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*"Hereby know we the spirit of truth
and the spirit of error" 1 John 4:6*
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The Discerner

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WITH THIS ISSUE

Our featured article for this issue is by Pastor Dennis Ingolfsland regarding the reliability of the New Testament Book of Acts. It is an excellent overview of the subject that confirms our confidence that Luke was used of God to bring this important book to us!

Dr. Ingolfsland delivered this paper at our recent Religion Analysis Service Conference on Christian Apologetics.

I wrote our second article which is titled Pascal's Wager and the Place of Faith. It discusses one's journey to the kingdom of God.

As always, enjoy our quiz! The topic is famous scientists and their view of who God is—or isn't!

I want to thank our Board members who worked hard to make our recent one day event, the 2019 Religion Analysis Service Conference on Christian Apologetics, a great success.

We are thankful to the University of Northwestern-St. Paul for hosting our conference. Likewise, we are thankful to our speakers and everyone that attended the conference!

May God bless you in the days ahead.

Steve Lagoon

President, Religion Analysis Service

THE HISTORICAL RELIABILITY OF ACTS

by Dennis Ingolfsland

The Book of Acts is either historically unreliable or is an outright work of fiction—at least that's what some critics tell us. Why do they think that? One reason is because they think the Book of Acts contains so many errors that it cannot be trusted. For example, the Book of Acts places a rebel named Judas the Galilean decades before he actually lived. The Book of Acts says an Egyptian rebel led 4,000 men in revolt against the Romans, when he actually led 30,000 men in revolt. According to the Book of Acts, Paul was once sent out by the High Priest to arrest Christians and yet Acts later says that Paul didn't even recognize the High Priest!

Acts 27 mentions a ship carrying 276 people but we know that ships back then were too small to carry that many people. Acts 28 says Paul was bitten by a poisonous snake on the island of Malta—but there are no poisonous snakes on Malta! The author of Acts, who also wrote the Gospel of Luke,¹ is almost a decade off on the date for Caesar Augustus' census. History knows of no census at the time of Jesus' birth. But even if there was a Roman census at that time, it would not require Joseph and Mary to travel to Bethlehem. And even if Joseph did make such a trip, it is highly unlikely that he would require his very pregnant wife to make the trip with him.

Not only that but the author of Acts says Quirinius was the governor of Syria when this census took place, but we know that Quirinius did not become governor of Syria until later. Finally, roughly 1/5th of the content of Acts consists of speeches and we know from the ancient historian, Thucydides, that in the ancient world, speeches were simply made up. In other words, over 1/5th of the Book of Acts is, therefore, pure fabrication.

These are all actual arguments critics have made in their attempt to discredit the Book of Acts. Their conclusions vary from those who are just very skeptical about the reliability of the Book of Acts, to a minority who think it is outright fiction.

1 I agree with ancient sources that Luke, the traveling companion of Paul, was the author of the Gospel of Luke and Acts. But readers should understand that most critics would dismiss that claim and attribute these books only to an anonymous first century Christian.

What difference does it make?

Having dismissed the Book of Acts as reliable history of the earliest church, some critics then proceed to produce their own revisionist history of the early church. Some have argued, for example, that there was not just one Christianity in the first century, but at least five different and competing Christianities that were later artificially merged by powerful bishops. In other words, having thrown out the Book of Acts, they are free to re-write the whole history of first century Christianity. Not only that, however, but if the Book of Acts is not reliable, that would also call into question what we know about Paul and the genuineness of his letters.

This paper will attempt to answer the objections mentioned above. It will then provide so much positive evidence for the historical reliability of Acts that I may end up boring my listeners to tears.

Before we start, it is worth mentioning that over a century ago an atheist named William Ramsey wanted to prove that the Book of Acts was all fiction, thereby undermining Paul's letters and all of Christianity. Dr. Ramsey was a brilliant man who had been a professor at both Oxford and Cambridge Universities. He studied archaeology and went to the Middle East and began following the journeys of Paul as described in the Book of Acts. He expected to prove that it was all just myth. After 25 years of research he became so impressed with the book's historical accuracy—even in small details—that he ended up getting saved!

Arguments Against the reliability of Acts

So let's begin with the arguments against the reliability of Acts. First, Acts 5:36–37 mentions a rebel named Theudas who was before the census that Luke places near the end of Herod's life in 4–6 BC.² The problem is that according to the testimony of the ancient Jewish historian Josephus³, the rebel Theudas led a revolt during the time of the Roman governor, Fadus, who ruled from 44–46 AD. In other words, Luke places Theudas 40 or 50 years earlier than Josephus does. The critics, therefore, assume that Luke was and is wrong.

The problem with this objection is that the evidence simply does not prove that Luke was inaccurate. Perhaps Josephus was the one who made the error. After all, there is good reason to believe that Luke was writing as much as 20 years closer to the events than Josephus. Or perhaps there was more than one Theudas. In fact, there are at

2 To be more precise, Luke says that Theudas was before Judas and "Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census".

3 Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.5.1.97098.

least 9 people that we know of in ancient sources who were named “Theudas.”⁴ It is entirely possible that the Theudas in Josephus was either a descendant of the first Theudas or was named in honor of the first Theudas. For example, the Quirinius mentioned by Luke as governor of Syria was likely the son of a Roman Consul named Quirinius who ruled in 42 BC. In addition, many people in ancient history were named in honor of those who came before them. The critics, therefore, have not proven Luke was in error. The bottom line is that we simply don’t have enough evidence in this case to know one way or another.⁵

A second objection is that according to Acts 21:38 a Roman commander asked Paul if he was “the Egyptian” who led 4,000 men in revolt. Contrary to Luke, Josephus says this Egyptian rebel led 30,000 men in revolt. In answer to his objection it should be noted, first, that it is obvious Luke is not just making this story up since Josephus confirms that there was, in fact, an Egyptian rebel who led a significant revolt against Rome.

Second, Luke was simply recording what the Roman commander said about this Egyptian rebel. If the Roman commander was wrong about the numbers, Luke cannot be charged with error for accurately reporting what the commander said.

Third, scholars who study Josephus know that he has a tendency to exaggerate his numbers. In fact, if this Egyptian really had 30,000 troops as Josephus suggests, he would have been a significant threat to Roman power in the area. Most scholars would agree, however, that Luke’s figure is much more likely. The discrepancy between Luke and Josephus certainly does not prove that Luke was wrong. In fact, it is more likely that Luke is more accurate than Josephus in this matter.⁶

A third argument against the reliability of the Book of Acts is that according to Luke, Paul was once sent out by the Sanhedrin, the Jewish governing body headed by the High Priest, to arrest Christians. Acts 23:5–6, however, says that when Paul was later on trial before the Sanhedrin, Paul didn’t even recognize the High Priest! If Paul was really sent out by the High Priest to arrest Christians, how could Paul not recognize the High Priest?

But it had been about *twenty-five years* since Paul had been among the high echelons of Jewish leadership in Jerusalem and there had been several High Priests since that time. Not only that but Paul had

4 Bauckham, 86.

5 Hemer, 162.

6 Hemer, 97–98, 126–127.

been out of the country for years. It's not like they had TV news or Internet back then. There is no reason to think that Paul should have been able to recognize the current High Priest.⁷

A fourth argument against the reliability of Acts is that Acts 27:37 says Paul was traveling to Rome on a ship with 276 people on board. Some critics have argued that this is a historical error since ships at that time were too small to carry that many people.

But Josephus claims that he was once on a ship with 600 people on board! As we have seen, however, Josephus is prone to exaggeration. But even if there were really *only half* as many people on Josephus' ship, it would still have had more passengers than the one Paul was on! There is no legitimate reason to suspect Paul of error on this issue.⁸

A fifth objection to the reliability of Act is that Acts 28:3 says Paul was bitten by a poisonous snake on the island of Malta. Some critics have charged Luke with historical error since there are no poisonous snakes on Malta. But it has been almost 2,000 years since the time of Paul. It seems a little silly—or desperate—to assume that it is impossible for a species on a small island to become extinct or exterminated during that time. Remember that Ireland, for example, once had poisonous snakes too, but no longer does.

A sixth objection, probably one of the biggest historical problems, is not in the Book of Acts, but in Luke's Gospel since nearly everyone recognizes that the same author wrote both Luke and Acts. The Gospel of Luke, 2:1–2 says, "In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the *first* registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria."

Luke places this registration or census around the time of Herod's death in 4–6 BC. While there was a Roman census in 6 AD, history knows of no Roman census in 4–6 BC.

Although Luke was writing about a census which took place around the time of the birth of Jesus in 4–6 BC, there is reason to believe that Luke also knew of this later census in AD 6. When Luke describes the census at the time of Jesus' birth, he says it was the "first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria." If this translation is correct it would imply that Luke knew of more than one census administered by Quirinius, and it appears that Luke is deliberately distinguishing this "first" census in 4–6 BC from a later census in AD 6.

7 Hemer, 192.

8 Hemer, 149

Historians know of three other Roman censuses in this period. Just because Luke is the only one who records a registration or census in 4–6 BC is no reason to doubt Luke. We don't automatically charge other ancient historians with error when they are the only source for an event. The critics' argument is an argument from silence and simply does not prove that Luke was in error.

A seventh objection is that Luke 2:1–2 says that Quirinius was the governor of Syria when this census took place. The critics argue that we know Quirinius was the governor of Syria when the census of AD 6 took place, but he was not the governor of Syria at the time of the supposed census around the time of Jesus' birth in 4–6 BC.⁹

It is true that Quirinius was appointed governor of Syria from 6–9 AD. It is also true that we have no record of Quirinius being governor of Syria in 4–6 BC. But lack of historical record simply does not prove Luke was in error. It is not impossible that Quirinius was governor twice.

Imagine, for example, two thousand years from now, almost all history of America has been lost. One historian discovers a document that says Grover Cleveland was President of the United States from 1893–1897. Another historian finds another document that says Grover Cleveland was President from 1885–1889. They conclude that one of the sources was obviously in error. It would be the historians who were in error, however, because Grover Cleveland actually served as President from 1885–1889 and from 1893 to 1897. So perhaps Quirinius was governor, stepped down for other pressing duties, and was re-appointed later. We simply don't know but to say Luke was in error goes beyond what we do know.

Not only that, but Luke's phrase "first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria" could be translated "registration before Quirinius was governor of Syria." Luke may simply be saying that the census he is referring to occurred some time before Quirinius became governor of Syria in AD 6–9. In other words, Luke may be distinguishing the census that occurred around the time of Jesus' birth in 4–6 BC, before Quirinius was governor of Syria, from the one Quirinius administered in AD 6 while he was governor of Syria.¹⁰

Whatever the case, lack of evidence is not proof of historical error. As will be shown below, Luke can be shown to be accurate so many times

9 For most of this discussion I am indebted to Darrell Bock's excellent analysis in his commentary on Luke. Bock, Darrell. Luke 1:1–9:50. Grand Rapids : Baker, 1994, 903–909.

10 See Bock, 203.

that he should be given the benefit of the doubt until proven to be inaccurate. The critics have offered no such proof.

An eighth objection is that even if there was a Roman census in 4–6 BC, it would not require Joseph to travel all the way to Bethlehem. Darrell Bock notes, however, that “The problem of Joseph returning to Bethlehem may be explainable on the principle that sometimes the Romans allowed a census to be taken on the basis of local customs, which in a Jewish culture would require ancestral registration.”¹¹

A ninth objection is that even if Joseph did make such a trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem for the census, it is highly unlikely that he would have taken his very pregnant wife on such a long trip. This argument, however, is pretty weak. In first century Jewish culture, immorality was a very serious offense and there were still people who thought Mary and Joseph had been immoral. So maybe Joseph feared for Mary’s safety if he left her alone in Nazareth. Maybe Joseph just didn’t want to miss the birth. Maybe he planned to relocate to Bethlehem or nearby Jerusalem for a few years. Maybe, in a world without modern medicine, they were not as concerned about a pregnant woman traveling as modern people might be. Whatever the case, the fact is that we simply cannot pontificate with any certainty on what a first century Jewish husband and wife would or would not have done in such a case, and it is entirely out of line to accuse Luke of historical error on this point.

A tenth objection is that Acts 4:6 refers to Annas as the High Priest when we know that his son-in-law Caiaphas was the High priest at that time. But Josephus confirms that Annas had indeed been the High Priest and continued to be highly revered even after the Romans replaced him with his son-in-law, Caiaphas. It is no more unusual that Luke continues to call Annas “High Priest” after he was no longer in office than it is when people today continue to refer to President Obama or President Bush. The important point is that not only does Josephus verify the existence of Annas and Caiaphas, but Luke’s testimony about them is entirely consistent with what we know of them from Josephus.¹²

Finally, critics point out that roughly 22% of the content of Acts consists of speeches. Many critics insist that in the ancient world, speeches were simply made up and placed on the lips, so to speak, of the speaker. This can be demonstrated, they say, because the fifth century B.C. historian Thucydides wrote of his own history books saying, “I have put into the mouth of each speaker the sentiments

¹¹ Bock, 905.

¹² Hemer, 108.

proper to the occasions...” As far as some critics are concerned, therefore, the speeches comprising over 1/5th of the Book of Acts are pure fabrication.

It is indeed true that Thucydides said, “I have put into the mouth of each speaker the sentiments proper to the occasion...” but some critics often leave out the rest of the sentence. The entire quote is,

I have put into the mouth of each speaker the sentiments proper to the occasion expressed as I thought he would be likely to express them, while at the same time I endeavored, as nearly as I could, to *get the general purport of what was actually said* (emphasis mine).

In other words, Thucydides did not just create speeches out of thin air; rather, he tried to accurately provide a summary in his own words of what was actually said. Further, the practice of freely inventing speeches was not accepted in the ancient world. In fact it was strongly condemned by Polybius as early as the 2nd century BC. Ancient historians were very concerned to record the gist of what was actually said and that is precisely what Luke did in the Book of Acts.

The critics’ argument also ignores strong evidence showing that ancient people actually had a system of shorthand and that Jewish students sometimes took notes of their Rabbi’s lessons or speeches and then committed them to memory. Not only that, but those in the ancient world in general, and Jews in particular, learned by memorization. Abundant evidence indicates that they were far better at memorizing than most modern people are. Keener notes, “Difficult as it may seem to most readers today, the elder Seneca testifies that in his younger days he could repeat back two thousand names in exactly the sequence in which he had just heard them or recite, in reverse, up to two hundred verses given him.”¹³ Examples of amazing memories like this in the ancient world are numerous.¹⁴ So it is not at all improbable that people back then could record or accurately remember the gist of the speeches recorded in the Book of Acts.

¹³ Keener, 297.

¹⁴ Keener, 294 “Some scholars have complained (technically correct) that all the rabbinic evidence is late, but it is hardly likely that this evidence would be discontinuous with all other Jewish and Greco-Roman evidence, especially given the particular focus on it in our later extant sources. Some scholars curiously exclude all samples of evidence for oral tradition, voluminous though they are, and the closest analogies available: Rabbinic evidence because it is late, Greek or Roman evidence because it is Gentile, uneducated bards because they sang poetry, and orators and philosophers because they were educated (though not all philosophic students were), and so forth. Individually, each of these reservations is accurate, but they seem problematic when used to explain all the cumulative direction of the bulk of surviving evidence (Keener, 294).

Another point is that unlike some ancient historians who recorded speeches of people who lived long before the historian's time, the author of Acts actually lived during the time of the events he was recording. So Luke had to be careful about being accurate, because there were still plenty of people alive who had heard those speeches and could refute Luke if he got it wrong. The speeches recorded by Luke are undoubtedly summaries of what were originally much longer speeches, but to assume that the speeches were, therefore, entirely fabricated is just an unwarranted assumption.

The case for the reliability of Acts

The case against the reliability of Acts is weak at best. But do we have any positive evidence that the writer of Acts can be trusted as a reliable historian? When someone gives testimony to detectives, the detectives will often seek to verify that testimony from other sources in order to check on the reliability of the witness. We can do the same thing by checking on the testimony of Luke, the writer of Acts.¹⁵ We do this by comparing factual, historical, and geographical statements made in Acts against other ancient sources. Some of this evidence considered individually is not very compelling, but it is very compelling when considered all together.

For example, Acts 11:28 refers to a famine during the time of the Roman emperor Claudius who reigned from 41–54 AD. The Roman historian Suetonius verifies the fact of these famines during the time of Claudius and attributes them to persistent droughts.¹⁶ Luke's report of the famine checks out as accurate.

Acts 12:20–24 gives an account of the death of Herod Agrippa I. Josephus also tells of Agrippa's death. Both Josephus and Luke record that Herod was in Caesarea at the time. Both Josephus and Luke mention Herod's royal or glorious robe which, Josephus explains, reflected the sun, dazzling the audience. In both accounts Herod is then praised by the crowd for being divine! In both accounts Herod is immediately struck down with serious illness resulting in his death.¹⁷ Both Josephus and Luke attribute Herod's death ultimately to his acceptance of divine worship. And yet almost all scholars agree that neither Luke or Josephus was borrowing from each other so each

¹⁵ Most of the evidence below comes from *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* by Colin J. Hemer. Winona Lake, IN : Eisenbrauns, 1990. Colin Hemer was an expert in Greco-Roman history and, at the time of his death in 1987, was a research fellow at Cambridge University in England, one of the most prestigious universities in the world. The information was compiled by Matt Pierce, one of my former students.

¹⁶ Hemer, 164.

¹⁷ Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*. 19.8.2., Hemer, 166.

of these events are confirmed independently. Luke checks out as accurate even in the details.

Acts 13:7 says that Paul met with the Proconsul Sergius Paulus at Paphos on Cyprus. Ancient sources confirm that Cyprus was indeed a proconsular province at that time, and that Paphos was where the proconsul lived. In fact, the family name of Sergius Paulus has even been attested in ancient Cyprian sources. Luke's testimony turns out to be accurate.¹⁸

Acts 14:12 says that the people of Lystra wanted to worship Barnabas as Zeus and Paul as Hermes. The grouping of these two gods together in this region has been verified in ancient inscriptions.¹⁹ In fact, the ancient poet Ovid tells a story about how the people in this region were punished for not recognizing Zeus and Hermes who once came to them in human form. When the people of Lystra saw Paul and Barnabas doing miracles, they called Barnabas Zeus, and Paul they called Hermes—and tried to worship them, apparently assuming that the two gods had come back! The story told by Luke in Acts 14 fits perfectly with the religious background of the people in the area of Lystra. Luke even gets small details right.

Acts 16:1 indicates that Paul traveled to Derbe and Lystra. Coming from his home church in Antioch through the Cilician Gates, Derbe and then Lystra is the order in which Paul would have arrived at these cities.²⁰ Acts 16:2 says that Timothy was known in Lystra and Iconium. That Timothy was known in Lystra and Iconium but apparently not in Derbe is understandable since Lystra and Iconium were geographically close together whereas Derbe was farther away.²¹ It is especially on tiny, irrelevant details like these that some writer of fiction would be likely to mess up the details. Luke gets it right.

Acts 16:11–12 says that Paul sailed from Troas, to Samothrace, to Neapolis, to Philippi. Luke's geography here is accurate. In fact, Samothrace is a 5,000 foot mountain rising out of the sea, and was, therefore, a perfect natural landmark for sailors traveling between Troas and Neapolis. From Neapolis it was just a short trip inward toward Philippi which Luke accurately calls a Roman colony. Luke is accurate on all counts.

According to Acts 16:13, after Paul got to Philippi he went outside the gate and met with some worshipers by the river on the Sabbath day. Sure enough, there is a small river just outside of Philippi. At this

¹⁸ Hemer, 108–109, 227.

¹⁹ Hemer, 111, 230.

²⁰ Hemer, 111.

²¹ Hemer, 111–112.

river, Paul met a woman named Lydia, a seller of purple goods from Thyatira. At least seven ancient inscriptions confirm that Thyatira was a center of dying, including purple dye.²²

Acts 17:1 says that Paul traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia on his way from Philippi to Thessalonica. This is also geographically accurate. These towns were all on the ancient Roman road called the Egnatian Way, and Amphipolis and Apollonia would have been perfectly located places to rest for the evening.²³ Again, these are just the kinds of irrelevant details a fictional writer could have easily gotten wrong. Luke gets them right.

According to Acts 17:6, the Greek word for the city authorities in Thessalonica is “politarchs.” Different cities often had different titles for their leaders so this would be a detail that writers of fiction and even historians could easily get wrong. “Politarchs” is historically accurate as the title for authorities in Thessalonica.

According to Acts 17:16, when Paul got to Athens he found that the city was full of idols. This fact has also been confirmed by both ancient literature and archaeology. Even the fact that there were idols to “unknown gods” has been confirmed.²⁴ Once again, Luke is right on all counts.

In Acts 17:17–18 Luke’s assertion that Paul reasoned in the marketplace with Epicurean and Stoic philosophers is entirely consistent with what we know of ancient Athens where philosophic debate was characteristic of Athenian life.²⁵

According to Acts 17:18, the word used for Paul by his opponents in Athens was “σπερμαλογος” (Literally “seedpicker;” figuratively used for a gossip or babbler). Ancient inscriptions show that this Greek word was “characteristically Athenian slang”.²⁶

In Acts 17:28 when Paul addressed the Athenians, Luke records him as quoting one of their poets. The quotation has been verified as genuine and is attributed to Epimenides.²⁷

Acts 18:2 tells of how Aquilla and Pricilla came to Corinth and began working with Paul because an edict by Emperor Claudius expelled Jews from Rome. The Roman historian Suetonius confirms the

22 Hemer, 113–114.

23 Hemer, 108, 115.

24 Hemer, 116.

25 Hemer, 116.

26 Hemer, 117.

27 Hemer, 118.

historicity of this edict and the time period fits the ostensible time when Paul was ministering in Corinth.²⁸

Acts 18:12 says that Paul was brought before the “bema” or judgment seat of Gallio, the Roman proconsul in Corinth. The site of this judgment seat can still be seen in the ruins of Corinth today. Ancient sources confirm that Gallio, who was the son of Seneca, was in fact the proconsul in Corinth. He was only there a short time, but the time he was in Corinth fits well with the time Paul was in Corinth.²⁹

Acts 19:9 indicates that Paul taught daily in the Hall of Tyrannus. As it turns out someone named Tyrannus was apparently an important figure in Ephesus. Archaeologists have discovered that the name Tyrannus is attested in first century AD inscriptions from Ephesus.³⁰

Acts 19:29 refers to a theater in Ephesus. This large amphitheater is pretty well preserved and can still be seen in the ruins of Ephesus to this day.³¹ Acts 19 also refers to the Temple of Artemis in Ephesus. Ancient inscriptions with the name “great goddess Artemis” have been discovered³² and the ruins of what little is left of this Temple can still be seen in Ephesus today. Again, Luke is accurate on all counts.

Acts 21 says that Paul was nearly killed when he was falsely accused of bringing Gentiles into the inner courts of the Temple. According to Josephus, it was a capital offense for Gentiles to enter the inner courts of the Temple. In fact, archaeologists have even discovered signs³³ warning Gentiles that if they entered the sacred inner courts of the Temple, they would only have themselves to blame for their ensuing death.³⁴ Acts 21:38 refers to an Egyptian who had recently stirred up a revolt. As we saw earlier, the existence of this Egyptian rebel is verified by Josephus.³⁵

Acts 23:2 says Paul was brought to trial before the Jewish high priest, Ananias. Ananias was in fact the high priest at the time of Paul’s trial in Jerusalem.³⁶ Acts 23 also records how the Roman soldiers took Paul, who was under arrest, from Jerusalem to Antipatris to Caesarea. This is geographically accurate. Antipatris was the natural stopping-point on the way from Jerusalem to Caesarea....³⁷

28 Hemer, 119, 167–168.

29 Hemer, 168–169.

30 Hemer, 120, 234.

31 Hemer, 121.

32 Hemer, 121–122.

33 Actually, inscriptions on stone.

34 Hemer, 126

35 Hemer, 170.

36 Hemer, 128.

37 Hemer, 128.

According to Acts, once in Caesarea, Paul had to stand trial before the Roman governor, Felix. The fact that Felix was the Roman governor ruling from Caesarea is confirmed by Josephus.³⁸ In Acts 24:24, Luke says Felix was married to a Jewish woman named Drusilla. This is also verified by Josephus.³⁹ Acts 24:27 says that after two years Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus. We know that Felix was in fact succeeded by Porcius Festus.⁴⁰

Acts 25:13 indicates that King Agrippa II and Bernice came to Caesarea to meet with Felix. We know from ancient sources that Bernice was the sister-consort of Agrippa, and sister to Felix's wife Drusilla.⁴¹

Acts 27:5–7 says that the ship Paul was on during his voyage to Rome came to Myra in Lycia. Luke says it was there that they got on a ship from Alexandria sailing to Italy. The fact is that Myra was a primary port for ships filled with corn traveling from Alexandria to Italy.⁴² Acts 27:8 records that during Paul's voyage to Rome, they came to Fair Havens, near Lasea. Hemer comments that "The locations of 'Fair Havens' and the neighboring site of Lasea are well attested, though obscure places unlikely to be known to any who had not made such a voyage".⁴³

The same is true of the tiny island of Cauda mentioned in Act 27:16. Hemer notes that Cauda is precisely where we would expect it to be, based on the context of Luke 27. Interestingly enough, the ancient writers Pliny and Ptolemy get the location wrong. Luke gets it right.⁴⁴ Back in Paul's day they obviously did not have Google and they couldn't just drive down to the local public library or convenience store to pick up a map. Only someone who had actually made these journeys was likely to get all the geographical details right. Luke gets them right—and the Book of Acts seems to imply that Luke accompanied Paul, especially on his journey to Rome.

In addition to all this evidence—and much more that was not covered—there are many cases in which Luke's historical accuracy can be verified from firsthand accounts in Paul's letters.⁴⁵ It must be remembered that the Bible is not one book, it is a collection of letters and other documents. Almost no one thinks the writer of Acts and

38 Hemer, 128.

39 Hemer, 130, 172–173.

40 Hemer, 130.

41 Hemer, 131, 173, 238.

42 Hemer, 134.

43 Hemer, 136.

44 Hemer, 331.

45 Hemer, 190–193.

Paul borrowed from each other, so when Acts and Paul's letters agree, that provides independent confirmation of their accuracy.

Craig Keener provides lists of literally dozens of such points of confirmation. For example, all of the following are mentioned independently in both Acts and Paul's letters: The "Twelve" were leaders in the early church⁴⁶, Peter and John stand out among the twelve⁴⁷, the Lord's brothers are mentioned with the apostles⁴⁸, the Lord's half-brother, James, was a leader on par with Peter and John⁴⁹, Judean churches faced persecution⁵⁰, Barnabas was an early church leader⁵¹, Mark was closely connected with Barnabas⁵², Paul and Barnabas were co-pastors in Antioch⁵³, Silas and Timothy were companions of Paul⁵⁴, the founders of the Corinthian church were Paul, Silas and Timothy⁵⁵, one early convert was a man named Crispus⁵⁶, the early church practiced baptism⁵⁷, signs and wonders accompanied apostleship⁵⁸, Paul persecuted Christians⁵⁹, Paul was converted near Damascus after a revelation by Jesus⁶⁰, Paul escaped Damascus by being lowered over the wall in a basket⁶¹, and Paul then went to Jerusalem.⁶²

In addition, Paul's ministry in places like Damascus, Jerusalem, Syria and Cilicia, Antioch, Philippi, Thessalonica, Athens, Corinth, Ephesus, Troas, and Rome are all confirmed in both Acts and Paul's letters. People associated with Paul, like Barnabas, Silas (aka Silvanus), Timothy, Aquila, Priscilla, Mark, Aristarchus, Tychicus, Sopater (aka Sospater), Crispus, and Trophimus are also confirmed in both Acts and Paul's letters. These are only a sample of the correspondences between Acts and Paul as listed by Keener.⁶³

46 Acts 1:13; 6:2; Gal. 1:17; 1 Cor. 15:5.

47 Acts 3:1ff; 8:14ff; Gal. 2:9.

48 Acts 1:14; 1 Cor 9:5.

49 Acts 12:17; 15:13ff; 21:18; 1 Cor 15:7; Gal. 2:9, 12.

50 1 Thess. 2:14 and throughout Acts.

51 Acts 14:4, 14; 1 Cor 9:5-6; 15:7.

52 Acts 15:37ff; Col. 4:10.

53 Acts 11:25-26; 13:1; Gal. 2:1-14.

54 Acts 15:40ff; 16:1ff; 1 Tess. 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:9.

55 Acts 18:1,5; 2 Cor. 1:19.

56 Acts 18:8; 1 Cor. 1:14.

57 Acts 2:38, 41; 8:12-13; Rom 6:3-4; Gal 3:27.

58 Acts 2:43; 14:3; 2 Cor. 12:11-12.

59 Acts 9:1ff; Gal 1:13-14; 1 Cor. 15:9; Phil. 3:6.

60 Acts 9:2-9; Gal. 1:12-17; 1 Cor. 15:8.

61 Acts 8; 2 Cor. 11:32.

62 Acts 9:26; Gal 1:18-19.

63 Keener, 238-250.

Conclusion

The evidence presented in this paper just scratches the surface of historical evidence for the reliability of Acts covered by Colin Hemer in *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History*, and volume one of Craig Keener's massive five volume set entitled *Acts; an Exegetical Commentary*, sources from which most of this paper were derived.

Even if all the objections to the reliability of Acts were true, it's hard to imagine any reputable historian of the ancient world dismissing the essential reliability of any other ancient historians for such petty objections. For example, critics would not throw out the testimony of ancient historians like Herodotus, Thucydides, Livy, Polybius, Tacitus, or Josephus simply because they made some historical errors. All of these historians made errors. So in light of all the positive evidence for the reliability of Acts, why is there still such a hyper-skepticism about the Book of Acts?

The answer can be stated in one word: Miracles! About one fifth of the book of Acts consists of miracles.⁶⁴ Make no mistake about it: If Luke's writings contained no miracles, it is unlikely that critics would even bother to attack his testimony.

To discuss the plausibility of miracle accounts would take way too much space. Those who are interested are encouraged to read Craig Keener's outstanding two-volume work entitled *Miracles* for what may be one of the best and most thorough treatments in print. Keener provides an absolutely devastating critique of the arguments of David Hume and other philosophical objections to miracles, and then describes hundreds of examples of genuine miracles that have occurred all over the world.

Just because Luke has been accused of minor inaccuracies is no reason to doubt his overall reliability as a historian, especially in light of all the times he can be demonstrated to be reliable. The bottom line is that there is abundant evidence to accept the historical reliability of the Book of Acts, and few if any good reasons to doubt it.

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⁶⁴ Keener, 320.

Most of the evidence in this paper has been summarized and synthesized from two outstanding sources: 1) Colin Hemer's book, "The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History" and 2) Craig Keener's Acts: An Exegetical Commentary; Introduction and 1:1–2:47. Hemer was an expert in Greco-Roman history. Keener is a world-class biblical scholar whose work is voluminous. His introduction alone in the above volume is over 600 pages!

PASCAL'S WAGER AND THE PLACE OF FAITH

by Steve Lagoon

Introduction

I am not much of a gambler, although I confess that over the years I have purchased a handful of lottery tickets and pull tabs, plus I've played a little bingo at the County Fair.

I guess, however, that I am just too cheap to waste money on gambling.

But according to the great French philosopher and Christian, Blasé Pascal, there is one form of gambling that we must all partake of, and that involves our eternal destiny.

Pascal's Wager

Pascal's wager is named after the famed French philosopher and mathematician Blaise Pascal (1623–1662). After he passed away, a collection was made of notes Pascal had made concerning the truths of the Christian religion and these eventually formed the work we know as the *Pensees*.

His "wager" argument is found most specifically in *Pensees* 233:

Let us then examine this point, and say, 'God is, or He is not.' But to which side shall we incline? Reason can decide nothing here . . . A game is being played at the extremity of this infinite distance where heads or tails will turn up. What will you wager? According to reason, you can do neither the one thing or the other; according to reason, you can defend neither of the

propositions . . . Yes; but you must wager. It is not optional. *You are embarked*. Which will you choose then? . . . Let us weigh the gain and the loss in wagering that God is. Let us estimate these two chances. If you gain, you gain all; if you lose, you lose nothing. Wager, then, without hesitation that He is . . . The end of this discourse. Now, what harm will befall you in taking this side? You will be faithful, honest, humble, grateful, generous, a sincere friend, truthful. Certainly you will not have those poisonous pleasures, glory and luxury; but will you not have others?¹

I love how Pascal showed the necessity of the choice we all face: “You are embarked.” None will avoid their appointment with the angel of death. Now, as Pascal argued, after we die, we will find the truth.

If we have bet *for God* and are right (risking very little!), then we will be most blessed indeed. On the other hand, if we have bet *against God and are wrong, we shall be damned for all eternity*. Pascal reasoned that the most logical thing to do, given the options available to us, is to believe in (to bet on) God.

But the skeptic asks: *Can you make yourself believe what you don’t?*

Carl Van Doren expressed a similar sentiment:

An honest unbeliever can no more make himself believe against his reason than he can make himself free of the pull of gravitation.²

However, it seems certain that Pascal was not advising a course of self-delusion.

I take Pascal to be challenging those struggling with ultimate issues to give faith a real chance, setting aside for a time all of their customary objections. They could begin, perhaps, by reading the Bible, not as a critic, but as one open to hearing from God. They could humbly consider the possibility that there just might be A Being greater than themselves. They could visit a church. They could pray, asking God to reveal Himself to them. As Pascal said, “What have you to lose?”

1 Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*, New York (E. P. Dutton & Company Inc., 1943), 66-68.

2 Carl Van Doren, *Why I Am an Unbeliever* in Christopher Hitchens, *The Portable Atheist: Essential Readings for the Nonbeliever*, Philadelphia PA (De Capo Press, 2007), 141.

In the struggle with faith, we can cry out to God like the man who cried out to Jesus, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24, NKJV).

Hebrews 11:1 (NIV) says, “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”

“Then Jesus told him, ‘Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.’” (John 20:29)

“Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy” (1 Peter 1:8).

But skeptics ask: Why is faith necessary?

They distort the meaning of faith as did Mark Twain when he said, “Faith is believing what you know ain’t so.” In reality, skeptics *want to know why God can’t just prove His existence beyond doubt!*

For instance, the skeptic Vincent Bugliosi asked:

So why not give these millions proof that they will accept and cannot deny, such as appearing to us in the sky? Since it would be so easy for him to do, why not? They have no answer to this because there is no answer.³

Carl Sagan agreed:

God could have engraved the Ten Commandments on the Moon. Large. Ten kilometers across per commandment . . . Or why not a hundred-kilometer crucifix in Earth’s orbit? God could certainly do that. Right! . . . Why didn’t God do things of that sort?⁴

Contrary to these arguments, I believe there is a very good reason why God hasn’t provided this type of undeniable evidence or proof of His existence. *It would remove the element of both faith and freedom.*

Epistemic Distance

Philosopher John Hick called the gap between absolute proof versus adequate proof (which entails the need for faith) *epistemic distance*.

3 Vincent Bugliosi, *Divinity of Doubt: The God Question*, New York (Vanguard Press, 2011), 268.

4 Carl Sagan, *The God Hypothesis* in Christopher Hitchens, *The Portable Atheist: Essential Readings for the Nonbeliever*, Philadelphia PA (De Capo Press, 2007), 238.

As it is, there is more than enough reason to believe, but a gap remains for faith, the epistemic distance. This is by God's design; to separate lovers of truth from lovers of self. Faith has the sifting quality of drawing those sincere and hungry for truth while repelling those too devoted to themselves and their idols.

Paul Edwards recorded the sentiments of John Hick and Alasdair MacIntyre on this issue:

If the existence of God were unquestionably certain like a physical fact, writes John Hick, it 'would leave no ground for a free human response of trust, self-commitment and obedience.' If we could produce logically coercive arguments, in the words of Alasdair MacIntyre, 'we should be as bereft of the possibility of making a free decision to love God as we should be if every utterance of doubt and unbelief was answered by thunder-bolts from heaven.'⁵

Martin noted the similar thoughts of Kierkegaard:

Kierkegaard maintains that with objective certainty comes lack of personal growth and spiritual stagnation. But with faith there is risk, danger, and adventure—all essential for spiritual growth and transcendence.⁶

Consider also, the similar sentiments of C. S. Lewis:

The Irresistible and the Indisputable are the two weapons which the very nature of God's scheme forbids Him to use. Merely to override a human will . . . would be for Him useless. He cannot ravish. He can only woo.⁷

Menssen and Sullivan argue:

A super-abundantly convincing revelation from on high would need to tear the veil off mysteries of freedom, sin, satisfaction, and grace. Suppose . . . that God could make the evidence in this world irresistible, so strong that we would have no real choice but to assent. It is quite easy to think of a reason God would not want to do that. It is the same reason given earlier, one

5 Paul Edwards, *A Modern Introduction to Philosophy: Readings from Classical and Contemporary Sources*, Third Edition, Paul Edwards & Arthur Pap, Editors, New York, (The Free Press, 1973), 391.

6 Michael Martin, *Atheism*, 252.

7 C. S. Lewis, *Screwtape Letters*, New York (Macmillan, 1961, p. 128) as quoted by Timothy Morgan, *Thank God for Atheists: How the Greatest Skeptics Led Me to Faith*, Eugene OR (Harvest House Publishers, 2015), 223.

endorsed by Kant: such a revelation would destroy all freedom of action.⁸

God does not want heavenly prisoners forced or dragged into His kingdom against their will. Hence, God has made it possible for people to believe in Him, but He does not demand it of them. He has provided more than enough evidence for belief, but has left an element of faith lest the freedom of choice be removed and entrance into His Kingdom be compelled. God has provided the way of salvation as a gift through faith in His Son Jesus Christ. Yet, in the final analysis, whether we receive the gift is left to our choice.

Kierkegaard's parable of the King and the Maiden

We shall now consider Kierkegaard's parable of *The King and the Maiden* to further illustrate the point:

Suppose there was a king who loved a humble maiden. The king was like no other king. Every statesman trembled before his power. No one dared breathe a word against him, for he had the strength to crush all opponents.

And yet this mighty king was melted by love for a humble maiden who lived in a poor village in his kingdom. How could he declare his love for her? In an odd sort of way, his kingliness tied his hands. If he brought her to the palace and crowned her head with jewels and clothed her body in royal robes, she would surely not resist - no one dared resist him. But would she love him?

She would say she loved him, of course, but would she truly? Or would she live with him in fear, nursing a private grief for the life she had left behind? Would she be happy at his side? How could he know for sure? If he rode to her forest cottage in his royal carriage, with an armed escort waving bright banners, that too would overwhelm her. He did not want a cringing subject. He wanted a lover, an equal. He wanted her to forget that he was a king and she a humble maiden and to let shared love cross the gulf between them. For it is only in love that the unequal can be made equal.

The king, convinced he could not elevate the maiden without crushing her freedom, resolved to descend to her. Clothed as a beggar, he approached her cottage with a worn cloak fluttering loose about him. This was not just a disguise – the king took on

8 Sandra Menssen & Thomas D. Sullivan, *The Agnostic Inquirer: Revelation from a Philosophical Standpoint*, Grand Rapids MI (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 311.

a totally new identity—He had renounced his throne to declare his love and to win hers.⁹

While the primary purpose of Kierkegaard's parable was to illustrate the incarnation of the Son of God for the purpose of man's redemption (Kenosis) as taught in Philippians 2, nonetheless, we can take a further lesson from the parable as well.

We take note of the parable's description of the king's concern that his maiden's love be real and not coerced. Just as the King could not ride up in all his kingly glory with his impressive retinue to seek the love of the maiden, so God has not given spectacular and undeniable signs in the heavens compelling men to believe. For such an act would denigrate man's free response to God's offer of salvation.

Would unbelievers be persuaded by spectacular signs?

Further, it is a fair question whether unbelievers would really be persuaded by even the most spectacular signs in the heavens. Just like skeptics today, Jesus confronted "a wicked and adulterous generation" asking Him for just such a sign. Notice Jesus' response to their demand:

"Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, 'Teacher, we want to see a miraculous sign from you.' He answered, 'A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a miraculous sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth,' (Matthew 12:38-40).

In other words, Jesus would give them the sign of His own resurrection from the dead. While many have believed the sign, Christ's hardened enemies obstinately refused to believe despite the powerful evidence of His resurrection including His empty tomb and appearances.

The heavenly sign at Christ's second coming to earth

It is interesting that Jesus has actually promised to provide the kind of sign in the heavens that skeptics have demanded. But it will be on God's timetable, particularly accompanying Christ's still future second coming to earth. At this time, said Jesus, there will be a powerful sign in the heavens:

9 Soren Kierkegaard, *The King and the Maiden*, Philosophical Fragments, 31-42, as quoted at <https://bearskin.org/2015/04/03/the-king-and-the-maiden>.

“At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.” (Matthew 24:30)

The apostle John described the same event:

“Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.” (Revelation 1:7)

Both passages mention the mourning of the people of the earth at the second coming of Christ. This is because when He returns, Jesus will be coming as a Judge to separate the good from evil, the sheep from the goats (Matthew 25:31-46).

There are already powerful signs in the heavens

Further, *there already are signs in the heavens above* that reflect the majesty and grandeur of God. David declared by the Holy Spirit:

“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge.” (Psalm 19:1-2)

Who has not been awestruck and inspired by a clear, dark-night’s survey of the heavens and wondered about the ultimate meaning and existence of God?

The God who seeks

Let’s bring this down to the personal level. Let there be no doubt that God loves you and wants a relationship with you. The Bible is clear that God wants all men to be saved. The apostle Paul said: “This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” (1 Timothy 2 3-4). Likewise, the apostle Peter said:

“The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:9)

Speaking of God’s preeminent grace, Merton said, “We could not seek God unless He were seeking us.”¹⁰ Jesus said, “But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.” (John 12:32) God is

¹⁰ Thomas Merton, *Random House Webster’s Quotationary*, Leonard Roy Frank, Editor, New York (Random House, 2001). 317.

seeking you as a shepherd seeks a wayward sheep. Francis Thompson described God's graceful call using the metaphor of the *Hound of Heaven*:

I fled him down the nights and down the days; I fled Him, down
the arches of the years: I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways
of my own mind; And in the midst of my tears I hid from Him.¹¹

And again:

All the messages you've heard,
about Jesus and His word.
But still you keep on running from His love.
When you gonna open your eyes and see,
that it's Him you really need.
Tell me why do you keep running from His love?
Why do you keep running from His love?
If you only knew how much He cares for you.
Don't you know He cries a tear inside,
every time you run and hide?
Tell me why do you keep running from His love?¹²

Please remember that Jesus said: "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost." (Luke 19:10)

Kierkegaard's leap of faith

We can shut our eyes to the overwhelming evidence for God and stubbornly go on doing our own thing, or we can humble ourselves and take a leap of faith into God's kingdom. This leap of faith is the idea that Søren Kierkegaard emphasized; that at the end of the day, coming to faith requires one to finally leap.

Kierkegaard's parable of the young maiden contemplating marriage

Elmer Duncan explained how Kierkegaard used an illustration of a young maiden contemplating a marriage proposal to explain the leap of faith necessary for Christian salvation.

"[Kierkegaard] said that we become Christians, that we move into the religious sphere from the ethical, by a 'leap of faith.' As he put it, 'reflection can be halted only by a leap . . . When the subject does not put an end to his reflection, he is made infinite

11 *The Encyclopedia of Religious Quotations*, Frank S. Mead, Editor, Westwood NJ (Fleming H. Revell Company, 1965), 188.

12 The author.

in reflection, i.e., he does not arrive at a decision' . . . Whether we are deciding to become Christians, or to get married, or anything else, we finally must put reflection aside, and make our decision . . . Here I think Kierkegaard can be defended. He did not say that reasons cannot be given for a choice. The young girl asks for reasons, and should have them, before she decides to marry. But, in the very nature of the case, she can never know *all* the facts. She must decide on less than complete evidence, and so must the Christian. If we wait for complete knowledge, we shall never decide.¹³

Kierkegaard himself put it like this:

Without risk there is no faith. Faith is precisely the contradiction between the infinite passion of the individual's inwardness and the objective uncertainty. If I am capable of grasping God objectively, I do not believe, but precisely because I cannot do this I must believe.¹⁴

For Kierkegaard, it is precisely because we don't have absolute visible proof of God's personal existence as a tangible Divine Being that makes real faith possible. As we have seen, this has the result of separating the faithful from the faithless. So, rather than desponding this lack of certainty, join Kierkegaard in making the leap!

Don Francisco and a "Step Across the Line"

Don Francisco wrote these words:

"You got to take a step across the line.
Let Jesus fill your heart and mind.
I can show you where to look,
but you got to seek to find.
You got to take a step across the line."¹⁵

Barry McGuire and the big leap

Barry McGuire, in his song *Cosmic Cowboy* caught the same idea:

Somehow without a sound, I heard Him call my name. Lookin'
up, I saw we was high up on this ridge. He took me by my hand:

13 Elmer H. Duncan, *Soren Kierkegaard, Makers of the Modern Theological Mind*, Bob E. Patterson, Editor, Waco TX (Word Books, 1976), 88-89.

14 Soren Kierkegaard, *Eternal Happiness, Subjectivity and Truth*, as reprinted in, *A Modern Introduction to Philosophy: Readings from Classical and Contemporary Sources*, Third Edition, Paul Edwards & Arthur Pap, Editors, New York, (The Free Press, 1973), 501.

15 Soren Kierkegaard, *Step Across the Line, Forgiven*, (Newpax, 1977),

led me right to the edge. I was so scared I couldn't find a single word to say. I mean, there's 10,000 feet in the air, and it's just about an inch away. But a million miles was out beyond the waving of his hand. And I was looking through His eyes, right in to another land.

He said, 'This is my Father's ranch, as far as you can see. He made it out of nothing; every branch and every tree. The stars, and mountains, the rivers and the streams. The oceans and the fountains, and the valley of your dreams.

That's right, I know that place you long to be. Truth is, I'm the only door, you're going to have to pass through me.' Bending back, I tipped my hat so I could look Him in the eye. He just smiled and gave me confidence. He said, 'Go ahead and try.'

Well, it was now or never, and I knew I had to start. So I took that step and I went falling, straight into His heart. The first thing that I noticed coming out the other side; all my fears had vanished, He taught me how to fly!

There's a Cosmic Cowboy, and He rides the starry range. He's a supernatural plowboy, and he is dressed up kind of strange. To think I nearly missed him, being out there on the run. Ah, but that old hat He was wearing, was shining brighter than the sun.

And when my eyes adjusted, to the flashing of His smile; Hey, I saw His invitation, He said, 'Come on, Me and you, we'll go ridin' for a while.'¹⁶

The way of Faith

Mark Mittelburg provided a practical illustration concerning the relationship between reason and faith:

Think in terms of flying. It's not enough to just believe in aviation, to spend time in airports, to affirm the skills of pilots. No, that will not get you to Pittsburgh. You need to act on those beliefs by actually climbing on board an airplane. That's real faith, and it can get you where you want to go.¹⁷

¹⁶ Barry McGuire, *Cosmic Cowboy*, Sparrow Records, 1978.

¹⁷ Mark Mittelburg, *Why Faith in Jesus Matters* in William Lane Craig & Chad Meister, Editors, *God is Great, God is Good: Why Believing in God is Reasonable and Responsible*, Downers Grove IL (InterVarsity Press, 2009), 226.

John F. Haught said: “At some point in the validation of every truth claim or hypothesis, a leap of faith is an escapable ingredient.”¹⁸ Indeed, Haught is insightful in reminding us of the paradox of faith:

The life of faith is one in which ‘there is no knowing without going’: ‘unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven’ (cf. Matthew 18:3).¹⁹

Humble before the Lord

The truth is, we must finally make this leap of faith absent of absolute or total proof, trusting in God as a child instinctively trusts its parents. You must humble yourself, then, if you are to find The King of the universe.

Paul Moser stated:

The Key question will thus become ‘Who is enquiring about the existence of God? More specifically, what *kind* of person is inquiring about divine reality—a person willing or unwilling to yield to a perfectly loving God? . . . Inquirers about God’s existence typically overlook this important cognitive consideration about a God worthy of worship.’²⁰

Some may find this admonition an offense. *But the issue isn’t whether we like it, but whether, in fact, it is true.* If, for the sake of argument, there is an Almighty God, Creator of the universe, and Lord over all, does that not give one pause to consider that reverence toward this Being would be appropriate?

C. S. Lewis’ Leap of Faith

Gerald Benedict described C. S. Lewis’ own conversion experience:

C. S. Lewis became an atheist at the age of fifteen. In *Surprised by Joy*, he said he was ‘very angry with God for not existing.’ He confessed to being brought to Christianity like a prodigal, ‘kicking, struggling, resentful . . . You must picture me alone in that room in Magdalen night after night, feeling, whenever my mind lifted even for a second from my work, the steady, unrelenting approach of Him whom I so earnestly desired not to meet. That which I greatly feared had at last come upon me.

18 John F. Haught, *God and the New Atheism: A Critical Response to Dawkins, Harris, and Hitchens*, Louisville KY (Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 47.

19 John F. Haught, *God and the New Atheism*, 46.

20 Paul K. Moser, *Evidence of a Morally Perfect God* in William Lane Craig & Chad Meister, Editors, *God is Great, God is Good: Why Believing in God is Reasonable and Responsible*, Downers Grove IL (Inter Varsity Press, 2009), 56-57.

In the Trinity Term of 1929 I gave in, and admitted that God was God, and knelt and prayed; perhaps, that night, the most dejected and reluctant convert in all England.²¹

Conclusion

The Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem is the traditional sight of Jesus' birth. During the Middle Ages, pilgrims on horseback would ride right into the church. To protect the church, and to provide proper reverence for Christ's birthplace, the doorway was lowered to prevent the horse and rider from entering.

Indeed, it is now so low, that even on foot, most adults have to crouch to enter through the opening. This is a beautiful picture of the faith that brings salvation, for just as one must bow down to enter into the place of Christ's birth, likewise, one must humble themselves if they want to enter into the Kingdom of God, becoming like a little child trusting alone in their heavenly Father.

21 Gerald Benedict, *The God Debate: A New Look at History's Oldest Argument*, London (Watkins Publishing, 2013), 113.

QUIZ: SCIENCE AND FAITH

1. This scientist taught there are two books of truth, the Bible and the book of creation (nature).
 - a. Francis Bacon
 - b. Frank Lolan
 - c. Bobby Bittman
 - d. Skip Bittman
2. This scientist developed vaccinations to fight diseases and disproved the theory of spontaneous generation of life (the law of biogenesis).
 - a. George Washington Carver
 - b. Florence Nightingale

- c. Madam Marie Curie
- d. Louis Pasteur

3. This scientist said: "I was merely thinking God's thoughts after him. Since we astronomers are priests of the highest God in regard to the book of nature, it benefits us to be thoughtful, not of the glory of our minds, but rather, above all else, of the glory of God."

- a. Michael Faraday
- b. Nicholas Copernicus
- c. Johannes Kepler
- d. Steve Devore

4. This scientist said: "The Bible teaches men how to go to heaven, not how the heavens go."

- a. Albert Einstein
- b. Albert Brooks
- c. Galileo
- d. Nicholas Copernicus

5. This scientist said: "God does not play dice."

- a. Albert Einstein
- b. Stephen Hawking
- c. Werner Heisenberg
- d. Wernher von Braun

6. This scientist said: "This most beautiful system of the sun, planets, and comets, could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent Being."

- a. Sir Isaac Newton
- b. Wayne Newton
- c. Tycho Brahe
- d. Edwin Hubble

7. This scientist, known as the father of modern chemistry, believed true science and faith are in harmony.

- a. Robert Bunsen
- b. Dmitri Mendeleev
- c. Robert Boyle
- d. Antoine Lavoisier

8. This scientist compared belief in God to a mental illness and is the author of "The God Delusion."
- a. Sadie Hawkins
 - b. Richard Dawkins
 - c. Richard Feynman
 - d. Paul Kurtz
9. This atheistic scientist said: "The cosmos is all that is, or ever was, or ever will be."
- a. Isaac Asimov
 - b. Carl Sagan
 - c. Freeman Dyson
 - d. Robert Zimmerman
10. This scientist originally espoused William Paley's argument from design but later rejected it in favor of his own theory of evolution.
- a. Darwin Gross
 - b. Henry Gross
 - c. Charles Darwin
 - d. Bobby Darin

Answers:

1. a; 2. d; 3. c; 4. c; 5. a; 6. a; 7. c; 8. b; 9. b; 10. c

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