

The Shortest Leap: The Rational Underpinnings of Faith in Jesus – Discussion Questions

Introduction

1. What is a worldview? What types of questions does a worldview address? Can you describe your own worldview? Where did you get your worldview?
2. Do you identify with one or more of these common beliefs? Why? On what evidence do you base these beliefs?
 - a) All religions are basically the same.
 - b) All paths lead to God. Traditional Christianity is too closed-minded.
 - c) You just have to be a good person to get into heaven.
 - d) I will believe in God if he does [fill in the blank] for me, or if he gives me [fill in the blank].
 - e) God is love, so he loves everyone no matter what.
 - f) My spiritual beliefs work for me, so I don't feel the need to investigate others.
 - g) God is impossible to prove, so there is no need to figure out if he exists.
 - h) I don't believe in God because I believe only the natural world exists.
3. Why is the claim, "There is no absolute truth," a logical contradiction?
4. What is the difference between the belief in religious freedom and the belief that all religions are equally true?
5. How are all worldviews, including the atheistic worldview, based on leaps of faith?
6. What other truth claim is someone making when he or she states: "I will believe in God if he can be proven with 100% certainty"?
7. How can we go about investigating the truth of an unseen God? How is it similar to the work of scientists, historians, and crime scene investigators?
8. What are some common ways people reject Christianity for emotional reasons? How is it similar to judging the value of a treasure covered with barnacles?
9. What did St. Augustine mean when he encouraged people not to "judge a philosophy by its abuse"?
10. What are your feelings as you embark on this overview of the rational evidence for Christianity? Do you truly want to see this evidence, or are you—in a little way—hoping you can refute it?

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Part I: The Scientific Evidence

Chapter 1: Out to the Stars

1. Why has an apparent conflict between science and belief in God arisen in the last few centuries? How does it help resolve the conflict to view God as the “Supreme Engineer” instead of a “God of the gaps”?
2. If the universe has a beginning, what are the philosophical implications regarding the origin of this universe?
3. What are some theories that scientists have proposed to explain that a finite universe need not require a divine creator?
4. What are some issues with the multiverse theory? Can it be proven?
5. Why is it not necessary to discover what created a divine Creator?
6. What does it mean to say the universe had to be “finely tuned” in order to exist and to enable life to exist?
7. What are some examples of those finely tuned parameters? What are the conclusions we can draw from this precise tuning? Could it have happened by blind chance? Why or why not?
8. What about the position of the Earth enables discoveries about the universe?
9. How does the speed at which time flows change depending on the force of gravity? Why are six days from the Creator’s perspective the same as 16 billion years from a modern-day Earth perspective?
10. How do the days of Genesis in the Bible match up with the scientific evidence for the origin of the universe, the sun, the earth, single-celled organisms and plants, a transparent atmosphere, more complex life forms, and modern humans?

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Chapter 2: Into the Cell

1. What is *abiogenesis*? Why have some scientists proposed that life began in a different part of the universe (*panspermia*) and not on Earth?
2. How would you explain the theory of evolution by natural selection? Why does it seem to explain the origins of all life forms so well?
3. What is *irreducible complexity*? Can you explain how a mousetrap displays this characteristic?
4. What problems arise with the theory of evolution by unguided natural selection when you consider biochemical processes that have multiple, interdependent parts?
5. Why is the bacterial flagellum so similar to a machine that is designed by humans? How is it irreducibly complex?
6. Why would it be so difficult—and therefore very unlikely—for an irreducibly complex system to arise from unguided evolution?
7. Try to explain how the order of nucleotides (A, C, G, and U) translates into the order of amino acids in a protein. How are these four nucleotides like the letters of the alphabet?
8. What is the meaning of the terms in the three tests for determining whether something is an accident or designed: *necessary*, *contingent*, *simple*, *complex*, *ad hoc*, and *specific*?
9. Can you define “specified complexity”? What are some examples of specified complexity in the world?
10. How is DNA like a computer program, a book, or other types of information? What does this reveal about its origin?

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Chapter 3: Back in Time

1. What future discoveries did Darwin expect fossil hunters would find that would prove his theories? Instead, what has been found?
2. What is the Cambrian Explosion? Why does this present a conundrum for the theory of unguided evolution?
3. Even if we discovered all of the intermediate forms in the fossil record, would this disprove the existence of God? Why or why not?
4. What have anthropologists discovered about the types of tools first used by humans who lived between 40,000 and 150,000 years ago?
5. What does the fossil record indicate about the development of the modern human brain?
6. Why would it be very difficult for human language and communication to have evolved through chance?
7. What are some ways to visualize the complexity of the human brain? How have some scientists described the computing power and storage capacity of the human brain?
8. How does the scientific evidence support the existence of a single ancestral couple from whom all humans descended? What is the time range during which this ancestral couple lived, and when did their ancestors migrate out of Africa?
9. How is the anthropological evidence for early human culture and religious beliefs consistent with the claim that humans were created in the image of God?
10. What are some communicable attributes of God that humans, as opposed to animals, share, albeit imperfectly? How does this lend credibility to the Bible's description of God and humans?

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Chapter 4: Science and God

1. Can you list the seven primary lines of scientific evidence for God that were presented in the last three chapters?
2. Can you list the three main leaps of faith that materialists must make to defend their belief that there is no Creator?
3. This chapter summarizes seven conclusions that we can draw from the evidence regarding the nature of God. What are these seven conclusions, and how is the biblical God consistent with them?
4. Why must God be infinite? Why can there only be one infinite Being?
5. How are pantheistic religions inconsistent with the concept of an infinite Creator who is distinct from his creation?
6. If God existed before the creation of the physical realm, in what other realm could he be? If God is in this other realm, could there also be other creatures there?
7. Why are miracles possible, given an all-powerful Creator who exists outside the physical realm?
8. How would you define these three terms: omniscient, logical, and wise? How does the scientific evidence regarding the origin of the universe and the complexity of life require that there be a Creator who is omniscient, logical, and wise?
9. How does a personal God differ from an impersonal force? In what ways does the Bible describe God as a personal God?
10. What aspects of the world give us a hint that God loves humans? (For now, think of the aspects of the world that are beautiful, as we will address the problem of evil in a later chapter.)

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Part II: The Historical Evidence

Chapter 5: Please Believe Me!

1. How is the Bible consistent in its message, despite the variety of historical periods, authors, literary styles, and topics? Can you summarize the main storyline of the Bible?
2. What is *general revelation*, and how does it differ from *specific revelation*? What types of information about God do each convey?
3. How is Christianity unique among world religions in that the truth of its claims depends on historical events? Why does it matter so much to the validity of Christianity that Jesus really existed, that he died on the cross, and that he rose again?
4. What are the three tests of historicity that historiographers use to determine whether a historical document is truthful and accurately describes events that actually happened?
5. Why is it so important that the authors of the New Testament documents claim to have been eyewitnesses of the events they record?
6. Why does it matter that the author of the Books of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles really was Luke, the doctor who accompanied Paul on his travels, including his journey to Rome?
7. Who was Theophilus, and why did the author of Luke and Acts sound desperate to make him believe that what he was writing wasn't made up?
8. Can you name at least five instances in Luke, John, Acts, and 1 John where the author claims to have been an eyewitness of Jesus or to have interviewed eyewitnesses?
9. What is a creed, and why do scholars believe that 1 Corinthians 15 contains one of the earliest Christian creeds? Why does it matter that it was written so soon after Jesus' death?
10. How many of Jesus' original disciples (except Judas Iscariot) were killed because they refused to recant? What is the difference between dying for a strongly held belief and dying for something that you have seen with your own eyes?

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Chapter 6: The Eyewitness Details

1. What are three types of details in the Gospel accounts (covered in this chapter) that support the authors' claims that they are truthfully recording eyewitness testimony about Jesus?
2. According to psychological research, in what circumstances are our memories the most detailed? What are common characteristics of eyewitness accounts of these events, and how are the accounts about Jesus similar?
3. What are examples of unnecessary details that are included in the Gospels? Why do these unnecessary details demonstrate that these stories are eyewitness accounts?
4. What detail did Peter and John notice in the empty tomb that made them believe that Jesus had risen from the dead? Why was this detail so convincing?
5. Why is the Gospel of John considered more likely than the other Synoptic Gospels to be a legend about Jesus? How can you rebut the argument that John's account is legendary?
6. Why does Richard Bauckham believe the inclusion of named individuals (who aren't in positions of power) throughout the Gospels is a sign that they are eyewitness accounts?
7. What is the criterion of embarrassment?
8. What are some examples of embarrassing information in the Gospel accounts that would have been excluded if someone biased in favor of Christianity were inventing them?
9. How do confusing or counterproductive statements in the Gospel accounts support the claim that they were neither concocted nor altered by later church leaders?
10. What are some examples of confusing statements that Christians who wanted to make up a story to win converts would not have included?

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Chapter 7: Not a Myth

1. Describe the Egyptian myth of Osiris, Isis, and Horus. In what ways do skeptics claim these stories influenced Christianity?
2. Describe the Greek myth of Dionysus (equivalent to the Roman myths of Bacchus) and the effect that this god had on his followers. What miracles did Dionysus perform? In what ways do skeptics claim Dionysus influenced Christianity?
3. Describe the Greek myth of Adonis. In what way did Adonis supposedly influence Christian beliefs, according to skeptics?
4. Describe the Phrygian myth of Attis and Cybele (worship of whom eventually moved to Greece and Rome). What did the priests of this pagan religion practice, and how did the Roman senate limit this practice? How did this myth influence Christianity, according to skeptics?
5. What are some reasons people claim the stories of Jesus were based on Mithraism?
6. What time period was the cult of Mithras active, according to archaeological evidence?
7. What are the ways that Christianity differs from Mithraism, according to ancient historian Edwin Yamauchi?
8. How do you counter the argument that Christianity was influenced by Osiris, Isis, and Horus, Dionysus, Adonis, Attis and Mithras?
9. Why do people love stories of redemption, sacrificial love, good defeating evil, and other aspects of the Gospel stories of Jesus?
10. What do you think Timothy Keller meant when he stated, "Jesus is not one more story pointing to these underlying realities. Jesus is the underlying reality to which all the stories point"?

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Chapter 8: Eyewitness Testimony

1. By way of review, can you summarize the main lines of *internal evidence* covered in Chapters 5 and 6 that demonstrate the historicity of the New Testament accounts?
2. Why is it unlikely that the leaders of the early Christian church changed the Gospel stories? How might they be different if they were able to change them?
3. What is the Atrian Curse, and can you describe events that led up to it?
4. How do the accounts of miracles in the New Testament differ from Zeus' miracle that changed the direction of the sun and the miracles described in the last chapters?
5. What was Jesus' primary purpose when he performed miracles? What did he aim to teach through his miracles?
6. How does the account of Jesus' resurrection in the Gnostic document, the *Gospel of Peter*, differ from the New Testament accounts of this event? How are the events describing the discovery of the empty tomb in the New Testament more believable?
7. If two authors write accounts that are consistent in the primary details but differ in the secondary details, how does this strengthen the case that they are each telling the truth?
8. How can you explain differences in the chronology of the events in the various Gospel stories?
9. What did the early church leader Papias say about the order of events in Mark's Gospel? From whom did Papias get his information?
10. What are the differences between the four different accounts of the discovery of the empty tomb? How do these differences demonstrate varied perspectives of the event, rather than that the stories were invented?

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Chapter 9: More Eyewitness Evidence

1. For the sake of review, what are six main lines of evidence that have been covered in previous chapters that provide support for the trustworthiness of the accounts of Jesus' life?
2. Why is it important that the documents describing Jesus' life and the early church were (a) written within the lifetime of possible eyewitnesses and (b) started to circulate in the same places where the events had occurred?
3. Why do many scholars believe that the Book of Acts was written before AD 62? Why is it likely that Luke was written before Acts, and that Mark was written before Luke?
4. What is the likely range of dates assigned to the seven Pauline epistles that scholars agree were written by Paul? What are examples of even earlier material that is included in the Pauline epistles?
5. What is especially significant about the description of Jesus in the creed or hymn that Paul includes in Philippians 2:9-11?
6. Why is it significant that the Jewish authors of the accounts of Jesus' life call him *kyrios*?
7. What is the distinction between oral history and oral tradition? Why is it more appropriate to classify the Gospel accounts of Jesus' life as oral history?
8. Why does Richard Bauckham claim that some individuals in the Gospel accounts are named, while others are not? What are some examples of this, and how does it explain the different names of the women in the resurrection accounts?
9. What are two narrative devices that are used in Mark and John to indicate that the stories are based on eyewitness testimony?
10. How are more than eighty percent of Jesus' sayings written, and how does this affect the reliability of oral transmission?

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Chapter 10: Secular Confirmation

1. What is the external evidence test of historicity? How does it compare to the internal evidence test discussed in chapters 5 through 9?
2. Why is it so important that Jesus is mentioned in other sources besides documents written by early Christians? Why are secular sources—especially those with an anti-Christian bias—helpful in proving that Jesus was a real person?
3. What are the four main conclusions about Jesus that we learn from Roman historian Tacitus?
4. What do we know from Roman historian Suetonius that confirms an event mentioned in Acts 18?
5. Describe the debate that was taking place in the ancient world, to which Roman historians Thallus and Phlegon contributed their thoughts. Why is it logical to conclude that they were talking about an event that happened at the death of Jesus?
6. What can we conclude from Pliny the Younger and the Roman emperors Trajan and Hadrian regarding what the early Christians believed about Jesus?
7. What can we glean about Jesus from the reference to “Yeshua” in the Talmud? Why is it surprising that the Talmud even mentions Jesus?
8. Why is there a debate regarding the authenticity of Josephus’ second reference to Jesus? Why is it plausible for a Jewish historian to describe Jesus in this way, according to New Testament scholar Gary Habermas?
9. What can we glean about Jesus from the Syrian, Mara Bar-Serapion?
10. What are the twelve main points that we learn about Jesus from just these twelve non-Christian sources, all written within one hundred fifty years of his death? How do the number of non-Christian and Christian sources mentioning Jesus compare to the number that mention Tiberius Caesar in the same 150 years?

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Chapter 11: Archeological Consistency

1. Before even reading this chapter, what evidence do we have from previous chapters that Jesus was an actual historical figure, not a myth?
2. How does archaeological evidence help to determine whether a document is mythological or describes true history?
3. Why is it important to confirm the historicity of the Old Testament, in addition to the New Testament (except for the parts that are allegorical or visionary)?
4. Describe the following discoveries and how they have confirmed details of the Old Testament: the Rosetta Stone, the Moabite Stone (or Mesha Stele), the Tel Dan inscription, the Ketef Hinnom scrolls, and the Dead Sea Scrolls.
5. Describe the rules that the scribes were required to follow when they copied the Hebrew Scriptures, as set out in the *Mishneh Torah*.
6. Why have many archeologists thought that the biblical Exodus must have happened in the 1200s BC? Why have these archeologists concluded that the story of the Exodus is a myth?
7. What is some of the evidence that David Rohl has summarized to support the historicity of the biblical stories of:
 - a. the arrival of the Israelites in Egypt
 - b. the increase in their population
 - c. their enslavement
 - d. the judgment of pharaoh, followed by the Israelites' departure from Egypt, and
 - e. their conquest of the land of Canaan (Jericho in particular)?
8. What is the evidence that Luke has an excellent attention to detail with regards to the historical details in the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts? How does this detail provide more reason to trust the truthfulness of these books, as well as the Gospels of Matthew and Mark?
9. What are some examples of archaeological confirmation of details in the Gospel of John?
10. What is the significance of the detail that both blood and water emerged from Jesus' body after a spear pierced his side?

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Chapter 12: The Chain of Testimony

1. What is the bibliographical test of historicity? What are the three components of this test?
2. What are some other ancient documents that historians consider trustworthy, and how do they compare to the New Testament documents in terms of elapsed time between the earliest copy and the original and the number of extant manuscripts?
3. How many manuscripts of the New Testament documents exist? What are the various types of manuscripts that are available to text critics in order to determine the content of the original documents?
4. Why do the original papyrus documents no longer exist? Is this a huge problem? Why or why not?
5. Describe the process whereby text critics compare extant manuscripts to each other in order to determine the most likely contents of the original document. What is the main assumption underlying this process?
6. What are the various causes of the vast majority of these variants, and how do they impact the meaning of the text? Do any central Christian beliefs stand or fall on these variants?
7. Describe the argument that skeptics make when they claim that the canonical Gospels' accounts of Jesus' life and teachings are simply the one opinion of Jesus that "won out" over other opinions. What do they mean by "early Christianities"?
8. Why are the beliefs of the Gnostic gospels so appealing to many people today?
9. What are the main differences between *The Gospel of Thomas* and the canonical Gospels? What are the main ways we can demonstrate that the *Gospel of Thomas* was written in Syria in the late second century?
10. If the *Gospel of Thomas* is the one Gnostic gospel that scholars have tried to demonstrate was written in the first century, and if it actually was written in the late second century, what can we then conclude about the Gnostic gospels' descriptions of Jesus' life and teachings?

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Chapter 13: Not Gnosticism

1. How does Gnosticism differ from the Bible with respect to its beliefs about God, creation, and the existence of evil?
2. What is meant by the term *Christology*? Does Gnosticism demonstrate “high Christology” or “low Christology”?
3. What is the *Christology* of traditional Christianity, and how does it differ from the various Gnostic beliefs about Jesus’ nature?
4. What do the Gnostic gospels teach about redemption? Does one’s soul or one’s body survive after death, or both?
5. How do the early Christian writers present Jesus following his death and resurrection, and how does this differ from the Gnostics’ presentation of Jesus?
6. Which type of redemption would you prefer? Why?
7. What did the Gnostics believe about who Jesus was and what he does for us?
8. According to the New Testament documents, why did Jesus come, and what does he do for us?
9. What did the Gnostics teach was necessary in order for humans to attain “spiritual enlightenment”?
10. What role do we play in attaining eternal life, according to the New Testament documents? How does this require humility and circumvent pride?

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Chapter 14: The Anti-Supernatural Opinions

1. What did the founder of the Jesus Seminar want to do for traditional Christians? How does this ironically contrast with what the traditional Jesus says he does for his disciples?
2. What is the Jesus Seminar? How do their numbers compare to the number of scholars in the field of New Testament studies?
3. How many Fellows were involved in voting whether Jesus really said or did what the New Testament claims he said or did?
4. What does the Jesus Seminar assume about the documents *Q* and the *Gospel of Thomas*? Why is this assumption flawed (see Chapter 12 for help, if necessary)?
5. What does the Jesus Seminar assume about the existence of God and a supernatural world? What does the scientific evidence reveal about their assumptions concerning God and the possibility of miracles?
6. Which group of traveling philosophers does the Jesus Seminar assume that Jesus resembled in word and deed? Why is this assumption flawed?
7. What is the most logical reason that the Jesus Seminar believes Jesus would never talk about the ending of the world, God's judgment of humanity, and other "apocalyptic" themes? Does the historical evidence support the idea that Jesus was in close contact with Greco-Roman philosophy, or that he was steeped in Jewish culture? What are the implications of this evidence for determining the true teachings of Jesus?
8. Why is it more likely that a narrative story about Jesus was composed earlier than a list of his sayings, like *Thomas* and the hypothetical *Q*?
9. Why does the Jesus Seminar disregard the rest of the New Testament in their assessment of who Jesus really was? Why is this illogical and bound to lead to a less accurate portrayal of Jesus?
10. Why does the Jesus Seminar think Jesus would only say short, pithy saying or parables that were easy to remember? What evidence demonstrates that this assumption is flawed?

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Chapter 15: Trusting the Selection

1. What do skeptics accuse the emperor Constantine and the bishop Athanasius of doing that significantly altered the selection of the New Testament canon?
2. How did the early churches store the manuscripts that they received as copies from other churches? How does their respectful treatment of the scrolls and codices demonstrate the importance they placed on which books they cared for and read in their services?
3. Describe the situation in the middle of the second century, when new documents started circulating?
4. What is *apostolicity*, and how did it determine whether a document was read in a church service or not?
5. Describe the evidence that the four gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John had already been generally accepted as the official stories of Jesus' life and teachings by the end of the second century, more than one hundred years before the Council of Nicaea.
6. Of the twenty-seven books in the New Testament, how many had not yet been fully accepted by all churches by the end of the second century?
7. What is the Muratorian fragment, and what can we glean from it regarding the state of the canon in the second century?
8. What is *catholicity*, and how did it determine whether a document should be included in the official canon?
9. What was the theological issue concerning Jesus' relationship to God the Father that the Council of Nicaea was called to address? What was the result of the vote?
10. How has this chapter affected your feelings about the process that the early church leaders followed in order to hand down to us the New Testament that we have today? Can you concisely state the reasons they selected the twenty-seven books that comprise the New Testament?

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Chapter 16: He Is Risen!

1. What are the implications for humanity if Jesus really did rise again from the dead in a transformed, physical body?
2. Why are Christians to be pitied more than all others, as Paul writes, if Jesus really did not rise from the dead? What is the point of being a Christian if the resurrection didn't happen?
3. Why did N. T. Wright spend more than 500 pages describing his research into the many cultures at the turn of the first century? What did he find regarding their beliefs regarding the transformed bodily resurrection of a single dead person in the middle of history?
4. How can we account for the fact that the worldview of so many people changed so dramatically overnight once the stories of Jesus' resurrection started to circulate?
5. What are the four "surprise features" of the resurrection stories in the four Gospels, according to N. T. Wright?
6. Why are these four features more consistent with a historically accurate, eyewitness account of Jesus' resurrection, rather than with the claim that the resurrection stories were invented?
7. What are the "five minimal facts" that virtually all New Testament scholars, atheist and traditional alike, agree upon?
8. What are the secular historical sources that make scholars confident that Jesus really died by crucifixion?
9. Why can we trust what the New Testament documents say about the overnight transformation of the disciples, as well as Paul's and Jesus' brother James' conversions?
10. Describe the three lines of evidence that demonstrate that there was no body in Jesus' tomb beginning the Sunday after his burial.

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Chapter 17: He Is Risen Indeed!

1. Why is it unlikely that the claim that Jesus rose from the dead was the result of legendary development?
2. What is the evidence that the story of Jesus' resurrection was not just intended as a beautiful symbol of rebirth and renewal?
3. Summarize the evidence countering the claim that Jesus' resurrection stories were copied from other myths and legends. You are welcome to also incorporate evidence you remember from previous chapters.
4. Why isn't it plausible that the disciples stole Jesus' body?
5. If someone else stole Jesus' body, how does this not account for the five minimal facts?
6. Why is it unlikely that the disciples thought Jesus had risen from the dead because they went to the wrong tomb?
7. What are the problems with the theory that Jesus didn't really die, which is why he appeared to his disciples after the crucifixion?
8. Explain the various types of theories that claim psychological phenomena account for the resurrection appearances. What are the problems with these theories?
9. What is the weakness of using a combination of theories to account for the five minimal facts?
10. Which two aspects of Jewish worship changed overnight soon after Jesus' crucifixion? Why is the truth of the resurrection the best explanation for these changes and for the birth of the Christian church?

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Part III: The Biblical Evidence

Chapter 18: Claims of Divinity

1. How is a logical journey to the truth similar to an ascent of a mountain to see a view?
2. Why is it so offensive to many people to claim that Jesus is God?
3. Based on the evidence presented in the first seventeen chapters, what are the three main conclusions we can draw?
4. Why would it have been so unlikely for Jews to believe that Jesus could be God? What is the most likely explanation for the overnight change in the worldview of formerly pious, law abiding Jews?
5. What are a few examples from the New Testament that the earliest Christians considered Jesus to be equal to God?
6. What are a few examples of Jesus' own statements from the Book of John that indicate he considered himself God?
7. What are a few examples of Jesus' own statements from the Synoptic Gospels that indicate he considered himself God?
8. Why did Jesus use the term "Son of Man" to refer to himself? At what point in his earthly life did he indicate that he was going to come like the "son of man" referenced in the Old Testament? What did he say?
9. What did Jesus say to the paralyzed man that raised questions in the minds of the teachers of the law? How did Jesus demonstrate that he had authority to do this?
10. Explain what Jesus probably meant when he referenced Psalm 110, where King David wrote, "The Lord says to my Lord." How was Jesus expressing both his deity and humanity?

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Chapter 19: Divinity on Display

1. Explain the acronym that Bowman and Komoszewski developed as a way to remember how the New Testament portrays Jesus as God: HANDS.
2. What are some of the honors that early Christians gave to Jesus that the Old Testament claims should be given to God alone? What are some examples of times that Jesus or his followers claim that Jesus deserves these honors?
3. What are some of the attributes that Jesus shares with God? What are some examples of when Jesus demonstrated these divine attributes?
4. How did Jesus purposefully humble himself through the incarnation? Why might it have appeared that he did not possess the full attributes of God while he was in human flesh?
5. Provide a few names normally reserved for God in the Old Testament that are then given to Jesus in the New Testament?
6. What are some examples of what the disciples were able to do “in Jesus’ name”?
7. What are some examples of Jesus’ deeds that the Jewish people had expected only God could do?
8. What does it mean that Jesus shares the same “seat” as God?
9. How do Jesus’ character and actions demonstrate his divinity? Why is it so unlikely that Jesus is merely an invention of mankind?
10. What was it about Jesus that caused Napoleon, a man who had experienced the height of human power, to so admire him?

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Chapter 20: Jesus' Coming Foretold

1. How did Jesus fulfill the first verse of Isaiah 61? How did he fulfill the first part of the second verse of Isaiah 61? What is the likely reason Jesus stopped before reading the second part of verse 2 of Isaiah 61 in the synagogue before he started his ministry?
2. Why is the fulfillment of prophecy strong evidence that the Bible is God's Word and that Jesus is who he claimed to be?
3. What promise did God make to three generations (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) regarding their descendants?
4. What did Jacob's deathbed statement to his son Judah indicate would happen through Judah's descendants?
5. What did Nathan the prophet tell David that God said concerning one of his descendants?
6. How does the author of Hebrews explain that Jesus is the fulfillment of Psalm 110? By way of review, why did Jesus refer to this psalm, and how is it evidence that Jesus declared he was God?
7. What was the sign that God gave to Ahaz as the Assyrian army was closing in on him? For whom else did God intend this to be a sign?
8. What else did Isaiah foretell about this child who would be born?
9. What does Solomon pray for in Psalm 72 that concerns an event relating to Jesus' birth? What are other aspects of this psalm that seem to relate to Jesus?
10. What message was Jesus sending when he rode into Jerusalem on the foal of a donkey that had never been ridden? How did this differ from what his fellow Jews were expecting upon the arrival of the Messiah?

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Chapter 21: Crucifixion and Resurrection Foretold

1. Why did many of Jesus' fellow Jews not recognize him as the Messiah? What kind of Messiah were they expecting?
2. Explain the main ways that Isaiah's description of the "Suffering Servant" points to Jesus.
3. What is the significance of the suffering servant being "raised and lifted up" and "highly exalted"? What is another meaning of the Aramaic word for "exalted"? Why is this double meaning so applicable in Jesus' case?
4. Why does the Bible often compare humans to sheep? Why does God claim that he himself must be the shepherd for his people? How is Jesus a fulfillment of this prophecy?
5. Was Jesus killed, or did he give his life? Provide some evidence from the Bible that helps us know.
6. Why did Jesus willingly endure the cross? What was "the joy set before him"?
7. How is Psalm 22 a picture of death by crucifixion?
8. What was one important discovery made in 1997 when a scroll from a site near Qumran was rediscovered? How did this clarify the meaning of one of the words in Psalm 22?
9. Why do Christians believe Jesus' death and resurrection fulfilled the last cry of Psalm 22: "He has done it!"?
10. What does David write in one of his psalms that demonstrates his trust that God would not allow him to die? Who else did David trust God would not allow to "see decay"?

The Shortest Leap: The Rational Underpinnings of Faith in Jesus – Discussion Questions

Chapter 22: The Victory to Come

1. After he displayed his power, why did Jesus resist the people's efforts to make him king?
2. How does Daniel describe the coming of the Messiah, who is "like a son of man"? At what point in his life did Jesus say that he would one day come "on the clouds"?
3. Why is it somewhat surprising that the Jewish nation was expecting the Messiah to call people from all the nations of the earth?
4. What is *shalom*? What are some ways that the Old Testament describes the time when the Messiah will establish shalom?
5. What does it mean to "fear the Lord"? Why would people fear God upon the arrival of the Messiah?
6. What are some ways that the Old Testament describes God as destroying death?
7. When reading the Bible, what is the first prophecy about Jesus that we come across?
8. Who do Christian scholars believe are the "offspring of the woman" and the "offspring of the serpent"? What will happen to each?
9. What are ways that Jesus and the apostle Paul refer to this Genesis prophecy?
10. What is the oldest prophecy about Jesus in the Old Testament? What does Job long for that will make it possible for him to approach God? How does Jesus fulfill Job's yearning?

The Shortest Leap: The Rational Underpinnings of Faith in Jesus – Discussion Questions

Chapter 23: Old Testament Objects

1. What did Jesus tell the two men on the road to Emmaus—and his disciples later the same day—about how the Old Testament relates to him? Which words did Jesus use to describe the Hebrew Scriptures?
2. Why is a study of the Old Testament helpful for understanding who Jesus is and what he came to earth to accomplish?
3. What is a symbol? What are some types of symbols that we use? Why are symbols useful?
4. How does Noah's ark point to Jesus? Why was Noah commended for his faith in Hebrews 11?
5. How does the stairway in Jacob's dream point to Jesus? What did Jesus say about himself that correlates with this symbol?
6. What is manna, and how does it point to Jesus? What did the manna do for the Israelites, and how is it like what Jesus does for his followers today?
7. Why was the tabernacle built? Why is it structured with three concentric sections? How does it point to Jesus as a whole?
8. What is the symbolism of the altar, the laver, the showbread, the lampstand, the altar of incense, and the curtain that separates the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place?
9. How do animal sacrifices teach us about God's ultimate plan for salvation? Why were sacrifices needed to please a God who is perfectly holy and just, but who also loves his people?
10. What is the significance of the ark of the covenant and the mercy seat? How were the people to enter into the presence of God, and how did Jesus change that?

The Shortest Leap: The Rational Underpinnings of Faith in Jesus – Discussion Questions

Chapter 24: Old Testament Fathers

1. What were the main consequences of Adam and Eve's disobedience of God's one command not to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?
2. What can you say in response to the claim that it's "not fair" that all descendants of Adam and Eve have inherited the state of not being able *not* to sin (i.e. they are not able to live a perfectly sin-free life)?
3. Can you explain the concepts of (1) *posse peccare*, *posse non peccare*, (2) *non posse peccare*, (3) *posse non peccare*, and (4) *non posse non peccare*? What about the related concepts of *posse mori*, *posse non mori*, *non posse mori*, and *non posse non mori*?
4. In which state were Adam and Eve? In which state is God? In which state are all humans who don't have faith in Jesus? And in which state are those who have faith in Jesus now, and then after they die?
5. What is one possible reason that God gave Adam and Eve *both* the ability not to sin *and* the ability to sin (admitting that we finite creatures are incapable of completely understanding God's thoughts and ways!)?
6. How does Adam foreshadow Jesus by means of contrast?
7. What do we learn about faith from Abel's offering to God? What does this say about one's outward behavior?
8. What was the promise God made to Abram, and how did God demonstrate that he was serious about it? What was strange about the way God made this promise? What is the meaning?
9. Why did God credit Abraham as "righteous"? What is the significance of this verse?
10. What did Abram not have to do that God would eventually do himself? Why did God do this? What are some ways that Joseph foreshadowed Jesus?

The Shortest Leap: The Rational Underpinnings of Faith in Jesus – Discussion Questions

Chapter 25: Old Testament Leaders

1. How is Moses' leading his people across the Red Sea out of slavery in Egypt, through the wilderness, and to the promised land, a picture of the work that Jesus has done, does, and will do for his people?
2. How can one interpret the rod, the rock, and the water in the story of the Israelites at *Massah* and *Meribah*?
3. How does the worship of the Golden Calf reflect human behavior in our society today? What does Moses mean when he asks God to "blot his name out" of the "book of life"? How does this point to Jesus?
4. Why couldn't Moses "see" God? How did God allow Moses to see him? What is Jesus' role in enabling us to "see" God? How does he do this in more than one way?
5. What is the significance of the staff with the bronze serpent that Moses lifted up to heal people from the serpents that were killing them? How does the staff with the bronze serpent point to what Jesus did for his people?
6. Why was it odd for Samuel to choose the youngest of Jesse's sons to anoint as king? What does this tell us about God?
7. How does the young David's defeat of the frightening warrior, Goliath, point to Jesus? How were David and Goliath representatives of their people, just as Jesus and Adam are representative of theirs?
8. What aspects of his job as a shepherd translate to David's role as king? How does the shepherd symbolize the leaders God gave the Israelites? How is Jesus the ultimate "Good Shepherd"?
9. How are even the greatest heroes of the Bible imperfect? How does this give us a longing for a perfect king?
10. Why didn't Jesus save himself when he was on the cross? How is this a demonstration of both perfect justice and perfect mercy?

The Shortest Leap: The Rational Underpinnings of Faith in Jesus – Discussion Questions

Chapter 26: Old Testament Outsiders

1. What had the Israelites done to qualify them to become God's chosen people, whom he set apart from other nations?
2. Why did Tamar believe she had a right to a child in the line of Judah? What had been done to her to cause her to feel wronged? How are Tamar's sinful actions evidence that she had faith that God wanted to use her? How did God use Tamar, despite her sin?
3. In what ways was Rahab an outsider? And how did she demonstrate faith in the God of Israel? What is the symbolism of the scarlet cord that Rahab hung in her window?
4. What are some ways that Rahab points to the future salvation of non-Jewish people?
5. How did Ruth display faith in the God of Israel, before she even set out on the journey back to Israel with her mother-in-law?
6. What is a "guardian-redeemer," and why would God set up this means of helping people who have fallen into debt and/or poverty? How does the guardian-redeemer point to Jesus?
7. How was Mephibosheth an outsider, especially with respect to King David? Why did David give Mephibosheth a seat at the king's table, and how is this analogous to sinful humans feasting with God for eternity?
8. How is Naaman an "insider with one problem that makes him an outsider"?
9. How is Naaman symbolic of all humans, and how is his cleansing in the Jordan River symbolic of what salvation by faith in Jesus accomplishes?
10. Why did Jesus have to be baptized? Why did he have to drink the cup of wrath? What is the significance of these two actions for a believer?

The Shortest Leap: The Rational Underpinnings of Faith in Jesus – Discussion Questions

Chapter 27: Spring and Summer Feasts

1. What is the difference between the Gregorian calendar that we use today and the Hebrew calendar? Describe the ways the two calendars record the passage of time, and the way they adjust the calendar to ensure that the seasons fall at the same time each year.
2. How many festival seasons are there, and how many feasts were appointed by God in Leviticus?
3. What did the Passover commemorate in the history of the Israelites?
4. What happened if a family did not kill a lamb and put the blood on the doorframe of their home? Did it matter if they were the Pharaoh's family or the family of a prisoner, or if they were Israelite or not?
5. What were the elements of the Passover meal, and how do they point to Jesus? What are the *afikomen* and the *zeroa*?
6. What is the significance that there was no lamb served at the Last Supper Jesus had with his disciples?
7. What two other feasts follow Passover and make up the rest of the spring pilgrimage festival?
8. What is the reason for eating only unleavened bread? What are some ways that the matzo represents the ultimate sacrifice for human sin?
9. What is one way that the Offering of Firstfruits points to Jesus and what he has done for his followers?
10. What is the significance of Pentecost to the Jew, and now to the Christian? What happened on the first Pentecost after Jesus' resurrection? How does the giving of the Law compare to the giving of the Spirit, and how does this describe the way the Old Covenant worked compared to the New Covenant?

The Shortest Leap: The Rational Underpinnings of Faith in Jesus – Discussion Questions

Chapter 28: Fall and Winter Feasts

1. Describe the significance of the three feasts of the autumn pilgrimage festival. How does the emphasis on good deeds versus sins compare to what Jesus has done for his followers?
2. When will the final shofar sound, according to many Jewish Christians?
3. What happened on Yom Kippur in ancient Israel?
4. How did the celebration of Yom Kippur change after the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 AD? How do modern Jews celebrate Yom Kippur?
5. How do the traditions of Yom Kippur (in ancient times and in modern times) point to Jesus?
6. What does the Feast of Booths commemorate? What were two ancient ceremonies during this feast, and how do they point to Jesus?
7. What are the stories of rescue in the feasts of Hanukkah and Purim? How does Jesus represent the ultimate rescue of God's people?
8. What is the significance of the weekly Sabbath? Why did Jesus heal on the Sabbath, and what did he teach about the Sabbath?
9. How is Jesus the fulfillment of the Sabbath rest?
10. How do the symbols, people, and feasts of the Old Testament provide evidence that Jesus really is the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises?

The Shortest Leap: The Rational Underpinnings of Faith in Jesus – Discussion Questions

Part IV: The Explanatory Evidence

Chapter 29: Human Nature and Purpose

1. What is wrong with Mark Twain's claim that "faith is believing in something you know ain't true"? What is a better way to explain faith?
2. What are the six main lines of evidence in support of the biblical God from astronomy, physics, biochemistry, molecular biology, paleontology, and anthropology?
3. What are some ways we discussed in Chapters 4 that the scientific evidence is consistent with the way the Bible describes God, the creation of the universe, and the nature of human beings?
4. How is the evidence for Christianity similar to a castle? Can just a few "arrows" that are shot by skeptics destroy this castle?
5. What is the meaning of "explanatory power"? How does this concept relate to the model of the sun revolving around the earth versus the earth revolving around the sun?
6. What are some ways that the world is both wonderful and terrible? What are ways that humans are both extremes?
7. How does the Bible explain the "greatness" and "wretchedness" of humans?
8. How do atheists like Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx explain why humans look to religion to fulfill their desires? How does the Christian worldview explain these human desires?
9. What are three things that the Bible teaches regarding God's creation of the world and its implications for meaning, purpose, and hope in life?
10. What's wrong with the idea that we'll be bodiless spirits in heaven? How is this different from what the Bible teaches about heaven?

The Shortest Leap: The Rational Underpinnings of Faith in Jesus – Discussion Questions

Chapter 30: Morality and Other Aspects of Real Life

1. How can you respond to someone who claims that morality is relative, and that every person must determine what is right or wrong for himself or herself?
2. Explain the “Sez who?” argument described by Arthur Laffer. Why can we reply, “Sez who?” to all moral claims?
3. Explain Hume’s Law. That is, what does it mean that science can only explain what “is” and not what “ought to be”?
4. What is the problem with voting for moral laws through the political process? How does this demonstrate the existence of universal moral absolutes?
5. How can the Christian God have been love for all eternity? Can the same be true of a unipersonal God (as opposed to a triune God)?
6. What is one possible explanation that God did not want humans to use any tools when they built the altar? What is the theological message that God may have been delivering to his people?
7. How is the sense of beauty as an end in itself more consistent with a “divine Artist” than with a universe created through blind chance?
8. How is Christianity consistent with experiences of supernatural phenomena, such as NDEs, miracles, and so forth?
9. How does Christianity’s understanding of the supernatural realm explain the extremes of good and evil in the world?
10. What did Elisha’s servant see when God opened his eyes? How does this symbolize what God must do before anyone can receive Jesus as their Savior?

The Shortest Leap: The Rational Underpinnings of Faith in Jesus – Discussion Questions

Chapter 31: Unique Among Philosophies

1. What are a few unique aspects of Christianity with regard to suffering, historicity, love, and heaven?
2. How is the “renewal of all things” that Jesus talked about prophesied in the Old Testament? And how is it described in Revelation?
3. Describe the “trajectory” of all other human religions besides Christianity (when it is properly understood)? What are a few examples of this works-based, humans-up-to-God trajectory?
4. How do atheists or irreligious people follow the same trajectory, though it is not to a god or gods?
5. What is the trajectory of the gospel of Jesus Christ? Why is this trajectory necessary if there is any hope for sinful humans?
6. Why can't God just forgive sins? Why can't he just let us into heaven with him? That is, why did Jesus have to die?
7. Why is grace so contrary to the natural inclination of humans? Why do we tend to dislike the idea of grace?
8. How do believers respond to God's law, once we truly “get” what he has done for us?
9. If we say we have faith in Jesus, but we aren't showing any desire to obey and know Jesus more, what is this possibly indicating, according to Matthew and James?
10. What did God tell his people before he gave them the law? Why did he do this? How does this show the gospel trajectory? What are three reasons that God provided his law?

The Shortest Leap: The Rational Underpinnings of Faith in Jesus – Discussion Questions

Chapter 32: Power to Truly Transform

1. Explain how the carrot and the stick motivate humans.
2. How is the human heart like the drive shaft of a car? What powers the human heart?
3. Describe the Jewish understanding of the human heart. What role does the heart play in our lives?
4. What results when we get the carrot or when we avoid the stick? What results when we fail to get the carrot or when we get hit by the stick? How does this lead to a roller coaster ride, as well as relational issues?
5. Why do we compare ourselves to others and look down on certain people?
6. When we fail, what are the various “modes” that we shift into, and why do we do it? When we’re successful, why do we like to take the credit?
7. In the carrot and the stick world, explain what powers the human heart. How does the gospel change the drive shaft of the human heart?
8. How do we, over time, replace the treasures of our heart with God? How does this change our motivations?
9. What are a few ways that the gospel changes our relationships? How can it change our attitude about suffering and give us hope?
10. How can you identify the “treasures of your heart,” that is, the idols that you worship? How do we go about replacing those idols with God?

The Shortest Leap: The Rational Underpinnings of Faith in Jesus – Discussion Questions

Chapter 33: Receiving the Free Gift

1. Who do you say that Jesus is? Why is the answer to this question so important? What happens if you just ignore the question?
2. What did Jesus mean when he said the people were like children playing pretend in the marketplace? How does this describe people today who refuse to listen to the evidence for Christianity? What are some reasons people provide for not wanting to become a Christian?
3. How is Christianity like a pure gold treasure that has accumulated barnacles over the centuries? What are types of barnacles that have covered the treasure?
4. What are the two ways that people try to avoid God? What does it require for people who avoid God in each way to have a personal relationship with Jesus?
5. Why do both the younger brother and the elder brothers dislike the gospel? What are the differing reasons for their dislike of the gospel?
6. Do you identify more with the younger brother or the older brother? Why? How have you erred in thinking the Gospel was about you and your own behavior rather than faith in Jesus' work alone?
7. Though people think believing in the Christian God will cause them to lose their freedom, how does faith in Jesus actually lead to freedom? How is freedom through obedience to God like a sailboat that is gliding smoothly through the water?
8. How important is the strength of one's faith when it comes to receiving eternal life? How important is the object of faith in order to receive eternal life? What quote from the Bible illustrates the fact that one can "believe" but still have "unbelief"?
9. What are the three main components of saving faith in Jesus?
10. What are the rings in the "dartboard of evidence"? What is the bullseye? Have you "hit the bullseye" of faith?