more. The scriptures supply numerous example of men and women who lived and died in faith, who were likewise moved by this new way of thinking. Hebrews chapter eleven supplies a very large list, and sets them before us as a cloud of witnesses so that we might understand that we are not alone in the challenges we face in life. Faith is transformational and allows us to see with the eyes of God himself. We see this concept spoken of in a number of places which we will review now.

Heb.11:27 – Speaking of Moses. “By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: **for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.**” The situation noted here is not at the Exodus, but 40 years before when Moses first made a public choice to identify with the children of Israel. His motive and endurance is said to have been based upon his spiritual sight, as seeing him who is invisible. God was real to him and could be seen with the eye of faith, a faith that was developed in him by the education he received from his mother and his personal belief in the promises made to Abraham about 400 years before. This faith allowed him to see things, as it were, through the eyes of God.

Job.42:5 – Job says; “I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: **but now mine eye seeth thee.**” The interesting thing in this reference is that Job didn’t really see God, he only heard him speaking. The information he heard persuaded him to the wisdom and power of God. This caused him to state that his past knowledge had been limited, but now he saw God clearly. Not with his eyes, but with the eyes of faith.

We also see Jesus speaking in similar terms. Here Jesus is not saying that he is the Father, neither is he speaking in terms of seeing with the natural eyes. He is rather telling his disciples that he and the Father are one in word, purpose and action. When the disciples heard or saw Jesus, they were seeing a perfect manifestation of the Father himself, for he only ever did the will of his Father (John.5:30).

John.1:18. “**No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son,** which is in the bosom of the Father, **he hath declared him.**”

John.12:44. “Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on me, believeth not on me, but on him that sent me. **And he that seeth me seeth him that sent me.**”

John.14:7-11. “**If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him.** Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? **he that hath seen me hath seen the Father;** and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?”

## Why is Faith required?

We also see this concept indirectly referred to in the NT, where John concludes that our choice to abide in Christ and sin not results from seeing and knowing God, and the opposite choice of serving sin comes from not seeing God. 1.John.3:6 “Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: **whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.**” and again in 3.John.11. “Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. **He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.**”

Faith is able to give us spiritual sight, and faith comes from hearing and knowing the things of God. Faith affects the choices we make and the type of lives we live. It will cause us to “**walk by faith, not by sight**” (2.Cor.5:7), just like the faithful always have. This spiritual sight comes from faith alone.

### iv. Faith is related to purpose

Jesus charged his disciples to preach the gospel message. Belief and baptism were to follow, which would bring salvation to those who believed.

Mark.16:15-16. “And He said to them, **Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved;** but he who does not believe will be condemned.”

Those who heard and believed lived by a new conviction that came from the message preached. Faith gave them an assurance of the things spoken and promised.

Heb.11:1-2. (ESV) “**Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the people of old received their commendation.**”

We have many examples of faithful men and women who lived and died remaining consistent to the things of God. They believed God’s word and their faith gave them strength to overcome adversity.

Heb.11:13. “**These all died in faith**, not having received the promises, **but having seen them afar off** were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.”

Faith in this context relates to a belief in the promises that God made, which gave to these believers spiritual sight to see afar off in time. These promises were related to the completion of God’s purpose. The believers were not restricted by the epoch of time in which they lived, nor by the contrary circumstances that they found themselves in. Faith gave them strength to endure, to live and die in confident hope of the fulfilment of all that had been purposed and promised by God. Again, this was only available through the acquisition of spiritual sight which came by faith alone, and not through the exercise of the natural senses.

**In the final analysis**, Biblical faith is a declaration of complete trust in God and is based upon being persuaded to God’s truth and the truthfulness of his word. In declaring this, disciples give honour to God trusting him as their living Father in heaven.

## 7. Conclusion.

We have seen that Faith is the basis of our justification and salvation. Without faith it is impossible to please God. We have further seen that faith only comes from hearing and believing the word of God. We have also seen that faith is the same in all ages irrespective of what type of evidence was advanced to support it. On top of this is a layer of understanding that relates to God's activity in calling people to respond. Jesus says, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him ..." As this is beyond our control and our current theme we will not explore this aspect of the subject.

In summary, we have seen –

- That there are various teleological reasons to believe in God.
- That the Bible claims to contain the word of God.
- That God has used witnesses as his ambassadors to speak his words.
- That the evidence of divine activity in the past was sometimes directly observed.
- That the evidence of divine activity in the past was most often indirectly known.
- That the NT records were compiled from eye witness accounts.
- That the Apostles were given the responsibility to preach the words Christ gave to them.
- That both Jesus and his Apostles endorsed the words of the OT prophets.
- That the Apostles, like Jesus, gave their lives as a witness to the truth of their testimony.
- That the NT disciples were forged into a believing community based upon the Apostles' teachings.
- That NT Faith was the product of a rational choice based upon the reasonableness of the evidence testified to by the Apostles and their witness testimony. This was often indirectly received.
- That Faith was not always or even often based upon what is seen or experienced directly.
- That our faith should be based upon the Apostles' teachings, and that the evidence of the truthfulness of the Apostles' testimony is persuasive today, just as it was in NT times.
- That confidence and faith is strengthened when we believe and practice Christ's teachings, for it is by this experience that we come to develop a personal relationship with both Christ and with God.

**Faith is powerful – do not underestimate it.**

Heb.4:12. (NKJV) "**For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.**"

This is remarkable imagery. The word of God is spoken of as both living and powerful, with the capacity to pierce even into our inward thoughts and intents. This shows the unique power that God has invested in his word, a power that can work in the lives of those who are willing to hear and consider its message.

Paul also speaks of this unique power in the word of God.

1.Thes.2:13 "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received **the word of God which ye heard of us**, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, **the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.**"

In this essay we have sought to show that Bible based faith has quite specific characteristics. It is based upon a belief in the word of God, which is the product of special revelation. This is to be a living faith that must be manifest in transformed lives. The question of faith is at the heart of what defines Christianity. It is unfortunate that this is a field containing many opinions and ideas that do not come from the Bible. This adds to the confusion and makes it difficult for those seeking for clarity to come to a reasonable faith.

## Conclusion.

When Jesus was asked about faith, and he made the following poignant comments about the power that exists in real faith. It is, in his hyperbolic language, able to move trees and mountains.

Luke.17:5-6 "And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith. And the Lord said, **If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed**, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you."

Matt.17:20. "... for verily I say unto you, **If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed**, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you."

When reviewing all these things we should begin to appreciate how God operates. In simple terms, he has revealed his word that he might change our minds, so that our words and works reflect a new way of thinking. This is what the truth of God is designed to accomplish and this is what discipleship is about.

Associated with this new way of thinking is a new way of seeing the world. The material things we see about us are seen with our natural senses. They are described as being temporal. These are compared to the things which cannot be seen with our eyes, but only by the acquisition of spiritual sight which comes from faith ... and these are the things that are eternal. The writer to the Hebrews informs us that this has always been so. For example, he says that: (V7) "By faith Noah, being warned of God of **things not seen as yet**, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house" Later, the record speaks of others who had this special sight that came from faith: (V13) "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, **but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them**, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." What we clearly learn from this record is that "faith" involved a new way of thinking and seeing the world in which they lived.

In the midst of his temptation Jesus himself shows the foundation of spiritual life, when he says to the tempter in Matt.4:4, "... It is written, **Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.**" Here is the answer to all of the challenges we face. These words remind us of the one source of essential knowledge which can make us wise unto salvation.

## Scripture and the Word of God

As we draw our thoughts to a conclusion, we more precisely define scripture as the words that God caused to be written, and the word of God as what God has said. In one sense they are same, and in another they are different. For example, the words of Pharaoh or Nebuchadnezzar are not the words of God, neither are the words of Job's three friends. Yet all the words recorded in the Bible are part of the inspired record. They are therefore to be understood as a true account of what was said and done in the past. **Our faith comes from hearing the word, for we believe that the record is true**, and that the spirit has caused these words to be recorded for our learning and the knowledge this brings (Rom.15:4, 1.Cor.10:11, Rom.4:23).

God has done so much for us, and he wants from us the courtesy of thoughtful consideration, effort and appreciation. He waits for our response, and for us to grow in spiritual maturity. At the heart of this question is the knowledge of God that ultimately produces the type of faith that pleases God (Heb.11:6).

What we have shown is that "Bible Based Faith" is both logical and rational, but above all it is reasonable. Today it is based upon the cumulative power of various pieces of indirect evidence, as well as the power of the word itself to work effectively in us (1.Thes.2:13). We have been invited to "taste and see" Psalm.34:8. In other words, there are valid reasons to believe. The main thing that holds people back is an unwillingness to search out and find God because of a love of the world rather than a love of God (1.John.2:15-17).

We have all received God's invitation to hear and believe the gospel message. Will we hearken to Christ's words (Matt.17:5, John.7:14-17), and will we have the courage to "**Have faith in God**" (Mark.11:22)?