# **Introduction**

My brother Colin is a committed Christian. He is disturbed by the fact that I am not a Christian and over the years has always done his very best to convert me to his faith. In addition to well-intentioned discussions about my beliefs Colin has sent me a number of books that he has felt might be helpful in this quest. I have found it hard to read many of these books in their entirety because I often reach a point where I find myself strongly disagreeing with the points being made and the logic that has been used to support the position taken.

When I got to page 100 of the last book that Colin sent, *Disappointment With God*, and could read no further, I felt that it was time that I set out as clearly as I could why I did not follow a religion. I intend to send this to Colin so that he will understand that despite his best endeavors I am a hopeless cause and he would be better to invest his missionary zeal on someone else.

If I pass this on to anyone other than Colin, I want you to know that I am not trying to persuade you (or anyone else) to my point of view. I just thought that it was worth explaining why I had reached the decision about religion that I have, and to let you know that I am comfortable with the choice that I have made not to follow any religion.

# **Why reaching a decision on religion is important**

At some stage in their life most people grapple with many of the same questions: what is life; does my life have a purpose; is there a greater God who controls my destiny; should I follow a religion and if so which one; do I have a soul; what happens when I die, do I just cease to exist or does my soul live on for eternity; is there a heaven and a hell and if so which one will my soul go to.

I believe that if we want to achieve peace of mind then we should consider each of these questions, draw our own conclusions from what we are taught and what we experience, and direct our life accordingly.

# **The Journey**

I was raised in a Christian household where both parents frequently expressed their faith. While they did not set an example on how to live a harmonious Christian life because they often argued, they both attended church regularly and in my view made a genuine effort to live their lives in accordance with the teachings of the Bible.

From an early age, I was told that the Bible was the word of God and should be revered. My mother was devout and could quote passages from the Bible to cover most circumstances. My father had copies of the Bible in many different languages and spent hours each week reading the Bible in whatever language he was studying at that time.

I don’t really understand why, but from about 11 years of age (the beginning of 1st year at high school) I found myself asking questions about the validity and value of what I was being taught in religious lessons, both at school and at Sunday school. When I asked really simply questions about stories such as Noah’s Ark, like “what did the all the animals eat?” and “where did all the water go after the flood if it was deep enough to cover the world up to the peak of the highest mountain?”, I was told that you just had to take what you were told “on faith”. This seemed greatly at odds with the whole thrust of our education, particularly science, where we were being taught not to accept things on face value but look for proof.

When I was at high school I was hopeless at most sports so I channeled my energies into reading, inter school debating (and chatting up girls). Often at lunch time when other kids were playing ball sports I would go to the library and read books on history, biology and geography. I sometimes got into trouble for turning up late to the first class after lunch because I had become engrossed in something that I was reading and had to be told to go to class by the librarian.

I can recall reading about the various religions in different regions like Asia, South America and the Middle East and trying to understand what these religions were about. It intrigued me that so many people believed that their religion provided the answers to the meaning of life and gave the exclusive way to an afterlife, as the Christian religion did.

When I was about 14 years old, I spent most Sunday afternoons reading. We did not have to work on the farm because it was the sabbath and my school friends lived too far away for me to visit them on my bicycle. I can recall that I read all of my father’s Charles Dickens books, loads of books about the two World Wars as well as weighty fictions such as War and Peace.

I don’t recall why I made the decision that I should read the Bible from cover to cover at that age, but that is what I did. It took me months and I can recall on many occasions finding it hard going and nearly giving up, but I stuck it out. Clearly, at that age I did not have maturity or life experience to apply to what I was reading, as I would today, and I may have missed some of the subtleties, but I believe that I was old enough to understand the thrust of what was written.

Reading the Bible, with all of the various testaments, lead to the obvious question of who had actually written each of the chapters of the Bible and who was responsible for putting it all together into one book. To my surprise, when I asked most people about this, including my parents and ministers of religion, they didn’t seem to know and fobbed me off with answers like “the Bible is the word of God, you just have to accept that it is His word”.

Although the question of who wrote the various books of the Bible and who was responsible for compiling it into one volume continued to interest me, I didn’t really have the opportunity to research this and get meaningful answers until I was at Sydney University in my late teens and could access Fisher library which had a first-class reference section on religion. At that time, I was also able to read about the history of religion, including the religions that had been followed in ancient times. In retrospect, I should have been concentrating on my university subjects to get better grades, but at the time I thought that I could somehow justify “learning for the sake of learning” as part of getting “a true education”, whatever that may be.

Perhaps it was my parents influence, perhaps it was the fact that my lack of faith distressed my mother, it could have been caused by many things, but for some reason throughout my life I have maintained a strong interest in religion, and have tried to gain enough knowledge to take an informed position on many of the important questions that I listed in the **Why reaching a decision on religion is important** section above.

While I did not spend a lot of time on the less popular current religions, like Jainism and Shinto, I have read enough books about the ancient religions and the major religions to have a reasonable understanding of their tenets, which I have summarized below.

I have also read the results of studies conducted all over the world in the last fifty years on why people follow particular religions, how the majority of religions are declining and how secularism is growing except in Muslim countries (where reliable numbers are not available and where atheism is still a crime warranting the death penalty in thirteen Islamic nations).

In my view, to get even a basic understanding of religion you need to study the key religions in both ancient and modern times. If you have been bought up in a Christian family in what is seen to be a Christian country, you also need to gain a pretty good understanding of what is in the Bible, and how the Bible was compiled, before dismissing it and risking deeply offending the other members of your family that treat it as sacred.

# **Religions in the Ancient World**

In covering the most significant religions of the ancient world I have borrowed content (copied and edited) from articles written by experts in the field that have been published on the Internet. I have also copied from an excellent article by Joshua Mark that was published in 2009.

Mark wrote “***There is no culture recorded in human history which has not practiced some form of religion”.*** These religions typically consisted of regular rituals based on a belief in higher supernatural entities who created and continued to maintain the world and surrounding cosmos. These entities usually behaved in ways which mirrored the values of the culture.

As with religion today, these ancient religions were all about the spiritual aspect of the human condition, the creation of the world, a human being's place in the world, life after death, eternity, and how to escape from suffering in this world or in the next.

Monotheism (belief in one God) did not make sense to the ancient people aside from the visionaries and prophets of Judaism. Most people, at least as far as can be discerned from the written and archaeological record, believed in many gods, each of whom had a special sphere of influence. If one were suffering heartbreak, one went to the goddess of love; if one wanted to win at combat, only then would one consult the god of war.

**Mesopotamia**

Mesopotamia has been cited as the birthplace of religion. When religion developed in Mesopotamia is unknown, but the first written records of religious practice date to around 3500 BC. Mesopotamian religious beliefs held that human beings were co-workers with the gods and labored with them and for them to hold back the forces of chaos which had been checked by the supreme deities at the beginning of time. Order was created out of chaos by the gods.

Humans were created, in fact, for this very purpose: to work with and for the gods toward a mutually beneficial end. The gods repaid humans for their service by taking care of their daily needs in life (such as supplying them with beer, the drink of the gods) and maintaining the world in which they lived. These gods intimately knew the needs of the people because they were not distant entities who lived in the heavens but dwelt in homes on earth built for them by their people; these homes were the temples which were raised in every Mesopotamian city.

The temples were the centre of the city's life and served in multiple capacities: the clergy dispensed grain and surplus goods to the poor, counseled those in need, provided medical services, and sponsored the grand festivals which honored the gods.

Although the gods took great care of humans while they lived, the Mesopotamian afterlife was a dreary underworld, located beneath the far mountains, where souls drank stale water from puddles and ate dust for eternity in the 'land of no return.'

**Egypt**

Egyptian religion was similar to Mesopotamian belief, in that human beings were co-workers with the gods to maintain order. The principle of harmony was of the highest importance in Egyptian life (and in the afterlife), and their religion was fully integrated into every aspect of existence. Egyptian religion was a combination of magic, mythology, medicine, psychiatry, spiritualism, herbology, as well as the modern understanding of 'religion' as belief in a higher power and a life after death.

The gods were the friends of human beings and sought only the best for them by providing them with the most perfect of all lands to live in and an eternal home to enjoy when their lives on earth were done.

The Egyptian afterlife was known as the Field of Reeds and was a mirror-image of life on earth down to one's favorite tree and stream and dog. Those that one loved in life would either be waiting when one arrived or would follow after. The Egyptians viewed earthly existence as simply one part of an eternal journey and were so concerned about passing easily to the next phase that they created their elaborate tombs (the pyramids), temples, and funerary inscriptions to help the soul's passage from this world to the next.

**Ancient China**

Religion in ancient China is thought to have developed as early as 4500 BC as evidenced by designs on ceramics found from that time. This early belief structure may have been a mix of animism (the attribution of a living soul to plants, inanimate objects, and natural phenomena) and mythology as these images include recognizable animals and dragons.

By 1600 BC there were many anthropomorphic gods (having a human form) worshiped with a chief god, Shangti, presiding over all. This belief continued, with modifications, during the period of the Shang Dynasty (1600-1046 BC) which developed the practice of ancestor worship because the people believed that Shangti had so many responsibilities that he had become too busy to handle their needs.

It was thought that, when a person died, they went to live with the gods and became intermediaries between the people and those gods. Ancestor worship influenced the two great Chinese belief systems of [Confucianism](http://www.ancient.eu/Confucianism/) and [Taoism](http://www.ancient.eu/Taoism/), both of which made ancestor worship core tenets of their practices. In time, Shangti was replaced with the concept of Tian (heaven), a paradise where the dead would reside eternally in peace.

In order to pass from one's earthly life into heaven, one had to cross the bridge of forgetfulness over an abyss and, after looking back on one's life for the last time, drink from a cup which purged all memory. At the bridge, one was either judged worthy of heaven - and so passed on - or unworthy - and slipped from the bridge into the abyss to be swallowed up in hell. Other versions of this same scenario claim the soul was reincarnated after drinking from the cup. Either way, those living were expected to remember the dead who had passed over the bridge to the other side and to honor their memory.

## **Mesoamerica**

Remembrance of the dead and the part they still play in the lives of those on earth was an important component of all ancient religions including the belief system of the Maya. The gods were involved in every aspect of the life of the Maya. As with other cultures, there were many different deities (over 250), all of whom had their own special sphere of influence. They controlled the weather, the harvest, they dictated one’s mate, presided over every birth, and were present at one’s death.

The Mayan afterlife was similar to the Mesopotamian in that it was a dark and dreary place, but the Maya imagined an even worse fate where one was constantly under threat of attack or deception by the demon lords who inhabited the underworld (known as Xibalba). The dread of the journey through Xibalba was such a potent cultural force that the Maya are the only known ancient culture to honor a goddess of suicide (named Ixtab) because suicides were thought to bypass Xibalba and go straight to paradise (as did those who died in childbirth or in battle). The Maya believed in the cyclical nature of life, that all things which seem to die simply are transformed, and considered human life just another part of the kind of pattern they saw all around them in nature. They felt death was a natural progression after life and feared the very unnatural possibility that the dead could return to haunt the living.

It was possible that a person would hang on to life for any of a number of reasons (the chief being improper burial) and so ceremonies were performed to remember the dead and honor their spirit. This belief was also held by Mesoamerican cultures other than the Maya such as the Aztec and Tarascan. In time, it developed into the holiday known today as The Day of the Dead (El Dia de los Muertos), in which people celebrate the lives of those who have passed on and remember their names.

**Greeks**

The importance of remembrance of the dead as part of one's religious devotions was integral to the beliefs of the Greeks as well. Continued remembrance of the dead by the living kept the soul of the deceased alive in the afterlife. The Greeks, like the other cultures mentioned, believed in many gods who often cared for their human charges but, just as often, pursued their own pleasure.

As with other ancient cultures, religion in Greece was fully integrated into one's daily life and routine. The Greeks consulted the gods on matters ranging from affairs of state to personal decisions regarding love, marriage, or one's job.

**Romans**

The religion of [Rome](http://www.ancient.eu/Rome/) followed the same paradigm as that of Greece. The [Roman](http://www.ancient.eu/Roman/) religion most likely began as a kind of animism (the attribution of a living soul to plants, inanimate objects, and natural phenomena) and developed as they came into contact with other cultures. The Greeks had the most significant impact on Roman religion, and many of the Roman gods are simply Greek deities with Roman names and slightly altered attributes.

In Rome, the worship of the gods was intimately tied to affairs of state and the stability of the society was thought to rest on how well the people revered the gods and participated in the rituals which honored them. The Vestal Virgins are one famous example of this belief in that these women were counted on to maintain the vows they had taken and perform their duties responsibly in order to continually honor [Vesta](http://www.ancient.eu/Vesta/) and all the goddess gave to the people.

Although the Romans had imported their primary gods from Greece, once the Roman religion was established and linked to the welfare of the state, no foreign gods were welcomed. When worship of the popular Egyptian goddess Isis was brought to Rome, Emperor [Augustus](http://www.ancient.eu/augustus/) forbade any temples to be built in her honor or public rites observed in her worship because he felt such attention paid to a foreign deity would undermine the authority of the government and established religious beliefs. To the Romans, the gods had created everything according to their will and maintained the universe in the best way possible and a human being was obligated to show them honor for their gifts.

# **Fundamentals of Major Religions Today**

Based on population projections from a study done in 2012 the four dominant religions are:

| **Religion** | **Adherents** | **Percentage** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| [Christianity](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity) | 2.3 billion | 31.50% |
| [Islam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam) | 1.7 billion | 22.32% |
| [Hinduism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hinduism) | 1.1 billion | 13.95% |
| [Buddhism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buddhism) | 390 million | 5.25% |

These religions have the following core beliefs: This summary (lifted in part from <http://listverse.com>) is sourced from the Encyclopedia Britannica, Wikipedia, Beliefnet, and Adherents.com (a collection of 43,870 adherent statistics and religious geography citations).

**Christianity**

Christianity is a monotheistic religion (the doctrine that there is only one God) which is based on the teachings of the Old Testament and Jesus of Nazareth. Christians believe that Jesus, as the Son of God is part of the Trinity (God as three persons in one), the others being God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. Christians believe that Christianity fulfils Judaism. Most Christians believe that the death and resurrection of Jesus to be the cornerstone of their faith. Protestant offshoots of Christianity believe that salvation comes from the belief in God alone, whereas Catholic and Orthodox Christians belief that faith, combined with good works is required for salvation.

The Christian scriptures are called the Bible – comprising two books, the Old Testament (based on the Septuagint which was a translation of the Hebrew Bible into the Greek language) and the New Testament. Protestants and Catholics have the same books in the New Testament, but Martin Luther removed 7 books from the Old Testament during the Protestant reformation, considering them to be apocryphal (not authentic). He also removed four books from the New Testament but was later persuaded to put them back – they were Hebrews, James, Jude, and Revelation.

**Islam**

Islam is also a monotheistic religion originating with the teachings of Muhammad, a 7th-century Arab religious and political figure. Muslims believe that God revealed the Qur’an to Muhammad, God’s final prophet, and regard the Qur’an and the Sunnah (the words and deeds of Muhammad) as the fundamental sources of Islam. They do not regard Muhammad as the founder of a new religion, but as the restorer of the original monotheistic faith of Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and other prophets. Islamic tradition holds that Judaism and Christianity distorted the messages of these prophets over time either in interpretation, in text, or both.

Muslims consider the Qur’an to be the literal word of God; it is the central religious text of Islam. Muslims believe that the verses of the Qur’an were revealed to Muhammad by God through the angel Gabriel on many occasions between the years 610 and his death on July 6, 632.

Islam considers itself to be the supreme religion and therefore Muslims must not place themselves in a position inferior to that of the followers of other religions. Pursuant to this principle, Muslim women may not marry non-Muslim men, non-Muslims may not inherit from their Muslim relatives, and a testimony of a non-Muslim is inadmissible against a Muslim. A non-Muslim who insults Islam must be put to death, according to most schools of Islamic jurisprudence, or flogged and imprisoned, according to others.

**Hinduism**

Hinduism has no founder, being itself a conglomerate of diverse beliefs and traditions. It is the world’s oldest existent religion, and has over a billion adherents, of whom over 900 million live in India and Nepal. Hinduism contains a vast body of scriptures. Divided as revealed and remembered and developed over millennia, these scriptures expound on theology, philosophy and mythology, providing spiritual insights and guidance on the practice of dharma (religious living).

Prominent themes in Hindu beliefs include Dharma (ethics/duties), Samsra (The continuing cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth), Karma (action and subsequent reaction), Moksha (liberation from samsara), and the various yogas (paths or practices). Hinduism is a diverse system of thought with beliefs spanning monotheism, polytheism, pantheism, monism and even atheism. It is sometimes considered as henotheistic (devotion to a single “God” while accepting the existence of other gods), but such a view may be considered an oversimplification of the complexities and variations of belief.

**Buddhism**

Buddhism is also known as Buddha Dharma or Dhamma, which means roughly the “teachings of the Awakened One” in Sanskrit and Pali, languages of ancient Buddhist texts. Buddhism was founded around the fifth century BC by Siddhartha Gautama – most commonly referred to as The Buddha. In Buddhism, any person who has awakened from the “sleep of ignorance” (by directly realizing the true nature of reality), without instruction, and teaches it to others is called a buddha. All traditional Buddhists agree that Shakyamuni or Gotama Buddha was not the only Buddha: it is generally taught that there have been many past Buddhas and that there will be future Buddhas too.

Buddhists believe in a cycle of death and rebirth called samsara. Through karma and eventual enlightenment, they hope to escape samsara and achieve nirvana, an end to suffering.

# **The Bible**

I am aware that to many Christians the Bible is sacred and is considered to be the word of God. While I do not want to offend anyone, I can’t accept its authenticity and question the motivation of those who wrote the various books as well as those who selected these books for inclusion.

Fundamentalist Christians interpret Biblical inspiration in a literal sense, in that the inspiration of scripture amounts to God dictating a word for word account which was then recorded and passed on into the Christian communities. They literally believe that the Earth is around 6150 years old, give or take a year or two to cover unrecorded rounding (like Adam being 130 years and 10 months old when he fathered Seth, not 130 years as recorded in the Bible).

Catholic and Orthodox denominations, together with High Church Anglicans and some Protestant denominations believe that the Holy Spirit inspired human beings who came to an enlightened understanding of God and recorded these reflections as a way of passing their faith onto the community. In their opinion, the Bible contains all that is necessary for human salvation however the Bible should not be understood in literal terms.

In my opinion, to try and understand the Bible you need to know when and how it was written and how individual books were selected for inclusion. I have extracted the following information from the Internet, but my recollection is that it is fairly consistent with what I read when I did my initial research in the Fisher Library at Sydney Uni the early 1970s.

**When were the books of the Bible written?**

The books that make up the Bible were written over a period of some 1,500 years (from earlier than 1445 BC to 95AD). These are recorded with best estimates as follows:

The Old Testament

* [Job](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Job+1): Considered earliest, but date unknown
* [Genesis](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+1): 1445-1405 BC
* [Exodus](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Exodus+1): 1445-1405 BC
* [Leviticus](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Leviticus+1): 1445-1405 BC
* [Numbers](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Numbers+1): 1445-1405 BC
* [Deuteronomy](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deuteronomy+1): 1445-1405 BC
* [Psalms](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalms+1): 1410-450 BC
* [Joshua](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Joshua+1): 1405-1385 BC
* [Judges](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Judges+1): 1043 BC
* [Ruth](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ruth+1): 1030-1010 BC
* [Song of Songs](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Song+of+Songs+1): 971-965 BC
* [Proverbs](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Proverbs+1): 971-686 BC
* [Ecclesiastes](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ecclesiastes+1): 940-931 BC
* [1 Samuel](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Samuel+1): 931-722 BC
* [2 Samuel](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Samuel+1): 931-722 BC
* [Obadiah](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Obadiah+1): 850-840 BC
* [Joel](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Joel+1): 835-796 BC
* [Jonah](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Jonah+1): 775 BC
* [Amos](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Amos+1): 750 BC
* [Hosea](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hosea+1): 750-710 BC
* [Micah](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Micah+1): 735-710 BC
* [Isaiah](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Isaiah+1): 700-681 BC
* [Nahum](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Nahum+1): 650 BC
* [Zephaniah](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Zephaniah+1): 635-625 BC
* [Habakkuk](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Habakkuk+1): 615-605 BC
* [Ezekiel](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ezekiel+1): 590-570 BC
* [Lamentations](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Lamentations+1): 586 BC
* [Jeremiah](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Jeremiah+1): 586-570 BC
* [1 Kings](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Kings+1): 561-538 BC
* [2 Kings](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Kings+1): 561-538 BC
* [Judith\*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?version=NABRE&search=Judith%201): Uncertain (538 BC-AD 70)
* [Daniel](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Daniel+1): 536-530 BC
* [Haggai](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Haggai+1): 520 BC
* [Baruch\*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Baruch+1&version=NABRE): 500-100 BC
* [Zechariah](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Zechariah+1): 480-470 BC
* [Ezra](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ezra+1): 457-444 BC
* [1 Chronicles](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Chronicles+1): 450-430 BC
* [2 Chronicles](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Chronicles+1): 450-430 BC
* [Esther](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Esther+1): 450-331 BC
* [Malachi](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Malachi+1): 433-424 BC
* [Nehemiah](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Nehemiah+1): 424-400 BC
* [Susanna\*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Susanna+1&version=CEB): 400 BC-AD 70
* [Psalm 151\*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+151+1&version=CEB): 400 BC-AD 100
* [Letter of Jeremiah\*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Letter+of+Jeremiah+1&version=CEB): 307-317 BC
* [Tobit\*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Tobit+1&version=NABRE): 225-175 BC
* [Ben Sira (Sirach)\*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ben+Sira+1&version=NABRE): 200-175 BC
* [Bel and the Dragon\*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Bel+and+the+Dragon+1&version=CEB): 200-100 BC
* [Greek Esther\*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Greek+Esther+1&version=CEB): 200-1 BC
* [Prayer of Azariah\*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Prayer+of+Azariah+1&version=CEB): 200-1 BC
* [1 Maccabees\*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Maccabees+1&version=NABRE): 150-100 BC
* [2 Maccabees\*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Maccabees+1&version=NABRE): 150-100 BC
* [1 Esdras\*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Esdras+1&version=CEB): 100 BC-AD 100
* [Prayer of Manasseh\*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Prayer+of+Manasseh+1&version=CEB): 100-1 BC
* [3 Maccabees\*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=3+Maccabees+1&version=CEB): 100-1 BC
* [4 Maccabees\*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=4+Maccabees+1&version=CEB): 100-1 BC
* [Wisdom\*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Wisdom+1&version=NABRE): 50-20 BC
* [2 Esdras](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Esdras+1&version=CEB): AD 100-200 \*A apocryphal book

**New Testament**

* [James](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=James+1): AD 44-49
* [Galatians](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Galatians+1): AD 49-50
* [Mark](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Mark+1): AD 50-60
* [Matthew](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Matthew+1): AD 50-60
* [1 Thessalonians](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Thessalonians+1): AD 51
* [2 Thessalonians](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Thessalonians+1): AD 51-52
* [1 Corinthians](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Corinthians+1): AD 55
* [2 Corinthians](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Corinthians+1): AD 55-56
* [Romans](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Romans+1): AD 56
* [Luke](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Luke+1): AD 60-61
* [Ephesians](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+1): AD 60-62
* [Philippians](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philippians+1): AD 60-62
* [Philemon](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Philemon+1): AD 60-62
* [Colossians](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Colossians+1): AD 60-62
* [Acts](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Acts+1): AD 62
* [1 Timothy](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Timothy+1): AD 62-64
* [Titus](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Titus+1): AD 62-64
* [1 Peter](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Peter+1): AD 64-65
* [2 Timothy](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Timothy+1): AD 66-67
* [2 Peter](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Peter+1): AD 67-68
* [Hebrews](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews+1): AD 67-69
* [Jude](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Jude+1): AD 68-70
* [John](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+1): AD 80-90
* [1 John](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+John+1): AD 90-95
* [2 John](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+John+1): AD 90-95
* [3 John](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=3+John+1): AD 90-95
* [Revelation](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Revelation+1): AD 94-96

# **How Did the Bible Come Together?**

The story of the collation of the chapters of the Bible is fascinating.

On our most recent trip we went to Israel and visited both Bethlehem and Jerusalem including going to the location where it is generally believed that Jesus was born and to the location where he was crucified. Regardless of your religious views you simply have to accept the historical fact that a Jewish man Jesus of Nazareth was born, lived and was crucified.

It is also well recorded that after the death of Jesus his apostles began to spread the gospel and make disciples, thereby providing the beginning structure for the early Christian Church. It is difficult, if not impossible, to separate the initial stages of Roman Catholic church from that of the early Christian church.

Simon Peter, one of Jesus' twelve disciples, became an influential leader in the Jewish Christian movement. Later James, most likely Jesus' brother, took over leadership. These followers of Jesus viewed themselves as a reform movement within Judaism, yet they continued to follow many of the Jewish laws.

At this time Saul, originally one of the strongest persecutors of the early Jewish Christians, claimed to have a blinding vision of Jesus on the road to Damascus, and became a Christian. Adopting the name Paul, he became the greatest evangelist of the early Christian church. Paul's ministry, also called Pauline Christianity, was directed mainly to Gentiles rather than Jews.

Another belief system at this time was Gnostic Christianity, which taught that Jesus was a spirit being, sent by God to impart knowledge to humans so that they could escape the miseries of life on earth.

In addition to Gnostic, Jewish, and Pauline Christianity, there were already many other versions of Christianity being taught. After the Romans sieged and took Jerusalem in 70 AD, the Jewish Christian movement was scattered. Pauline and Gnostic Christianity were left as the dominant groups.

Around A.D. 150, Justin Martyr (who wrote the First Apology, addressed to Emperor Antoninus Pius), described worship this way:

On the day called the Day of the Sun all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then all rise together and pray.

By this early date, “the memoirs of the apostles” were considered as important to the teaching of the church as the writings of the prophets.

It is accepted history that around this time a wealthy ship owner named Marcion sailed from his home near the Black Sea to the capital city of Rome. Marcion believed that the God of the Old Testament was different than the God of the New Testament. The former was distant and loved justice, while the latter was loving and emphasized grace.

Marcion rejected the Old Testament, along with any writings that might reinforce views other than his own. He developed a list of books he considered acceptable: portions of the Gospel of Luke, ten of Paul’s letters, plus a letter purportedly from Paul to the Alexandrians. This list is known as the Marcion Canon.

The church had to respond to this. Though nothing had been officially written down, decided or proclaimed, most Christians had a sense of what was Scripture and what wasn’t.

In A.D. 144, the church of Rome excommunicated Marcion and continued the sifting process on what was Scripture and what wasn’t. The church developed its list of canonical books. The following are guidelines for accepting a book into the New Testament:

* 1. Was the book written by a prophet of God?
* 2. Was the writer confirmed by acts of God?
* 3. Does the message tell the truth about God?
* 4. Did it come with the power of God?
* 5. Was it accepted by God’s people?

These are the marks of canonicity. “Canon” is a Greek word meaning “rule” or “measuring stick.” These five questions are used to determine which books “measure up” to being labeled divinely inspired. They exhibit “the marks of canonicity.”

If you turn to a Bible’s table of contents and you’ll see that each of the books was written by either a prophet or apostle, or by someone with a direct relationship to one.

***Miracles*** were seen as the means by which God confirmed the authority of his spokesmen. In Exodus 4, Moses was given miraculous powers to confirm his call. In Corinthians, Paul teaches that the mark of an apostle is “signs, wonders and miracles.”

It was considered that truth cannot contradict itself, so agreement with the other books of Scripture was only logical. As was historical accuracy. If the facts of a book were inaccurate, it couldn’t have been from God.

The inner witness of the Spirit was equally important. A key question these early Christians asked was, ***When we read this, is there an inner sense from God that what is written is right and true?***

Initial acceptance by people to whom the work was addressed was crucial. What was the original audience’s sense? Did they accept the book as an authoritative word from God?

After Marcion, other lists of New Testament books begin to appear. One of the first was The Muratorian Fragment. It was discovered among the Vatican’s sacred documents by historian Ludovico Antonio Muratori in 1740 and dates to about 190AD.

By the early third century only a handful of books that we now call our New Testament were in question. In western regions of the empire, the book of Hebrews faced opposition, and in the east Revelation was unpopular. Eusebius, a church historian of the fourth century, records that James, 2 Peter, 2-3 John and Jude were the only books “spoken against” (though recognized by others).

This process went on for over 200 years and it wasn’t until 367AD, that Athanasius, the bishop of Alexandria, wrote an Easter letter that contained all twenty-seven books of our present New Testament. In 393 the Synod of Hippo affirmed our current New Testament, and in 397 the Council of Carthage published the same list.

Theologians are careful to note that the church didn’t develop the canon, **God did that by inspiring its writing and superintending each book’s preservation**. The church recognized the canon by experience and mutual agreement.

**Inconsistencies in the Bible**

The study of inconsistencies in the Bible has a long history. In the 18th century, [Thomas Paine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Paine) in [The Age of Reason](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Age_of_Reason) compiled many of the Bible's self-contradictions. And in 1860, William Henry Burr produced a list of 144 self-contradictions in the Bible.

The question of inconsistency covers not only the text but even the composition of scripture. Over the centuries, different communities have accepted shifting collections of books. The size of these [biblical canons](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biblical_canon) varies enormously, from the [Samaritans](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samaritan_Pentateuch), who consider the five books of the [Torah](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Torah) alone to be authoritative, to the Protestants with sixty six books, to the Catholics with seventy three books, to the [Ethiopian Bible](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethiopian_Bible) which contains eighty eight books, including all the books of all other churches.

Today we have Internet sites that list out hundreds of inconsistencies. These include:

[**http://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Biblical\_contradictions**](http://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Biblical_contradictions)

[**https://infidels.org/library/modern/donald\_morgan/contradictions.html**](https://infidels.org/library/modern/donald_morgan/contradictions.html)

[**http://www.thethinkingatheist.com/page/bible-contradictions**](http://www.thethinkingatheist.com/page/bible-contradictions)

Many of these inconsistencies are trivial, such as whether Solomon had 4,000 or 40,000 stalls for horses, and can be disregarded as possible transcription errors as books were copied and translated over the ages. Others, such as the two examples below, are more significant because they go to supposed first-hand accounts of events.

Last words of Jesus:

* Matthew 27: The last words of Christ: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?".
* Luke 23: The last words of Christ: "Father, unto thy hands I commend my spirit".
* John 19: The last words of Christ: "It is finished".

Two deaths of Judas:

* Matthew 27: Judas repents and accepts that Jesus was innocent, attempts to return the money to the priests but ultimately has to simply throw the thirty pieces of silver into the temple, and hangs himself (in an undisclosed location) out of shame. The priests, unable to put the "blood money" in the treasury, use it to buy a potter's field which is used to bury strangers. The field is named for Jesus' blood, because it was bought with the "blood money."
* Acts 1: Judas is not said to repent, goes away and buys a field with his "ill-gotten gain," but manages to "fall headlong" in such a way that his body bursts open and his intestines spill out. The field is named for Judas' blood which was spilled on it.

# **Substantial inconsistencies in the first books of the New Testament**

Much has been written about the Gospels, the first four books of the New Testament that tell the story of the life of Jesus. Yet only one—the Gospel of John—claims to be an eyewitness account, the testimony of the unnamed “disciple whom Jesus loved.” (“This is the disciple who is testifying to these things and wrote these things, and we know that his testimony is true” [John 21:24]). “Who wrote the Gospel of John?” is a question that remains unanswered, though noted theologians throughout the ages maintain that it was indeed the disciple John who penned the famous Biblical book.

We may never know for certain who wrote the Gospel of John, any more than we can know who wrote the books of Matthew, Mark and Luke. We do know that John is a gospel apart, however. Early Matthew, Mark and Luke are so alike in their telling that they are called the Synoptic Gospels, meaning “seen together”—the parallels are clear when they are looked at side by side. Matthew and Luke follow the version of events in Mark, which is thought by scholars to be the earliest and most historically accurate Gospel. John, however, does not include the same incidents or chronology found in the other three Gospels, and the fact that it is so different has spurred a debate over whether John’s Gospel is historical or not, something that has been noted in Gospel of John commentary for hundreds—even thousands—of years.

Several hypotheses have attempted to explain why so much of [Jesus’ life](http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/people-cultures-in-the-bible/jesus-historical-jesus/did-jesus-exist/) not portrayed in the Synoptics is present in John and vice versa. One hypothesis claims that John recorded many of the events that occurred before the [arrest of John the Baptist](http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-sites-places/biblical-archaeology-sites/machaerus-beyond-the-beheading-of-john-the-baptist/), while the Synoptics all have [Jesus’ ministry](http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-topics/bible-interpretation/the-parables-of-jesus/) beginning only after the arrest. Another holds that John was written last, by someone who knew about the other three Gospels, but who wished to write a spiritual gospel instead of an historical one. This would mean that the person who wrote the Gospel of John would not have been a contemporary of Jesus, and therefore would not have been an eyewitness as the author claims. There is also the possibility that the author of John did not know of Mark and hence did not have the same information.

Another aspect of John that may be more historically accurate than the Synoptics is the account of the [crucifixion](http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-topics/crucifixion/roman-crucifixion-methods-reveal-the-history-of-crucifixion/) and the events that led up to it. The Synoptics say that [Jesus’ Last Supper was the Passover meal](http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/people-cultures-in-the-bible/jesus-historical-jesus/was-jesus-last-supper-a-seder/)—held that year on a Thursday evening (Jewish holidays begin at sunset)—and they would have us believe that the Sanhedrin, the high court, gathered at the beginning of a major holiday to interrogate Jesus and hand him over to the Romans. John, in contrast, has Jesus handed over for crucifixion on “the day of Preparation of Passover week, about the sixth hour.” According to John, [the Last Supper is not a Passover meal](http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/people-cultures-in-the-bible/jesus-historical-jesus/jesus-last-supper-passover-seder-meal/) (because the holiday that year did not start until Friday evening), and Jesus is crucified and buried before Passover begins. In John’s account Jesus becomes the Passover sacrificial lamb, which was offered the afternoon before the Passover holiday. Some scholars suggest that John may be more historical regarding the crucifixion than the other three Gospels.

These sorts of inconsistencies can’t be brushed aside or explained away. First-hand accounts of reasonably recent historical events (within the last 2,200 years), written by people who were supposedly inspired by God, simply can’t vary on significant details without discrediting the entire process.

**Noah**

As I mentioned earlier, the incredible story of Noah and his Ark lead to my first questions about the Bible as an 11-year-old boy. Some years ago, I made a very amateurish attempt at discrediting the Ark story by raising the difficulties of transporting a couple of Dreadnoughtus Schrani dinosaurs (which were 85 feet (25 metres) long and weighed 65 tons) along with all of other animals such as Kangaroos that no one knew existed in the 1400s BC when Genesis was written, in a wooden ship constructed by a 600 year old farmer and his family.

Since that time, I have read some published papers that cover the topic in much greater detail, and appear to be reasonably argued. The article accessed by the following link is probably one of the best of these, but I have to warn you it is 39 pages long.

[**https://ncse.com/cej/4/1/impossible-voyage-noahs-ark**](https://ncse.com/cej/4/1/impossible-voyage-noahs-ark)

It is hard to argue with Moore’s final comment:

***It has by now become abundantly clear that the case for the ark utterly and completely fails. Despite the clever ingenuity of its proponents, nothing, from the trickiest problems to the tiniest details, can be salvaged without an unending resort to the supernatural. This includes so many pointless prodigies, so many inane interventions for no reason other than to save a literalistic Bible, that religion itself is cheapened in the process, not to mention the total abandonment of any semblance of science. No doubt in days to come some erstwhile archeologists will concoct "solutions" to some of the difficulties we have raised, but no intellectually honest person can any longer pretend that the legend of Noah can possibly represent a historical occurrence.***

Another comment provided in the article Bible Contradictions, referenced above, is worth including for completeness:

***Much of the biblical flood story was actually plagiarized from "The Epic of Gilgamesh," the mythical Sumerian account of Ut-Napishtim written on stone tablets around 2000 BC. In "The Epic of Gilgamesh, one righteous man was spared from a worldwide flood by building a large boat with a single door and one window. The ark contained a few other human beings plus plant and animal specimens. Rains covered the mountains with water. Birds were sent to find land. The boat landed on a mountain in the middle east. Ut-Napshtim sacrificed an animal as an offering, and the Babylonian gods expressed regret for flooding the earth. Sound familiar?***

# **Conclusions**

**All religions are remarkably similar and have been created to address the same needs**

As shown by the ancient religions described above, throughout the ages man has struggled to understand things beyond their comprehension (such as the extent of the universe and the concept of life) and has created religions to fill the void. These religions universally try to give meaning to our existence, show deference to the God, or Gods, they believe must exist as creators of the things that we are incapable of understanding, and in most cases, promise eternal life to those who truly and exclusively believe in that particular religion.

**Every religion has rituals that are designed to give substance to the fundamental beliefs**

Most religions have impressive cathedrals, churches, temples, or alters (and even massive pyramids like the Pyramid of the Sun in Mexico). They also have rituals that are designed to take their members on a journey that will impress, and in some cases, intimidate them. It would appear that the central purpose of these elaborate structures and rituals is to reinforce that the religion is well established and has substance. Priests, ministers, bishops, imams, muftis, and other religious leaders present as important people with the knowledge and power to set the direction of people’s lives and help them through the big events and crises they may encounter.

I have witnessed first-hand how rituals are used to add substance to church services or masses. I have also experienced “cathedral aura” when these rituals are performed in a large church, or a cathedral. It is easy to be drawn into the process and feel that somehow you are involved in something that has to have real value.  
  
**Many religions had a God dying and rising from the dead**

In ancient religions, there is the repetition of the figure known as the Dying and Reviving God, often a powerful entity himself, who is killed or dies and comes back to life for the good of his people: Osiris in Egypt, Krishna in India, the Maize God in Mesoamerica, Bacchus in Rome, Attis in Greece, Tammuz in Mesopotamia.

The theme of life-after-death and judgment after death, gained the greatest fame through the evangelical efforts of St. [Paul](http://www.ancient.eu/Paul/) who spread the word of the dying and reviving of [Jesus Christ](http://www.ancient.eu/Jesus_Christ/) (c. 42-62 AD). At this time, the majority of people were uneducated and most had not travelled beyond their local area. They were not worldly, and would have been unaware that these themes were not original.  
  
It could be held that Paul's vision of the figure of [Jesus](http://www.ancient.eu/jesus/), the anointed son of God who dies to redeem humanity, was drawn from the earlier belief systems and were familiar to the scribes who would write the books which make up the [Bible](http://www.ancient.eu/bible/).

**The afterlife is also not original**

Religions generally promise life after death. There was an afterlife similar to an earthly existence (Egypt and Greece), antithetical to life on earth (Mesoamerica and Mesopotamia), or a combination of both (China and India).

[Christianity](http://www.ancient.eu/christianity/) made standard a belief in an afterlife and set up an organized set of rituals by which an adherent could gain everlasting life. It could be seen that in so doing, the early Christians were simply following in the footsteps of the Sumerians, the Egyptians, the Phoenicians, the Greeks, and the Romans all of whom had their own stylized rituals for the worship of their gods.   
  
**The Bible is the work of men – not the word of God**

We should accept that men such as Buddha, Mohamad and the many men who wrote the chapters of the Bible were incredibly perceptive and understood a great deal about the human condition. We should also accept that under the scrutiny of thousands of critics over many centuries their writings have been shown to be flawed, and as a result can’t be seen to be the literal word of God (as many Muslims believe the Qur’an to be) or inspired by God as many Christians believe the Bible to be.

In my view, there is no doubt that the books of the Bible were written by people who were talented, creative and imaginative. We do, however, have to recognize that these scripts were written thousands of years ago and the people writing them could not be expected to understand the world as we do today.

The example that I used was the story of Noah. At the time that these books were written the evidence that huge dinosaurs had roamed the world 200 million years ago had not been discovered, so they were not mentioned or taken into consideration in the design of the Ark. This is an oversimplified example but the same approach could be taken to many of the significant scientific discoveries that have been made since the Bible was written and it could be argued that if the books of the Bible had been effectively dictated by God, then being all knowing He would have been able to reference many things that would subsequently become known, rather than being limited to the knowledge available at that time.

As mentioned above, the Bible is filled with many contradictions. The process of establishing the canons was determined by men asking if:

* 1. The book written by a prophet of God?
* 2. The writer was confirmed by acts of God?
* 3. The message told the truth about God?
* 4. It came with the power of God?
* 5. It was accepted by God’s people?

Considering the highly subjective nature of this process, there is no wonder that in a world that today relies so heavily on science and scientific proof the authenticity of the Bible is constantly being challenged and people are moving away from established religions in every increasing numbers.

**Immaculate Conception, Miracles and the Resurrection defy belief**

We spend our whole life in a world of realities. We know what is required for a woman to conceive and we understand that when a person has died they are not coming back from the dead.

While we hear of miracles having been performed, both in the Bible and in order for someone to be recognized as a saint in the Catholic Church, these miracles have generally been difficult to verify: the crippled man walking again after meeting Jesus; the person with incurable cancer having a full recovery after praying to Mother Teresa. We never appear to have amazing and verifiable miracles occurring in clear view where, for example, a man who has lost his arm is given a new one

Based on our own experience and understanding it is difficult to accept immaculate conception, the resurrection and miracles on faith. It is much easier to believe that Jesus was conceived in the usual way and that when he was crucified he died and his body was buried.

**Churches could be seen to be institutions that sell false hope**

Most religions have a hierarchy, headed by men who gain respect and power based on their deep understanding of the teachings and the rituals that are part of that particular religion. Many religions have churches and other property, and some, such as the Catholic Church have immense wealth and political power. Many religions have become institutions, like large multinational corporations, with survival as one of their key foundations.

As can be seen by the publicity in recent times, churches are often prepared to sacrifice victims of abuse rather than tarnish the reputation of the institution.

In my view, the promise of eternal life or reincarnation for belief and adherence, is the source of power for most religions. If you can’t accept life after death as a reality then the obvious conclusion has to be that the leaders of religious organizations are effectively defrauding their followers by promising to give them something that will never be delivered, and taking their cash in the process.

**If there is an omnipotent force (a God), then Science will help us work that out in due course**

As you would probably be aware there are three main branches of science: physical science, Earth science and life science. **Physical science** is the study of inanimate natural objects and the laws that govern them: it includes physics, chemistry, and astronomy. **Earth science** is the study of the Earth and the physical components that make it up: the constitution of the atmosphere, the seas, the land, and how those things are tied together, while **Life science** is the study of living organisms, such as microorganisms, plants, animals, and human beings: it includes biology and medical science.

It may be stating the obvious, but most people are aware that we are making progress in life science, particularly medicine, because they understand how breakthroughs in medical science have affected them directly. At least a couple of members of my family keep our blood pressure under control by taking a small tablet on a daily basis. My brother Colin had a stint slipped into an artery near his heart, a low impact operation that no doubt extended his life by many years. My brother Rodney has a pacemaker. My sister Josephine had cancer surgery and treatment some seventeen years ago and I had a double cataract operation some twenty years ago that restored my vision. And so, the list goes on.

We are all made aware of advances in physical science by the way our daily lives have been changed by the invention of physical things such as cars, planes, computers, the internet and mobile phones. Not so many of us, however, are aware of significant advances being made in Earth science, although we are aware of things like studies being made into climate change.

The Science umbrella these days covers an amazingly wide range of disciplines and as I write this paper there are literally millions of scientists all over the world addressing different parts of the “big puzzle”, a puzzle which extends from the tiniest components of an atom to the most distant stars.

Most of us will not be able to grasp the extent of what is being discovered on a daily basis and how these small discoveries will ultimately advance the field of science to which they belong. There is just too much going on for any one person to keep up, even at a summary level.

There is, however, no doubt that our inventory of knowledge is building at an amazing rate on many fronts and we continue to have breakthroughs, breakthroughs that not only effect our day to day life but advances that change the way that we understand the universe in which we live.

While the significance of some of the discoveries being made in areas such as quantum physics (such as light consisting of both particles and waves) will always be well beyond me, I accept that scientists have proved that the nearest stars (the Alpha/Proxima Centauri star system) is roughly 4.3 light-years away and that the Milky Way galaxy consists of some 300 billion stars in a spiral-shaped conglomerate roughly 100,000 light-years across. I also accept that scientists have proved that the universe is expanding at a measurable rate, and this has allowed them to peg the universe at about 13.82 billion years old.

While concepts such the distance covered by light in a year (about 6 trillion miles) is beyond my comprehension, I have confidence that the measurement of the distance to the stars and the estimate of the number of stars in the Milky Way are reasonable because I have confidence in scientific method and know that nothing in science is accepted as a proven fact without relevant data being gathered, a hypothesis being formulated from these data, and this hypothesis being empirically tested. I also know that scientific “facts” are constantly being challenged and refined as new techniques are discovered.

Science now has such momentum that perhaps, for the first time in our history, we are moving towards what the founders of our religions would call “true enlightenment”. The progress of science is such that I would expect that at some time in the future we will be able to say with confidence when our solar system was formed and in due course we will also have a clear understanding of how it was formed.

It is also possible at some time in the future we may also come to understand if this is part of a cycle or process that has been going on forever, or is due to an act of creation by an omnipotent intelligence (or other force beyond our current understanding) that we may consider a God, or due to some other dimension of existence that we have not discovered as yet.

**If there is a God, what would impress him?**

Purely for the sake of argument there is an obvious question that has to be asked. If there is a God capable of creating the universe in which we live, what would impress him – using our intelligence to try to try and understand the world we live in and find the answers to creation, or just accepting the claims of others from centuries before, on faith?

**If there is a God, would he really want to tune into our thoughts and prayers and intervene in our lives?**

On a similar line to the question above, if we discover a God who is capable of creating the universe in which we live, creating life and formulating all of the many laws of science that we are still struggling to understand, will that God want to intervene in our lives.

I have always struggled with this premise, one that is imbedded in most religions, that an omnipotent God will have an interest in the thoughts and deeds of mere men, such as me. Somehow that doesn’t seem to be a realistic expectation as I wouldn’t expect that the majority of our thoughts would have much interest to an omnipotent God, in the same way that the thoughts of white ants, bees and mosquitoes would be of little interest to humans if we have the capacity to read them.

# **Finally**

What answers can I offer to the questions posed at the beginning of this paper:

**What is Life:** Having been nearby when my own children were delivered, and thereby could be seen to have come into existence, and having been present when people near to me have died, and thereby ceased to exist, I understand that life is finite, you have it for a short time and then it is gone.

Beyond knowing that I am alive, (and appreciate this fact every waking minute), it is completely beyond my capacity to understanding what that magic spark called life really is and where it comes from.

**Does my life have a purpose**: It is hard to see a purpose beyond having the opportunity to make a positive contribution to the lives of others that you may directly interface with, particularly family. Some, such as me, would argue that this is purpose enough.

Living in a world of nearly 7.5 billion people, and not having the skills to do something really significant like discovering a cure to cancer (or even the common cold), if I were to be completely realistic I would have to recognize that my life will not have much impact on the world at large. I will work to have a positive impact on the lives of my family and circle of friends, but it is unlikely that many of the other 7.499,999,950 billion will ever be aware that I existed, let alone have any idea of what I may have done.

**Is there a greater God who controls my destiny**: As stated above, I don’t know if God exists, but if He does exist and has created the universe in which we live, he will not be reading my thoughts or controlling my destiny except at a macro level (like moving the Earth or the Sun).

**Should I follow a religion and if so which one**: For all of the reasons above, definitely not. As Karl Marx said “Religion is the opium of the people", and some of us just aren’t comfortable taking pain numbing drugs.

**Do I have a soul**: I have a mind and I can think and feel. I certainly do not believe that after I die any part of me will exist into the future, and I am comfortable with that.

**What happens when I die, do I just cease to exist or does my soul live on for eternity**: Yes I will just cease to exist. For a short time after I have died I will be remembered by those that are living, but like a pebble being thrown into the pond the ripple will quickly settle and after a while I will be forgotten. In my view this is reality, and there is no value in vainly hoping for something more.

**Is there a heaven and a hell and if so which one will my soul go to**: I do not believe that there is either a heaven or a hell and believe that the creation of both of these have been an integral part of many religions to give them power. If you adhere to our religion you will go to Paradise, Heaven, Moksha or Nirvana etc and if you don’t you will go to hell, is a pretty powerful incentive for many people to follow a religion. I just don’t believe that it is true.

Finally, I have always felt lucky to be alive and doubly lucky to have been able to share my life with those that are dear to me. Who could possibly ask for more.