

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Bert Thompson, Trevor Major, and Sam Estabrook

[EDITOR'S NOTE From time to time, we produce an issue of *Reason & Revelation* that responds to questions from our readers, inquiries on difficult topics or passages within the Scriptures, alleged Bible contradictions, etc. This is one such occasion. This month, however, I would like to introduce to you a new author. In my February "Note from the Editor," I mentioned a young man by the name of Sam Estabrook. As the Operations Manager at Apologetics Press, Sam has had a tremendous influence on our work, especially via his efforts related to our Web site. In this issue of *R&R*, it gives me great pleasure to introduce him as a writer. I have no doubt that you will enjoy his articles, and hope that you will let him know if you do.]

Q One of the best-known stories in the Old Testament concerns the unusual manner in which the Israelites conquered the city of Jericho while they were in the process of inhabiting the land of Canaan (which God had promised to give them as an inheritance after their escape from Egypt). A woman named Rahab not only provided sanctuary in her house for two Israelite spies but, when asked by the king's men about the matter, lied in order to protect them. Later, the lives of Rahab and her household were spared when Jericho was destroyed—a fact that has provided grist for the mill of Bible critics who suggest that this account establishes God's approval of "situation ethics." Their argument is as follows. Rahab lied. But the situation required that she do so for good reason—to protect the spies. Rahab was blessed, and her household was spared certain death.

Thus, God must approve of situation ethics (e.g., lying under certain conditions). How should the Bible believer respond to such a suggestion? Does God approve of situation ethics?

A In the sixth chapter of the Old Testament book of Joshua we find the familiar story of the Israelites' siege of the famous city of Jericho. The people of the city had heard of the many successes of God's people as they defeated various enemies throughout the land of Canaan. And they were determined that Jericho would not fall to the Israelites as so many other cities around them had. Joshua 6:1 confirms that fact by observing that "Jericho was securely shut up because of the children of Israel; none went out, and none came in." Therefore, the Lord gave Joshua several specific commands relating to how the Israelites were to overcome the city. God said to Israel's leader:

You shall march around the city, all you men of war; you shall go all around the city once. This you shall do six days. And seven priests shall bear seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark. But the seventh day you shall march around the city seven times, and the priests shall blow the trumpets. Then it shall come to pass, when they make a long blast with the ram's horn, and when you hear the sound of the trumpet, that all the people shall shout with a great shout; then the wall of the city will fall down flat (Joshua 6:3-5).

Prior to the Israelites' attack on the city, however, Joshua sent two men to Jericho as spies to examine the city secretly (Joshua 2:1). Upon their arrival, they came to the house of a woman by the name of Rahab who was a harlot and lodged there. Apparently the fact that two strangers had entered the closed city raised suspicions among some of the townspeople, who then told the king of the strangers' arrival. He, in turn, sent his representatives to investigate. Arriving at Rahab's house, they said to her: "Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered your house, for they have come to search out all the country" (2:3). The text goes on to indicate that Rahab had hidden the spies under stalks of flax on the roof of her house. She then told the king's messengers: "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. And it happened as the gate was being shut, when it was dark, that the men went out. Where the men went I do not know; pursue them quickly, for you may overtake them" (2:5).

While the king's men gave chase along the road to the Jordan River, Rahab pleaded with the spies:

I know that the Lord has given you the land.... For the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.... Now therefore, I beg you, swear to me by the Lord, since I have shown you kindness, that you also will show kindness to my father's house, and give me true token,

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Annual Subscription Rates:
\$6.00 Domestic
\$11.00 Canada & Overseas Airmail

Mailing Address:
Apologetics Press, Inc.
230 Landmark Drive
Montgomery, AL 36117-2752

General inquiries, changes of address, or international callers:
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and spare my father, my mother, my brothers, my sisters, and all that they have, and deliver our lives from death (2:9,11-13).

The spies answered her, "Our lives for yours, if none of you tells this business of ours. And it shall be, when the Lord has given us the land, that we will deal kindly and truly with you" (2:14). The two men then instructed Rahab to place a scarlet cord in the window of her house (which adjoined the wall of the city). This would be a sign to the Israelite army that she and her family were to be spared because they had helped God's people.

The Problem Of Rahab's Lie And The Lord's Blessing

Critics of the Bible have charged that this particular story involves God in a moral contradiction. Rahab lied to the king's messengers. Yet God blessed Rahab, as is evident from the fact that: (a) she and her family were the only ones spared when the Israelites invaded Jericho; and (b) she is commended in two separate New Testament passages (Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25). The critics have claimed, therefore, that Rahab was blessed by God as a direct result of her lie—a sin that the Bible elsewhere condemns (Exodus 20:16). How should a Bible believer respond to such a charge?

In addressing the critics' allegations, let us first admit the obvious. Rahab **did** lie—not once, but twice. When the king's emissaries came to interrogate her, she lied when she feigned ignorance about the spies being Israelites. She then lied a second time when she told the intermediaries that the spies had left the city through the main gate under cover of darkness. Let us also freely admit that Rahab and her household were the only ones saved during the assault upon Jericho (Joshua 6:17).

The question is not whether Rahab lied. She did. The question is not whether she was saved during Jericho's destruction. She was. The questions that must be addressed are these: (1) Did God bless Rahab **as a result of her lie**?; and (2) Is "situation ethics" acceptable? That is to say, can a person lie on certain occasions (if the situation warrants it) and still be pleasing to God?

First, what does the Bible have to say about lying? Of the Ten Commandments, the ninth forbade lying (Exodus 20:16). And, in both the Old and New Testaments the telling of a falsehood is condemned (Leviticus 19:11; Proverbs 6:16-19; Ephesians 4:25; Colossians 3:9). As one writer stated the matter, "Just as there are no exceptions to the adultery commandment, there is none for the Ninth Commandment" (Webster, 1993, p. 2). God has denounced explicitly any form of lying and has made it clear that those who commit such a sin without repenting shall spend eternity "in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone which is the second death" (Revelation 21:8).

Second, a close examination of the actual events of Joshua 2 is in order. Note, for example, that the spies never asked Rahab to lie for them. In fact, there is no indication in the text that the spies even knew Rahab **had** lied. Since they were hiding on the roof (Joshua 2:8), it is highly unlikely that they had any knowledge of her sin. It is wrong to suggest that Rahab received God's blessings **as a result of her lie**. The two New Testament passages that mention Rahab do not commend her for the sin of lying. Quite the opposite, in fact. The writer of Hebrews placed Rahab in the great "hall of fame of faith" (Hebrews 11) because "she received the spies with peace" (vs. 31). James acknowledged that she was "justified by works when she received the messengers" (2:25). Nowhere in Scripture is Rahab's sin of lying spoken of approvingly. Instead, it is her faith and her righteous works that are commended and approved. As one writer observed:

What she is commended for is her faith or that which prompted her to deliver the spies from her townspeople, **not the means** by which she accomplished it. She had heard about God's dealings with Egypt and how He had delivered Israel through the parting of the Red Sea. So, the word of hearing profited her, because it was united by faith (Heb. 4:2). James did not write, "...was not Rahab the harlot justified by lying, in that she spoke an untruth to the king's men and sent the spies out another way?" Her faith was evidenced in the work of receiving the spies and sending them out another way (Lloyd, 1990, p. 357, emp. added).

Furthermore, it is important to consider the entire context of Rahab's life and vocation. She was a prostitute, living in a pagan city. As Wayne Jackson has observed:

The case of Rahab is an example of where God honored a person due to their obedient faith in spite of a personal character flaw. Consider the following facts about this incident. Rahab was from a pagan environment. Her concept of morality and her personal lifestyle (she was a harlot) needed considerable refining. In spite of this sordid background, she had developed a genuine faith in Jehovah (Josh. 2:9ff.). She referred to Him as "God in heaven above, and on earth beneath...." Accordingly, when the spies approached her, she was not "disobedient" as were the others of Jericho, who perished in the destruction of the city, for she, through faith in God and His promises, received the spies in peace (Heb. 11:31), hid them, and sent them out another way (Jas. 2:25) [1986, 22[6]:23].

Should we be surprised that a prostitute, living in pagan surroundings, would lie to governmental authorities? Hardly. But she was not saved because she lied—a critical point that needs expanding. In addressing this idea, Allen Webster wrote: "Rahab lied, true, but God never complimented this action. She was a heathen, not yet even converted to Judaism.... She was saved **in spite** of her lying, and not **because** of it. She was a prostitute, but this text does not authorize such activity" (1993, p. 2, emp. in orig.). This is a part of the story that seems to have been missed by the Bible critics who have isolated Rahab's lie not only from the context of the story itself, but from the remainder of her life and additional biblical commentary on that life.

Does Temporary Sin Necessarily Imply Permanent Condemnation?

Having established the fact that Rahab's lie was not the reason for her commendation within the pages of Scripture, the question arises: Why, then, was she honored within the great "hall of fame of faith" in Hebrews 11 and spoken of by James as having been "justified"? There can be no doubt that Rahab occupies a special place within the biblical text, since she is one of only five women listed as being within the lineage of

Christ. [She married Salmon, an Israelite, and became the mother of Boaz, Jesse's grandfather, joining Tamar, Bathsheba, Ruth, and Mary in the Lord's ancestry.]

Surely, the answer to the question has to do with the fact that Rahab did not remain in her sinful state. In fact, "her repentance is implied since the New Testament writers commend only those Old Testament characters whose lives as a whole reflect an obedient faith" (Grizzell, 1986, 15[9]:70, emp. in orig.). The operative phrase here, of course, is "lives as a whole." Rahab was not mentioned favorably by the writers of the books of Hebrews and James because she told a lie at one point in her life. Rather, she was commended for a lifetime of righteousness that followed a previous life of sin.

Consider three other famous Old Testament characters who committed heinous sins yet who overcame those sins and were counted as faithful in God's eyes. Noah, for example, was "righteous," "perfect in his generations," and a man who "walked with God" (Genesis 6:9). Yet after the Flood he became drunk in front of his sons and exposed his nakedness before one of them (Genesis 9:20-23). Was Noah permanently condemned for a temporary sin? Gary Grizzell addressed this issue when he wrote:

There is absolutely no record of anyone reproving Noah for his sin. There is no record of his repentance. This is the extent of the Old Testament revelation of Noah's retirement years. Did Noah die in an unrepentant state? No, just as Rahab did not die a harlot and a liar.... In the twenty-seven books of the New Testament there is not one hint of the historical fact of his sin of drunkenness. The only logical conclusion is that this implies his repentance prior to his death (1986, 15[9]:70).

We know this to be the case because, like Rahab, Noah is mentioned specifically in Hebrews 11:7 and even is referred to as having become "an heir of righteousness which is according to faith."

Consider also the example of Abraham. To protect his own life, he lied not once, but twice (just as Rahab later would do). In Genesis 12:10-20, Abraham told an Egyptian pharaoh that Sarai was his sister, rather than his wife. Later, he similarly lied to Abimelech, king of Gerar, regarding the same matter (Genesis 20:1-2). Yet in James 2:23, he is referred to as "the friend of God."

Lastly, consider the example of Israel's popular, beloved King David. He had taken his vows before God (see Psalm 101). He had insisted on righteousness in his nation. The people had been taught to love, respect, and honor the God of heaven. David, their sovereign, also was their example—a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14). But he committed the sin of adultery with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11-12), and then had her husband, Uriah the Hittite, murdered. The consequences of David's sin were horrible indeed. The child growing in Bathsheba's womb died after birth. And Nathan, God's prophet, made it clear to the great king that "the sword shall never depart from thy house," and that God would "raise up evil against thee out of thine own house" (2 Samuel 12:10-11).

David's life never again would be the same. His child was dead. His reputation was damaged. His influence, in large part, was destroyed. David paid for his sin with twenty years of strife, heartbreak, and the loss of a child that meant everything to him. Yet the king did not try to deny his sin or cover up his mistakes. In fact, he said quite simply, "I have sinned" (2 Samuel 12:13).

His description of the consequences of sin on the human heart is one of the most vivid in all of Scripture, and should move each of us deeply. His agonizing prayer is recorded in Psalm 51. David cried out: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness." Many years later, the apostle John would write: "Hath not the scripture said that the Christ cometh of the seed of David?" (John 7:42). Luke even went so far as to refer to Christ as "David's son" (Luke 20:41). From the loins of a sinful king who was willing to repent was formed an important part of the Messiah's lineage.

In addressing these very matters, Walter Kaiser correctly observed:

...divine approval of an individual in one aspect or area of his life does not entail and must not be extended to mean that there is a divine approval of that individual in **all** aspects of his character or conduct (1983, pp. 270-271, emp. added).

Or, as Grizzell noted: "God judges a man by the whole of his life, not one act of sin in his life" (1986, 15[9]:70). Neither Noah, Abraham, nor David should be condemned per-

manently because of a temporary occurrence of sin. As these three men stood accountable before God, each accepted personal responsibility for his actions. They became noteworthy characters in biblical history not because of their sinful mistakes, but because of their eventual repentance and lifetimes spent in God's service.

Conclusion

Does the Bible condemn lying? Indeed it does. The concept that "the end justifies the means" never has been correct. As Steve Lloyd wrote: "Simply because something works out in the end does not imply that the means are justifiable before God" (1990, p. 356). As with any other sin, if a person lies and does not repent, they will spend eternity in hell. This is especially true for Christians, as the Hebrew writer pointed out quite clearly when he wrote: "For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins" (Hebrews 10:26).

If critics of the Bible would consider the Scriptures in their entirety, rather than isolating individual passages in an attempt to justify their preconceived conclusion that the Bible contains contradictions and discrepancies, controversy over such matters would cease to exist. Furthermore, it reeks of inconsistency for the critic to "pick and choose" matters that at first glance appear to support his allegations and to ignore the plain and simple passages that refute those same allegations. As Eddie Miller put it:

...the person who argues for situation ethics by using the example of Rahab is making a serious mistake in terms of sound Biblical exegesis. He has taken one sketchy, obviously incomplete story about a prostitute who lied, to overturn many clear statements of scripture (Exo. 20:16, Col. 3:9, Eph. 4:25). Surely that is not dealing honestly with the Bible text. (Incidentally, how would they deal with God's disapproval of the lies of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:1-6?) The truth is that proper interpretation takes place when we allow explicit statements of scripture to explain or modify the examples, **not vice versa** (1983, 19[12]:4, emp. and parenthetical comment in orig.).

Additionally, we might add that there is nothing inherently wrong with question-

ing, or even doubting, what the Bible contains—as long as a person is willing to invest the time and effort to find the answers and resolve the doubts. This is the same procedure that people use in every other area of human interest (science, philosophy, etc.) on a daily basis. Why, then, should it not be employed in matters concerning God's Word? In addressing this very point, Trevor Major suggested:

It is a human failing that, on occasion, we simply cannot decide whether something is true.... Doubt, left unresolved, can become a serious problem. God holds us responsible for addressing the cause of our doubt, and for seeking the remedy so that doubt does not prevent us from doing what faith demands.... Doubt, then, is in some way an impediment to belief or faith. However, it is not the opposite of belief; it is not a denial of faith. This would be **disbelief**, that is, believing a claim to be false. Rather, doubt is a matter of **unbelief**—an occasional inability to admit a particular claim.... If we do not know whether God answers prayers, then how can we honestly go to God in prayer? If we eat meat sacrificed to idols (or the modern equivalent), and yet we are not sure that this is something we should do, then how can we have a good conscience before God? These are the negative consequences of unresolved doubts, but doubt may also be resolved in favor of greater faith, or even faith itself (1995, 15:94, emp. in orig.).

Rahab—a prostitute from a pagan background—humbled herself before the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. When she cried out, "I know that...the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath" (2:9), she confessed her willingness to acknowledge both His existence and His sovereignty. It was not enough, however, for her merely to express her faith verbally. Rather, she had to **act** upon it by: (a) keeping silent about the spies' mission (Joshua 2:14,20); (b) binding the scarlet cord in the window of her house (2:18); and (c) remaining inside that house, which would be the sole location of her deliverance when God destroyed Jericho (2:18-19).

God expects, and deserves, the same kind of obedience from us today. Critic and Christian alike should be willing to say, as did

this laudable lady from days of old, "According unto your words, so be it" (Joshua 2:21). What an admirable attitude—and how worthy of being imitated! Rahab sinned, repented, and obeyed. If we today should sin, surely those of us who know more about God, His Word, and His will for our lives ought to follow her example in repentance, obedience, and service.—**Bert Thompson and Sam Estabrook**

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Q Critics have charged that passages such as John 1:18, Exodus 33:20, and Genesis 32:30 contradict one another. In John 1:18, the apostle wrote: "No one has seen God at any time." In Exodus 33:20 God said to Moses: "You cannot see My face; for no man can see Me and live." But Genesis 32:30 records Jacob as saying: "For **I have seen God face to face**, and my life is preserved." Have John and Moses—two of the most influential writers in the Bible—contradicted each other as infidels and skeptics have suggested?

A No, they have not. The Bible is internally consistent, and does not contradict itself. The "contradiction" is the result of the passages being taken out of the context in which they were written originally. For example, consider the following two statements. Joe is rich; Joe is poor. Do these statements contradict one another? Not necessarily. Is it not possible that Joe could be **rich spiritually** but **poor**

physically? Renowned Bible scholar R.A. Torrey noted:

We must remember first of all that two statements which in terms flatly contradict one another may be both of them absolutely true, for the reason that the two terms are not used in the same sense in the two statements (1907, p. 80).

That is exactly what has happened in texts such as John 1:18 and Genesis 32:30. The passages **seem** to contradict one another, but when considered in their appropriate context they do not because they are not speaking of God being “seen” in the same sense. Several illustrations of this principle can be found in Scripture.

First, consider Moses “seeing” God in a burning bush (Exodus 3:2ff.). He saw a fire on the side of a mountain. When he went to investigate, he saw a bush that burned but was not consumed. As he observed this unusual sight, God called to him from the midst of the bush and said, “Moses, Moses!” And Moses said, “Here I am.” Then the voice from the burning bush echoed: “I am the God of your father—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (Exodus 3:6a). The text indicates that “Moses hid his face, for **he was afraid to look upon God**” (3:6b).

As Moses spoke to the burning bush on the mountainside, was he addressing God? Indeed he was, as the passage clearly teaches. But does the passage also teach that as he looked at the bush, Moses was fearful because he considered it “seeing” God? Yes, Exodus 3:6b so states.

When Moses looked upon the burning bush, did he **actually** “see” God? No. He

saw an image that we as humans can comprehend. The bush was a **representation** of God—an occasion where something took God’s place.

Second, consider Job’s “seeing” God in a whirlwind (Job 38:1ff.). Job made a wrongful boast that landed him in serious trouble with God. Suddenly (and unexpectedly) a whirlwind appeared before Job—from which the voice of God echoed: “Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me” (Job 38:2-3). Job looked at the whirlwind and heard God. But was God really **in** the whirlwind? Did Job actually **see** God when he looked into this magnificent force of nature? No. Instead, Job saw a **manifestation** of God that a human could comprehend. The whirlwind “took God’s place.”

Third, consider Jacob’s “seeing” God as he wrestled with an angel (Genesis 32:24-30). He wrestled from night until daybreak with this heavenly being and eventually said: “**I have seen God face to face**” Was it really God that Jacob saw? No, he did not see God but instead witnessed a representative of God. A similar example can be found in the case of Manoah (the father of Samson), recorded in Judges 13. In this instance, the text says that Manoah and his wife were visited by the “Angel of the Lord” (13:13) who informed them of their son’s impending birth. Afterwards, Manoah said: “We shall surely die because **we have seen God!**” (13:22). Again, it is necessary to ask: Was it really God that Manoah and his wife saw? No, they did not see God but instead witnessed (just as Jacob had) a manifestation

of God via the angel. [NOTE: A fascinating parallel can be seen in Gideon’s statement in Judges 6:22 when he cried: “I have seen the Angel of the Lord **face to face**.”]

What, then is the explanation of the alleged contradiction between passages such as John 1:18, Exodus 33:20, and Genesis 32:30? How can the Scriptures state that “no man hath seen God” (John 1:18) or that “no man shall see Me and live” (Exodus 33:20), while stating elsewhere that Jacob saw God “face to face” (Genesis 32:30) and that Manoah and his wife had “seen God” (Judges 6:22)? E.G. Sewell provided a partial answer to this kind of question when he wrote:

When Jacob is represented as saying he saw God, it was only an angel of God that appeared to him in the form of a man. In Hosea it is called an **angel** so that in that case Jacob did not see the face of God at all, but only an angel of God (1921, p. 274, emp. in orig.).

An illustration of this very point can be found in the incarnation of Jesus. The apostle Paul, in discussing Christ’s deity, noted that as a member of the Godhead, Jesus had existed throughout eternity and possessed “equality with God” (Philippians 2:5-6). He also discussed the fact, however, that Christ—Who had existed in heaven “in the form of God”—took on the “likeness of men” (1:7) while He was on Earth. Was Christ equal to God? Yes, He was. Did men **see** Christ during His earthly ministry? Yes, they did. Did they therefore “see” God? Yes, indeed. But did they see God’s true image (i.e., as a spirit Being—John 4:24), or did they see instead an **embodiment** of God as Jesus dwelt here in a fleshly form? The answer is obvious from John’s explanation in the first few verses of the first chapter of his Gospel. All this makes it clear that while Jesus is God, He also became a man “so that in history he might reveal the God whom no man has ever seen” (Pack, 1975, p. 39).

So the next time someone takes a two- or three-word quote from the Bible in an attempt to make the point that the text contains contradictions, we can be sure that in all likelihood it is not a proper quote (i.e., considered in its context). We can keep the improper interpretation from spreading by studying the “problem passage” and pointing out the **correct** context. When we prevent the interpretation offered by



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atheists, then they have nothing to use to prove their point that the Bible has contradicted itself. —Sam Estabrook

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Q In Acts 12:7, it says that Peter's "chains fell off his hands." Would it not make more sense to say that the chains fell off his wrists (assuming that "chains" refers to the whole restraining device, i.e., chains attached to bands secured around the wrist)? Skeptics allege that this must be a mistake. How can we respond?

A This is another example of skepticism run amok and, once again, there is a failure to appreciate the historical context of Scripture. In this particular case, the skeptics are ignoring the way in which word usage has changed over thousands of years. By this I am not referring to the difference in Greek and English languages. Rather, a Greek word, and a valid translation of that word, may mean something different to ancient and modern speakers. A classic example is *apologia*. This word entered the English language as "apology" in the 16th century but means something quite different to us today. Modern speakers tend to use the word as an expression of regret for having done something wrong, whereas for the people of New Testament times *apologia* meant a defense or well-reasoned argument. Also, people of many cultures and times have used different modes or styles of speech for different occasions. For instance, we do not always operate on the level of scientific accuracy in everyday life (e.g., we look in the vegetable section of the supermarket for tomatoes—even though, technically speaking, the tomato is a fruit).

Although the Greeks had a word for wrist (*karpos*), we find it only in the Greek Septuagint, not in the New Testament. This may reflect a conscious effort to preserve the Semitic character of someone like Peter (who would have preached on this great res-

cue story many times), rather than to provide a sanitized version for Greek speakers outside Palestine. Indeed, the Hebrew language of the Old Testament, which is quite closely allied to Peter's native Aramaic, seems to lack a specific term for this particular part of the body. For instance, Genesis 24:22 indicates that Abraham's servant gave Rebekah bracelets for her "hands" (KJV, ASV). This translation of the word is quite valid lexically, although we would understand bracelets as going around her wrists (NASV, NKJV). Interestingly, the NIV does not translate the anatomical reference at all, but simply takes it for granted that rings were for fingers and bracelets were for wrists. The Jewish Talmud has a word for "juncture" that refers to the hand/arm joint and the foot/leg joint, but this degree of accuracy probably was necessary only for legal purposes (and the Talmud was written much later than the Old Testament).

Thus, the reference to "hands" in Acts 12:7 can be taken as wrists. Not only is this implied by the way in which the word "chains" is used (just as it is implied in the word "bracelets"), but there is a strong Semitic influence to consider. We could apply the same understanding to Luke 24:39, in which the resurrected Christ said, "Behold my hands." According to medical evidence, the hand bones could not have supported much weight during crucifixion, and so it is likely that the large iron nails were driven through the wrists. As a physician, Luke could have put a more accurate Greek term in Christ's mouth, but he was dedicated to reporting these incidents as they had been delivered to him (Luke 1:1-4). This richness of God's inspired Word stands in stark contrast to the poverty of most skeptical charges against it. —Trevor Major

Q A skeptic argued the following: Mark 15:25 says that Jesus was crucified at "the **third** hour," but John 19:14 says that Pilate presented Jesus to the Jews at "about the **sixth** hour." Thus it appears that Jesus was on the cross three hours **before** His trial. How do we resolve this alleged biblical discrepancy?

A The Jews and the Romans used different standards for reckoning

the hours of the day, although both systems split the day into two periods of 12 hours. A new day for the Romans began at midnight (as it does for us today), whereas a new day for the Jews began in the evening at what we would call 6 p.m.

Various clues within the fourth gospel indicate that John was using the Roman system (Geisler and Howe, 1992, p. 376). This makes sense given that John was writing outside of Palestine to a Hellenistic audience. That Mark used a Jewish system makes sense in light of the strong tradition that his gospel account follows sermons delivered by the apostle Peter (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.39). As always, we have to take into account the context, as well as cultural differences between the Jewish and Gentile worlds.

Given this distinction, the problem disappears. John has Pilate handing Jesus over for crucifixion at 6 a.m., and Mark has Jesus on the cross three hours later at 9 a.m. (i.e., "the third hour"). In fact, John begins his whole account of Jesus' audience with Pilate by noting that it was "early morning" (18:28). This reference follows immediately after Peter and the rooster crowing incident. Roosters, of course, can crow at any time, but are most famous for signaling the beginning of a new day.

This is perfectly consistent with Mark's account. The previous evening, Jesus and the disciples traveled from the upper room to the Mount of Olives and then to Gethsemane. The disciples fell asleep, and Jesus had to wake them in order to meet the arresting mob. Mark records the rooster crowing incident, and notes that the Jews delivered Jesus to Pilate "in the morning" (15:1). A skeptic might doubt that the events at the Prætorium took place at such an early hour (i.e., before 6 a.m.), but there is no evidence for this objection, and there is no inconsistency in the Gospel accounts.

I would like to end with a word of warning. Skeptics are notorious for raising a dozen objections in as many minutes. As you can see, it takes a lot more time and work to answer an objection than it does to raise it. And yet, if we do not answer every objection, no matter how frivolous it may be, the skeptic claims victory. We should recognize that most skeptics have no interest in making sense out of Scripture. The pow-

ers of comprehension and interpretation they would bring to an average newspaper are left behind in the case of the Bible. Perhaps this uneven treatment should not be surprising. After all, the skeptic has much to lose if the Bible is right.—**Trevor Major**

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Q (1) In the September 1996 issue of *Reason & Revelation*, you wrote that progestin—an ingredient of most contraceptive drugs—has abortifacient properties. My sources, available to me as a pharmacist, say that progestin acts like its natural counterpart, progesterone, in merely preventing ovulation. Shouldn't you correct your misleading article?

(2) I am getting married soon and want to choose a birth control method that will not violate Christian principles. I read your article in *Reason & Revelation*, but I'm still not quite sure what to do. Should I, or should I not, use the Pill?

(3) If the Pill has abortifacient properties, then why not just come out and say that it is wrong to use it?

A (1) Progestin by itself can prevent ovulation in only 15-40% of menstrual cycles. It is much more effective when packaged with low doses of synthetic estrogen. Together, these tailor-made hormones make-up the combination Pill, which is by far the most popular form of oral contraceptive on the market today. An alternative, the so-called mini Pill, is a progestin-only option.

Unfortunately for drug makers, there is a phenomenon known as "breakthrough ovulation." This occurs when the Pill fails to prevent the release of an egg. Studies have shown that this happens around 17 times a year for every 100 women taking the Pill (Wilks, 1997, p. 6). But each ovulation presents an opportunity for conception, which is precisely what the Pill is supposed to prevent. This is where progestin comes into play. It has two main roles.

First, it thickens the cervical mucous, thus providing a barrier to sperm and preventing conception. And second, it disrupts the development of the uterine lining, thus preventing implantation of the fertilized egg (Shapiro, 1978, p. 19).

Product inserts and patient guides have described these effects in very similar terms for a long time now. The same literature usually begins by describing the product as "safe and effective." Non-technical consumer guides frequently skip any mention of progestin's effects, and emphasize the Pill's role in preventing ovulation. Understandably, manufacturers and public health services are not explicit about the Pill's abortifacient properties. It is left up to the patient to realize that the Pill can act as an **inter**ceptive, rather than a **contra**ceptive. And it is in this role that a serious ethical difficulty arises: by preventing implantation, a woman runs the risk of denying life to a pre-born child. This is an early embryo—a baby—that would go to term if only it had a suitable "home" in which to grow and develop.

Whether we like it or not, the "miracle" of modern medicine requires us to gain a better understanding, both of our bodies, and of those technologies that promise to increase our quality of life.

(2) In my previous article, I encouraged couples to look into the effects of hormonal contraceptives and consider alternative methods that do not pose a threat to the developing child.

After hearing how the Pill works, many women feel they have enough information to make a decision. One young woman with whom I spoke had a clear zero-tolerance policy: once she understood the workings of the Pill, she knew right then and there that this was not for her. She is to be commended for the strength of her convictions. It is my own opinion that a Christian should not use hormonal contraceptives. But if a woman chooses to use this method, she should know that the chance of breakthrough ovulation and, hence, the chance of a Pill-induced abortion, increases over time.

There are other options for birth control that prevent conception without threatening a pre-born child. Unfortunately, the vast majority of sources seem to reside at

extreme ends of the spectrum: those that condemn birth control in principle, and those that ignore the ethical issues completely. One exception I have come across recently is an excellent Web site run by Monica Terwilliger (<http://www.epigee.org/guide/>). She provides information on most birth control methods, but recommends only those options that are true contraceptives.

(3) As my studies into this issue progressed, I found myself increasingly unwilling to recommend the Pill in any form. At the same time, I recognize that this is a decision that a woman must make according to her own conscience. But by saying this I do not mean to open the door for pragmatic and utilitarian rationalizations. There could be a strong temptation to think, for instance, that the risk is "worth it," without truly appreciating that a God-given life is at stake here. Our conscience must be well informed by Scripture and exercised in concert with a tender heart and a desire to do God's will (1 Timothy 1:5). Certainly, if a woman has any doubts about using the Pill, she should not use it at all (a principle that Paul clarified in Romans 14).

Admittedly, acting according to one's conscience can become difficult in the face of pressure from husband, family, friends, or doctors. In such situations it is important to become well informed on both the medical and biblical issues. In particular, this is an issue that prospective husbands and wives should discuss before marriage.—**Trevor Major**

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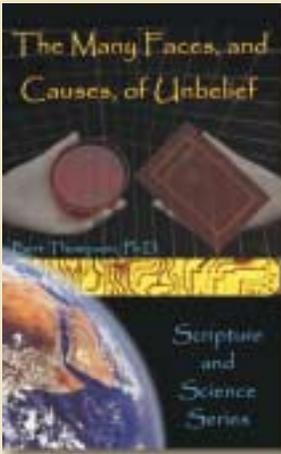
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NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

ANNOUNCING: VOLUME SEVEN IN THE “SCRIPTURE AND SCIENCE SERIES”

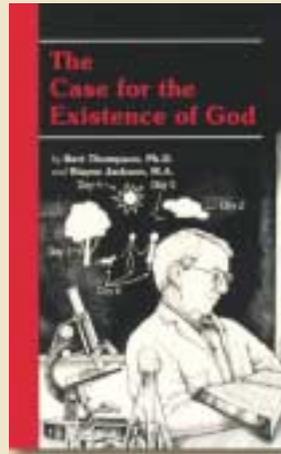


In this space in the September and October issues of *Reason & Revelation*, I announced six volumes in the new Apologetics Press “Scripture and Science Series” and mentioned that two more would follow in November and December.

The seventh volume in the new series now is available. *The Many Faces, and Causes, of Unbelief* is an in-depth discussion of the various systems of unbelief such as atheism, agnosticism, skepticism, infidelity, deism, pan-

theism, and panentheism. In its 128 pages you will find an examination of the many causes of such rampant unbelief, including bias against God, education, upbringing, scientific materialism, pride, immorality, intellectual intimidation, hypocrisy and misconduct of unbelievers, evil, pain, and suffering, etc. The book contains all of the material from the March/April issues of *Reason & Revelation* on the faces of unbelief, plus the material from the May-July issues on the causes of unbelief. However, the book also contains much additional material that was not published previously due to space restrictions (e.g., information on the current New Age beliefs of pantheism and panentheism, as well as an expanded section covering evil, pain, and suffering). Although adults of all ages can benefit from this study, I think it will be of special interest to college and university students who will find it both instructive and faith building. [\$4.95 + \$1.25 s/h]

While I am on this topic, I also would like to recommend the book, *The Case for the Existence of God*, that Wayne Jackson and I co-authored. While it is not one of the new vol-



umes in the “Scripture and Science Series,” it makes a terrific companion to *The Many Faces, and Causes, of Unbelief*. Within its 82 pages, readers will find a mountain of material which—to the open-minded, honest inquirer—proves that the God of the Bible does, in fact, exist. As it goes about establishing the validity of its major premise (i.e., purposeful design does not occur without a designer), the book examines the possible explanations regarding the origin of the

Universe, as well as the intricate design of the Universe, the Earth, members of the animal kingdom, and even man himself. In addition, an entire chapter is devoted to human morality and ethics and the implications that they present regarding how man came to be in possession of these two important concepts. [\$4.95 + \$1.25 s/h]

Within the next month or two, I plan to announce the eighth volume in the new “Scripture and Science Series,” *The Bible and the Age of the Earth*. The two books mentioned here, however, are available now and may be purchased as a set at the special price of only \$9 [\$1.00 s/h]. You may order all seven of the new books currently available in the series for only \$30, or those seven plus *The Case for the Existence of God* (a total of eight books) for only \$33 [\$2.50 s/h]. What a wonderful (and inexpensive) gift a set of these books would make (especially with the holidays just around the corner). To order by credit card, call us at 800/234-8558.

— Bert Thompson