

“Does God Exist?”

PART 3

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This morning, I would like for us to conclude our series of lessons on the existence of God. If you were with us several weeks ago, then you know we started by looking at the nature of the evidence. We cannot prove God in the same way that we prove the Law of Gravity. There is no experiment that will ever reveal a piece of God in a test tube. And yet we learned that our own legal system recognizes the validity of what we referred to as a “prima facie” case. In other words, there are many cases where enough evidence is available for us to come to a reasonable conclusion, and that conclusion will legally stand as fact unless it can be refuted.

And so, with that in mind, we started looking together at several arguments in favor of God’s existence, and specifically, some of the reasons why I personally believe in God. And to do this, we have had to move away a little bit from the way we normally use the Scriptures. Normally, as you know, we try to take a paragraph of scripture and stick with it during our lessons each Lord’s Day morning. And yet, as we do this, those of us who are Christians are starting out with our understanding that the Bible is the word of God. Of course, for those who do not believe in God, it hardly makes sense to try to prove the existence of God by appealing to a scripture that they do not believe in in the first place. In other words, we cannot just point to a passage about God and say, “See, it says it right there: God is real!” We can’t do that! And so, for that reason, our lessons in this series have included passages from the Bible, but they have not been based on God’s word in the same way that we have been accustomed to doing.

And so, with that in mind, we started several weeks ago by looking at two very basic arguments that start out just by looking at the world around us. In Part 1, then, we started by looking at what we referred to as the “Law of Cause and Effect.” And yes, that basic concept is referred to in Hebrews 3:4, but the concept is true in all areas of life, even among those who do not believe in the Bible. Very simply stated: Every effect must have an adequate cause. We listed those four possibilities and came to the conclusion that the universe must have been created. The universe is real, it did not create itself, and it has not been here forever.

We then moved on and considered the idea that Design Demands a Designer. And the idea here is that if something shows clear and compelling evidence of having been designed, then we can reasonably conclude that a Designer must have been involved. We looked at the little insect, the tiny creature with microscopic gears in its hips. We looked at a number of other creatures that are even said to have been designed. At the Lincoln Park Zoo in Chicago, the lion’s skull is said to have been “designed” to kill. At the National Zoo in

Washington, DC, the sea otters are said to have been “built” to survive. And we would agree: There is evidence to suggest that certain things in this world have been designed and built for a reason. As Christians, we believe that the designer and builder of all things is God.

And then, two weeks ago, we moved on to look at two more reasons for believing in God, starting with just the Existence of Morality. Not that you need to believe in God to make a moral decision; instead, the idea is that the concept of morality has no way of popping up on its own. As human beings, we feel things and do things that cannot be adequately explained by the evolutionary system. Nearly every human being seems to have some kind of built-in moral compass. There are certain things we “should” do. There are certain things we “ought” to do. That compass can be ignored, that compass may be wrong due to mental illness or improper training, but the sense of morality, the sense of right and wrong, is there.

And then, we looked at a second and somewhat related concept, the idea that the human race seems to have some kind of almost built-in religious instinct. Every culture we have ever found has had a need to worship something. Again, they might worship the wrong thing, they might worship in the wrong way, but as human beings, we have a need to reach out and to try to find God. And we believe that this need for worship cannot be adequately explained by the evolutionary system. Instead, this need to worship is something that God put inside of us so that we might go looking for Him.

There is so much more we could study, but this morning, I would like for us to conclude our series with a third and final lesson as we look very carefully at the Bible. “But I thought we weren’t looking at the Bible!” And that is correct in a sense. We are not looking at a verse that says, “God is,” and using that as some kind of proof. Instead, this morning we are considering the Bible itself as proof of God’s existence. In other words, if the Bible has qualities that can only be explained by supernatural involvement, then we can come to a reasonable conclusion that God is. And that is what I would like for us to look at this morning: Does the Bible itself exhibit qualities that can only be explained by supernatural involvement. I believe the answer is YES!

I. And as we begin, I would point out that THE BIBLE ITSELF IS A PERFECT BOOK.

In fact, it is so perfect that its perfection would not have been possible without divine intervention. And I realize that we are not basing our thoughts on one particular passage, but if a book truly were from God, wouldn’t we expect it to claim to be from God? And of course, the Bible does claim to be from God. We think of 2 Timothy 3:16-17, where Paul said, ***“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”*** That word “*inspired*” refers to something being “*God-breathed*.” The Bible was exhaled by God, and when we look at it, we see qualities that that is, in fact, the case.

Sometimes we think of the Bible as a book, and it is. The word Bible means book. But the Bible is actually a collection of books. The Bible is like a library. The Bible is a collection of 66 books written by 40 different authors over a period of roughly 1500 years. The authors wrote from several different continents, they wrote in three different languages, they came from vastly different social and economic backgrounds. Some were shepherds, some were kings, some were highly educated, some were commercial fishermen, at least one was an arborist. Some were Greek, some were Roman, some were wanderers and had no nation to call their own. And yet when we sit down and read the Bible from cover to cover, we cannot find a single contradiction. We cannot find a single historical error. But instead, we discover uninterrupted unity, the story of God’s love from creation until the present.

Can you imagine what would happen if we put 40 authors in a room this afternoon and told them to write a book with three-quarter of a million words spread over 1,189 chapters? I would suggest we couldn't get 40 people to write a single chapter on any religious subject without making mistakes and contradicting each other. In the Bible, though, we have the blending of law, and history, and poetry, and prophecy, and in the end, we fail to find a single mistake. It is miraculously perfect.

Of course, people will claim to have found mistakes. We studied this in-depth back on June 23 and July 7 of this year. Those two lessons are on the church website, so we won't spend too much time on this. I remember from back in June and July, we looked at one man who refused to believe the Bible because the ark was a huge barge weighing hundreds of tons, and yet a small handful of men managed to carry the ark across the Jordan River – a contradiction! So there, that goes back to a few verses taken out of context. Those were two different arks – Noah's ark and the Ark of the Covenant – one was 450 feet long by 75 feet wide by 45 feet tall, and the other was about the size of this table up here. And so many of the other so-called contradictions can be very easily explained just by looking at a few of the surrounding verses – just to make sure we're talking about the same thing, at the same time, in the same sense, and so on.

Eric Lyons has an article in the latest edition of *Reason and Revelation* that came out just a few days ago (it is available online), and in his article he outlines a number of the alleged contradictions and points out that all we really need is to have one possible explanation. He uses the example of a coworker seeing you take \$20 out of the petty cash box at the office one afternoon. Would the coworker be justified in concluding and telling everybody else that you were a thief, that you stole that money? In reality, there are any number of reasons why you might have taken the \$20 out of that box. The boss might have told you to go get it so that you could bring doughnuts to work the next morning. You might have been reimbursing yourself for a work-related purchase. There are so many other possibilities. The point is: Just seeing you take the \$20 out of the box does not make you guilty, especially when there are so many other possible explanations. In a similar way, what might appear at first to be a contradiction in the Bible really needs to be investigated before it is taken out of context and used as an example of some inaccuracy.

Normally, even in everyday communication, context can be incredibly important. Mr. Lyons gives an example. Mom and dad are watching their son's basketball game, the son scores his 30th point in that game, and the mom yells out to her husband, "Our son is on fire!" Obviously, she does not want her husband to get a fire extinguisher. Later that evening, though, when the son is grilling steaks in the back yard, if mom looks out the back window and screams out those same words to dad who is resting on the couch, "Our son is on fire!" those words take on an entirely new meaning, and the husband will have no problem understanding the message. In a similar way, in the Bible, context means everything.

The point here, though, is that the Bible is miraculously perfect. Even with thousands of proper names – thousands of names of people and places and events – not once has anyone ever found a mistake or a contradiction. And the only way this is possible is if God was involved in the process.

- II. **There is a second reason why I believe in God based on the Bible itself: Not only is the Bible perfect, but THE BIBLE ALSO CONTAINS A NUMBER OF SCIENTIFIC AND MEDICAL FACTS THAT ARE HUNDREDS AND EVEN THOUSANDS OF YEARS AHEAD OF THEIR TIME.**

Sometimes we refer to this as "scientific or medical foreknowledge." The Bible is not a scientific or medical textbook. In other words, the main point of the Bible is not to teach science; instead, the main point of the Bible is to teach spiritual truth. However, in the teaching of spiritual truth, sometimes the scriptures will

happen to mention something from the realms of science or medicine. And when that door cracks open just a little bit, the information 1.) Is accurate, and 2.) The information is centuries ahead of its time. And again, I know the verse on the wall up here doesn't prove this for those who don't believe the Bible anyway, but the verse up here simply gives the reason why the Bible is accurate in these areas, and the reason is, God's understanding is **"infinite"** (Psalm 147:5). To me, this is one of those reasons for believing in God: Those who wrote the Bible knew things that mankind did not know about for hundreds and sometimes thousands of years. I have included another article in the cubbyholes this morning with a lot more information – something you can read at home – but I would point out several examples.

We start with a passing reference in Genesis 15:5 and also Jeremiah 33:22, statements both indicating that the stars cannot be numbered. For thousands of years, though, scientists have tried – over and over again – to number the stars. In roughly 150 BC, one astronomer came up with a figure of 1,026. Well, that wasn't nearly enough, so a little bit later (in 150 AD), another astronomer raised that figure to 1,056 (they upped it by 30)! In the 1500's, astronomers thought they might have overdone it a little bit, and they gave a new figure of 777. A short time later, around 1600 AD, another astronomer decided they needed to up it a little bit, and they bumped it back up to 1,005 stars! The latest figure I've seen today comes from Dr. Carl Sagan, a figure of 25 sextillion. That's the number 25 with 21 zeroes behind it! And you know, they are definitely getting closer, but the Lord knew all along that the stars can not be numbered. I remember at camp several years ago, one of the astronomers from UW Eau Claire came out to the observatory, and in his lecture, he explained how just recently scientists took the Hubble telescope (I believe it was), and they pointed it at the darkest point in the night sky. They pointed that powerful telescope toward a tiny little piece of the sky where there appeared to be absolutely nothing, and they just left it there for a while as they allowed whatever light might have been there to come in to the telescope. And what they found was amazing – in that little piece of night sky, hundreds upon thousands of stars, far beyond what the human eye could ever possibly see. As the Lord said, the stars cannot be numbered. The deeper into space we look, the more we will continue to find.

Concerning the natural world, we think of a passing reference in Job 38:16 where God questioned Job and said, ***"Have you entered into the springs of the sea or walked in the recesses of the deep?"*** That word ***"recesses"*** refers to a deep chasm or canyon, something that can only be seen by searching for it, by exploring. For thousands of years, people thought that the oceans were basically nothing more than rather shallow, sandy extensions from one shore to the other. It wasn't until the late 1800's, though, that British scientists exploring the Pacific Ocean discovered a ***"recess"*** or a trench nearly 36,000 feet deep, that's more than 6 miles down. Now we know that there are many trenches in the ocean. A trench is a long, narrow canyon in the ocean floor that looks like a huge gash with very steep sides. How did Job know that there were trenches in the ocean, thousands of years before those trenches were discovered?

When it comes to health, we think back to the Law of Moses and the command from God in Leviticus 17 that the people were not to eat blood. The Lord said, ***"For the life of all flesh is its blood; whoever eats it shall be cut off"*** (Leviticus 17:14). Today, we know how true this is. Today, we know the importance of blood. We know that our blood carries oxygen, removes waste, carries nutrients, and so on. And yet do you remember what our own enlightened society thought about blood less than 300 years ago? Just a short time ago, we thought that we could cure diseases by bleeding people. It is amazing how much science and medicine have changed over the past 300 years. We wonder what changes we will see over the next 300 years! And yet back in 1400 BC, God told Moses that the life is in the blood.

Just a little earlier in Leviticus, God laid out some basic rules for hygiene and public health. Certain animals were not to be eaten, because they were especially vulnerable to passing along disease – pigs, and other

scavengers, for example. As far as I can tell, there were no restrictions on eating vegetables under the Law of Moses, but there were very strict rules concerning animals. That right there is an interesting lesson: Animals are more dangerous to eat than vegetables. And I would add: Especially when you are traveling in the wilderness with 2-3 million people. Today, we have instant read thermometers. We know that you have to cook pork to 155 degrees, steaks to 145, ground meat and poultry to 165, and so on. We do this, because we have microscopes. We know what kind of stuff can live on the surface of meat. Years ago, when my wife was getting her ServeSafe certification to work in food service, I couldn't sleep one night, so I made the mistake of reading her textbook. It is amazing to discover how many ways that food can kill you! But in 1400 BC, without this knowledge, God had to tell them, and those instructions were way ahead of their time.

Also in Leviticus, the Lord gave rules for dealing with leprosy and various skin diseases. Think about this: Moses, the author of Leviticus, was raised in Egypt. From history, we know that the Egyptians had some truly bizarre ways of treating various conditions. For example, to draw out a splinter, you were supposed to cover it with worm blood and donkey dung. Well, as you can imagine, a lot of ancient Egyptians died while trying to recover from something as simple as a splinter. They got a splinter, they rubbed donkey dung on it, there were tetanus spores in the dung, and people were dying of lockjaw, all from something as simple as a splinter. The point is: Moses had to know about some of those remedies, but the book of Leviticus is different. The book of Leviticus never tells anybody to rub donkey dung on an open wound. In Leviticus 12 God established the principle of quarantine, something that was not really understood in western medicine until the 1700's, the revolutionary idea that germs can spread.

We could go on and on, and I hope you will consider some of the articles in the cubbyholes this morning, but the point here is: The Bible is scientifically and medically accurate and it was accurate hundreds if not thousands of years before its time. For this reason, the Bible must be the result of divine influence.

III. There is a third reason why the Bible must have come from God, and it goes back to THE ACCURACY OF BIBLE PROPHECY.

We are not talking about some kind of weird end-time type thing that people have a tendency to ramble on and on about today, but we are talking about a vast number of incredibly simple but powerful prophecies that are fulfilled all throughout the Bible. We have prophecies about nations rising and falling. We have very specific prophecies about cities being destroyed and rebuilt. We have prophecies about people.

Most of us are probably very familiar with the idea of a time capsule. At some big anniversary of a city or maybe a school, sometimes people will collect a bunch of stuff to seal up and bury in a wall to be opened in a hundred years or something. And then, at the end of that period of time, the box is opened, and people are amazed at the way life used to be. Well, predictive prophecy is a little bit like a time capsule in reverse. In the Bible, a prophet gets a little glimpse of how things will be in the future, he writes it down, and when that prophecy is fulfilled hundreds of years later, we have confirmation that the prophet was indeed a man of God.

There is so much we could consider here, but I would point out just a few of the highlights concerning the coming of Jesus Christ. There were literally hundreds of prophecies in the Old Testament, many of them written anywhere between 500-1500 years before the Lord's birth. And I would point out: For a prophecy to be valid, it needs to be specific, it needs to have been made before the event that takes place, it needs to be more than an educated guess, and it needs to be something that is not controlled by the one making the prophecy. In other words, if I say, "A great leader will arise in the future," that is not a specific prophecy – that does not count! And again, if I were to say, "In one minute, this piece of paper will land on the floor," that

again is not a valid prophecy, because I am in control of whether that happens. If I predict that the sun will come up tomorrow, that doesn't make me a prophet; instead, that is an educated prediction based on experience and human reason. With this in mind, then, think with me about some of the prophecies concerning the Messiah:

- He will be born of a virgin (Isaiah 7:14).
- He will be from the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10).
- He will be from the family of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1).
- He will be born in Bethlehem (Micah 5:2).
- When He is born, other children will be murdered (Jeremiah 31:15).
- When He is born, He will be presented with gifts (Psalm 72:10).
- He will be preceded by a messenger (Isaiah 40:3).
- His ministry will begin in a small town in Galilee (Isaiah 9:1).
- He will enter Jerusalem riding on a donkey (Zechariah 9:9).
- Leading up to His death, He will be betrayed by a friend (Psalm 41:9).
- He will be betrayed for 30 pieces of silver (Zechariah 11:12).
- He will be accused by false witnesses and will not answer those accusations (Isaiah 53:7).
- He will be wounded and bruised (Isaiah 53:5).
- He will be spit upon (Isaiah 50:6).
- He will be mocked (Psalm 22:6-8).
- His hands and feet and side will be pierced (Psalm 22:16 and Zechariah 12:10).
- He will be killed with others (Isaiah 53:12).
- The people will shake their heads at Him (Psalm 109:25).
- The people will stare at Him as He dies (Psalm 22:17).
- People will gamble for His clothing (Psalm 22:18).
- And yet in spite of this, He will ask God to forgive them (Isaiah 53:12).
- While dying, He will suffer from extreme thirst and cheap wine will be offered to Him (Psalm 69:21).
- Although He will feel abandoned by God (Psalm 22:1), he will commit His spirit into God's hands (Psalm 31:5).
- Through all of this, not a single bone will be broken (Psalm 34:20).
- While He is dying, darkness will cover the land (Amos 8:9-10).
- And after He dies, He will be placed in a rich man's tomb (Isaiah 53:9).

We could go on and on. Scholars have estimated that there are well over 300 references from the Old Testament that prophesy various details concerning the life and death of Jesus Christ.

A number of years ago, two college professors tried to visualize the chances that only eight of the Old Testament prophecies regarding the Messiah could have been accidentally fulfilled in a single individual. They determined the odds of that happening to be 1 in 10^{17} . And then they put that figure in terms that we could understand, "Suppose that we take 10^{17} silver dollars and lay them on the state of Texas. They will cover that state to a depth of 2 feet. Now mark one of those silver dollars, stir the entire mass thoroughly, all over the state, blindfold a man, and tell him that he can travel as far as he wishes, but that he must pick up one silver dollar and say that this is the right one. What kind of chance would that man have? The same chance that the prophets would have had of writing only eight prophecies and having all eight come true in any one man." And again, that is for only eight of the more than 300 prophecies concerning Jesus from the Old Testament.

Conclusion:

So again, as I see it, the Bible itself is evidence for God's existence – not just because a particular verse tells us about God, but because the Bible itself would not be possible without divine intervention. I say this because 1.) The Bible is perfect – perfectly unified and without contradiction – even though it was written by 40 men, from different nations and social backgrounds, in three languages, over a period of more than 1500 years. Not only that, but 2.) The Bible also shows evidence of divine intervention because of the scientific and medical foreknowledge that we find in it – not that the Bible is a science or medical textbook (that is not the purpose of the Scriptures), but almost in passing, we find hundreds upon hundreds of little references here and there that are constantly being confirmed by what we now know to be true, even though those references were made hundreds of years before their time. And then finally, 3.) The Bible shows evidence of God's involvement because of the hundreds of prophecies that we find in it. We have somewhere between 300-400 prophecies just concerning the Messiah, and every single one of those was fulfilled in the life of Jesus. That kind of unity, that kind of precision, could not have been possible without some kind of divine intervention.

Because God is, he is worthy of our praise. Because God is, he is to be obeyed. And because God is, he is to be shared with others. We obey God by doing what he has asked us to do in the Scriptures. The Bible tells us that God sent his only Son as a sacrifice for our sins. We respond to that sacrifice with faithful obedience. The Bible commands that we repent and be baptized. In other words, we have a change of mind concerning sin, and then we allow ourselves to be buried with Christ in baptism, immersed in water for the forgiveness of our sins. If you would like to discuss it further, let us know. If you have something we need to pray about, we would invite you to write your concern down and bring it to the front. But if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com