

Summary of the Reasons I am a Christian

By Dr. Doug Baker

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Question: Can you summarize the reasons you believe the Bible to be true?

Answer: Yes, I can do so on the basis of philosophical reasons and history, although I will not attempt to explain the historical evidence since I did that in chapters two and three of my book *Bible Answers*.

1. I believe that the material universe literally exists independent of our perceptions of it.

If this were not true, then there must be an immaterial mind that is causing all sentient beings to perceive something that is not literally there since all normal people perceive material things in the same essential way despite their different perspectives. That means that either all that literally exists is one immaterial mind thinking about itself or that all sentient beings have their own individual immaterial minds because we each apparently think for ourselves. An immaterial mind, either one or many, must exist outside space and time and therefore not be limited by space and time. Such mind or minds would in turn have to be everywhere simultaneously and thus know everything as well as be eternal (having always existed). This would be true whether there is only one mind that “we” are a part of or there are many minds. However, we all know that we had a beginning and that we do not know all things. Therefore, the material universe actually exists independent of our perceptions of it.

2. The material universe must have had an outside cause to bring it into existence.

The universe cannot be eternal because anything essentially material in nature, and that includes energy (as modern physics has demonstrated), must exist in time and space. And anything in time and space is limited by time and thus cannot be eternal. So the universe must have had a beginning. It is axiomatic that nothing can create itself, for to be able to create itself, the self would have to exist before it was created. It is also axiomatic that nothing cannot come from nothing. Secular modern physicists say that the universe came into being as a quantum fluctuation. But a quantum fluctuation involves the presence of energy, and energy is not nothing. Therefore, the cause for the material universe, or at least its building blocks of raw matter, must exist outside of space and time and thus be immaterial and eternal. Based on Occam’s Razor, which says that one should not postulate more than one cause if one is sufficient to explain something, this cause is one not many. Also, there must have been a time when nothing existed other than the one immaterial, eternal, and

Uncaused Cause. In turn, this means that there was no outside entity to influence the Uncaused Cause to create the universe, implying in turn that it must have a will. Anything with intelligence that has a will must be a personal being. By definition a personal immaterial and eternal Being is what mankind calls God. Therefore, I believe that God exists.

3. Observation of the material universe, especially of living organisms, demonstrates that God is love personified.

I see three things by observing the universe and especially living organisms. First, the great complexity I observe requires that God must have created them as the Intelligent Designer; they could not have evolved that way. The reason for this is that whenever we see complexity in something—whether it be a computer or television or whatever—we know that it was designed by a personal intelligence. Second, I note the existence of what science calls the Second Law of Thermodynamics (or Law of Entropy), that left to themselves all things (animate and inanimate) naturally tend toward decay and dissipation (with dissipation meaning death for living organisms). In turn this implies that if everything is going downhill, then if you reverse that process, everything must have been initially created as perfect and that something happened to introduce natural evil (defined as natural disasters and the process of decay and dissipation) in the universe. Evil must have originated by a willful decision to live apart from God, the Author of all perfect life, which implicitly means that one (again, Occam's Razor) intelligent being made a decision to live apart from God's will and thus introduced all moral and natural evil into the universe. Finally, I also see great beauty despite the natural evil in the universe, which implies that the Creator-God must be a loving God. Moreover, since God is infinite (as an eternal Being unaffected by space and time) He must be infinite love personified, and not merely loving.

Having deduced that there is a God who is love personified, several things logically follow from that central truth. First, God must care for His creation, which refutes Deism, the idea that God created the universe and then allows it to take care of itself without ever, or rarely, intervening in human history. Second, since God cares for His creation, He will not allow moral and natural evil to exist indefinitely. Third, since He loves His creation, He will have a plan of liberation for His intelligent creatures to be able to choose to accept or reject. And since love requires free will (because genuine love cannot be forced), His plan of liberation cannot overwhelm intelligent creatures so as to essentially force them to accept it. This is the probable reason that evil has existed for so long. Fourth, it is axiomatic that He would communicate His plan of liberation to mankind. So as not to overwhelm people with excessive free will-crushing evidence, He will probably speak supernaturally to a few people He chooses to be His official spokespersons; we call these people prophets. Given man's tendency to forget, eventually God would probably have His prophets' messages written in a holy or sacred book or collection of books. Then at some point in history God would probably take on the additional nature of mankind and live among us for at least two reasons: (1) to confirm His holy book or books by giving rational evidence of His

divine nature because it is always better to “see a sermon than hear (or read) one any day;”; and (2) to by His own actions somehow enable mankind to be lifted up from his fall into moral evil. To the argument that God is too transcendent and different from us to stoop so low as to become a human being, I say that a God of love personified should be expected to do just that. Then after God fulfilled His mission on earth, He would be expected to have one or more additional prophets who would make a written record of His life and mission for future generations until God decided to finally judge the world and end all evil forever. Finally, this complete collection of documents would undoubtedly have powerful enemies because it would not be flattering to mankind and his natural inclinations. Therefore, God would also need to provide sufficient evidence to show reasonable people that He has supernaturally preserved those holy documents against attempts to destroy or corrupt its text.

When I survey the world’s religions to see if there is such a holy book or books that meets all of the rational requirements, there is one and only one that does so in every respect. That is the Christian Bible. The Quran, Islam’s holy book, is a distant second. But it (1) only portrays a loving God, not One who is love personified; (2) does not teach an actual plan of liberation except to seek forgiveness and to correct one’s mistakes—which seems inadequate considering the extent to which mankind has fallen into moral evil; (3) refutes the concept that the transcendent God would ever take on human nature; and (4) although it has produced enemies, it does not have the kind of history that the Bible has in this regard. Moreover, Islam teaches that its existence would not even be necessary if Christians had not corrupted their Scriptures to make them teach that Jesus was God incarnated as a man. But the historical evidence is very strong that the New Testament documents that form the second part of the Bible (the record of the God-man’s life and mission) were all written within the first century A.D., the same century the events are said to have occurred. And historians tell us that it takes 150 to 200 years for ancient accounts (both oral and written) to become corrupted.

The entire Christian Bible teaches (1) that God is love personified; (2) a detailed plan of liberation that appears to account for the degree of moral evil that mankind has fallen into; (3) that God indeed became a man (a Jew called Jesus of Nazareth) who validated the sacred book or books available in His day (the Jewish Scriptures or what Christians call the Old Testament), gave rational evidence that He was God, and fulfilled a mission that is described as necessary to His plan of liberation. Moreover, the Bible’s history shows that God has supernaturally preserved it from all its many powerful enemies, including ensuring that thousands of manuscripts of the New Testament in particular be discovered that confirms we have the message unchanged from the original documents. [Note: There are many more ancient Greek manuscripts for the New Testament than for any other ancient book.] Finally, the book of Daniel in particular (a book that is part of the collection called the Bible) contains prophecies that require the conclusion that its origin is from God. And if that book is part of the collection of books called the Bible, it follows that the entire Bible is God’s message to mankind.

For all these reasons I believe the Bible must be the genuine written record of God's acts in history. This in turn compels me to be a Christian.

Question: You mentioned prophecies in the book of Daniel. Would you elaborate on those as briefly as you can?

Answer: Yes, there are two predictive prophecies found in the Judeo-Christian book of Daniel that compel me to believe its message is of divine origin.

Before examining those two prophecies, I need to address the criticism of the book of Daniel briefly. Liberal scholars today do not believe in the possibility of predictive prophecy, so they theorize that Daniel either did not write or at least did not finish the book bearing his name. Rather, an unknown Jewish writer wrote or finished the book in the second century B.C. after the time of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, the Seleucid ruler who invaded Judea and Jerusalem, took over the Temple in that city, and desecrated it for a period of three years and ten days from 167-164 B.C. (according to I Maccabees 1:54, 59 and 4:52, 54). In this way, these scholars say that the "prophecies" were about Antiochus IV and were actually written about after they happened. Thus, they reject Daniel as the sixth-century B.C. author of the book, which the book itself claims.

However, the Jews were not ignorant people, and they are widely regarded for the accuracy of their history. Early and strong tradition among Jewish writers tell us that the canon of the Jewish Scriptures was completed by the Great Synagogue or Great Assembly shortly after the return of Ezra and others with him from Babylon in the fifth century B.C. (the 400s B.C.). Flavius Josephus, the famous first century A.D. Jewish historian, who is known for his accurate history, specifically states that the canon of Jewish Scriptures was completed during the reign of the Persian King Artaxerxes, who died in 424 B.C., and that no book was added, subtracted, or changed since then (See Josephus, *Against Apion*, Book I.8). Since we know that the book of Daniel was in the Jewish canon of Scriptures, it means it could not have been completed later than 424 B.C. Furthermore, the fifth century B.C. was still so recent in Ezra's day that they would have known if Daniel was written in that same century or in the previous (sixth) century. The book claims to have been written in the sixth century B.C., so we can safely assume that the Jews knew and accepted that.

With that background, Daniel's two predictive prophecies that persuade me there is a God are found in chapter 2 and chapter 9 of that prophetic book. By the way, one does not have to accept Daniel as inspired Scripture in order to interpret his predictions, although it certainly should impact one's thinking on that subject after you discover that his remarkable prophecies came true.

In Daniel 2 the story is told that the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar had a dream that troubled him but that he could not remember. After threatening to execute all his wise men and counselors, the Jewish prophet Daniel, who was one of those advisors, prayed and God gave him

Nebuchadnezzar's dream and its interpretation. According to Daniel 2, the dream consisted of a large image of a man, with different metals on different parts of his body. His head was of gold, his arms and chest were of silver, his belly and thighs were of bronze, his legs were of iron, and his feet and toes were of iron mixed with clay (vv. 32-33, 38-41). Daniel told the king that the head of gold represented him (v. 38). But the following verses he identifies as representing inferior kingdoms to his, so we know that Daniel meant Babylon (technically, Neo-Babylonia) when he said that Nebuchadnezzar was the head of gold. Daniel's point in verses 41-43 that the feet and toes of iron mixed with clay was that the fourth kingdom would be divided into other smaller kingdoms that would not mix well with each other, and that in fact, there would be some attempts to unite them but that they would fail. After an unspecified period of time, but during the division of the fourth kingdom, God would set up His everlasting kingdom (v. 44), represented by a stone that would break the entire image down and replace it as a great mountain (v. 45; cf. vv. 34-35).

When we examine history from our day's perspective, we find that the four kingdoms represented Babylon (Neo-Babylonia), Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. In order to accommodate a second-century B.C. date for the book of Daniel, liberal scholars identify the four kingdoms as Babylon (Neo-Babylonia), Media, Persia, and Greece. However, such an interpretation conflicts both with the book of Daniel and with secular history. Daniel 8:3-7, 20-21 identify the second kingdom here as Medo-Persia. Also, secular history records that it was the dual kingdom of Medo-Persia that conquered Babylon in 539 B.C., although Persia was more dominant than their cousins the Medes.

Not only does secular history tell us that Daniel's prophecy was completely accurate, even the different metals in Daniel 2 were later known to be associated with the correct kingdom. For example, we know that gold was a dominant and accurate symbol of ancient Babylon. The Medes and the Persians were known for their silver weapons and shields. The Greeks were known for their use of bronze. Even Rome was called the iron monarchy by the infamous critic of Christianity, the British historian Edward Gibbon, who called Rome this in his epic work entitled *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (published in 1776).

No one in the sixth century B.C., almost 1,100 years before the fall of the Roman Empire, could have possibly and naturally predicted with any degree of accuracy at all the sequence of kingdoms that would arise after Babylon. However, if God exists—a God whose essential nature is outside of time and space—He could have told Daniel the dream and its accurate interpretation. In fact, only such a God could have been Daniel's source of information, which is undoubtedly why the book of Daniel has been under so much attack since the Enlightenment of the eighteenth century.

By the way, let me say this about world kingdoms. Biblical history is concerned about God's professed people and the nations they interacted with. This does not mean that God is not concerned about other civilizations, such as the Indian and Chinese civilizations.

The other prophecy in Daniel that convinces me there is a God is found in chapter 9, verses 24-27. I do not need to exegete the entire prophecy but just cover what is pertinent for my point here. It tells us that 70 weeks were determined for Daniel's Jewish people to get right with God. During this time, the city of Jerusalem, which had been destroyed by Babylon in 586 B.C., would be rebuilt and the Messiah would come. Although we do not have the time to get into the entire issue of the Messiah, suffice it to say that Christians believe this important Jewish man was Jesus.

It is obvious to all conservative scholars that all these things could not occur in 70 literal weeks. As Daniel says he was studying the 70 years' prophecy of Jeremiah (9:2) when the angel Gabriel came to explain something to him (9:20-23), it is implied that 70 weeks of years is meant rather than a period of a mere 70 literal weeks. Verse 25 says that the Messiah would come after 62 weeks. But there is a period of 7 weeks stated in that verse first, so that it is actually 7 + 62, or 69 weeks. Sixty-nine weeks of years is 483 years. Messiah would come 483 years from *the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem* (v. 25). We know there were three different Persian kings who issued four different decrees or official statements concerning the return of the Jews to Jerusalem. They were as follows:

- Cyrus the Great—ca. 538/537 B.C.
- Darius I—520/519 B.C.
- Artaxerxes I—458/457 B.C.
- Artaxerxes I—445/444 B.C.

In Ezra 7:14 it is said that the Temple in Jerusalem was finished being rebuilt according to the command of Cyrus, Darius, and Artaxerxes. Ezra was a contemporary of Daniel. Therefore, it follows that this was viewed as a three-fold command, which means the command could not have gone forth until Artaxerxes I's decree had been issued. But which one? Some scholars assume the second one is meant and thus date this decree either in 445 or in 444 B.C. However, numerous problems exist with the application of this decree, so that these scholars reinterpret the 69 weeks as 483 prophetic years rather than as 483 solar years. This so-called prophetic year consists of exactly 360 days per year. A few of these scholars are willing to admit that there are still too many problems with this chronology. However, if the entire period of 70 weeks of years is interpreted under the year-day principle, in which each day in a week represents one literal year, and the first of Artaxerxes' decrees is chosen, the problems disappear. That this was intended is evident from the fact of how the 70 years of Jeremiah appears in juxtaposition with the 70 weeks of Daniel's prophecy, as shown below:

70 years...weeks 70

That is the exact word order in the original Hebrew of Daniel 9:2 and all the references to the various weeks in verses 24-26. Like 70 and 70 are both numerals, so the word for *years* and *weeks*

both refer to a unit of time rather than to a number. To translate the word *weeks* in Daniel 9 as *sevens*, as the New International Version (NIV) does is to break the parallelism between the 70 years and the weeks 70. Finally, we conclude this year-day principle by declaring that if the 70 weeks is symbolic of a longer time period, then it should be viewed as symbolic time representing a literal time period, not another symbolic time period (prophetic years). Therefore, we conclude that the Messiah would make His appearance 483 regular years from the going forth of Artaxerxes I's decree. That would thus make it his decree in 458/457 B.C.

But which year did this decree *go forth* as the prophecy said it would? There were two different methods for determining the reigning years of a king in antiquity, either on a spring-to-spring basis or on a fall-to-fall basis. Ezra 7:7-9 says that Ezra left for Jerusalem on the first day of the first month and arrived on the first day of the fifth month of Artaxerxes' seventh year as the Persian king. His seventh year is known to be 458/457 B.C. If his years were reckoned on a spring-to-spring basis, and knowing that Ezra could not have organized his group and left on the same day the king issued his decree, then the first month must be calculated according to the Jewish civil year, which began in the fall. Then the first day of the fifth month, when he arrived in Jerusalem, would be in early 457 B.C. On the other hand, if Artaxerxes' seventh year was reckoned on the fall-to-fall basis, the first day of the first month would have to be calculated at the beginning of the year (again, he could not have gotten organized and left Babylon on the same day the king issued his decree), which was in the spring. This would make it the spring of 457 B.C., and he would arrive in Jerusalem in the summer of 457 B.C. So we see that either way of reckoning Artaxerxes' reign, the going forth of his command would be in the year 457 B.C.

Keep one other thing in mind as well. The word *Messiah* means the *anointed* one. And according to Acts 10:38, Jesus was anointed at His baptism, which marked the beginning of His public ministry according to the gospels (Matthew 3:13-4:17; Mark 1:9-15; Luke 3:21-4:15). Thus, Jesus was not born as the Messiah, but He became the Messiah at His baptism. Luke 3:1-22 tells us that Jesus was baptized in the fifteenth year of the Roman Emperor Tiberius Caesar, which we know was from the fall of A.D. 27 to the fall of A.D. 28. The rest is simple math. $483 - 457 \text{ B.C.} = \text{A.D. } 27$. If you do the math and arrive at A.D. 26 instead, it means that you forgot to add one year because there was no zero year; 1 B.C. was immediately followed by A.D. 1. This fits the year of Jesus' baptism perfectly as in A.D. 27. It was likely in the fall rather than the winter because it is highly unlikely that John the Baptist would have been baptizing people outside in the winter months.

How could anyone naturally predict the very year of the Messiah's appearance more than 560 years before it happened? Again, it seems to me that only an eternal God could have given Daniel this information.

Therefore, these two prophecies in Daniel 2 and 9 confirm for me that there is a God. The latter prophecy also tells me that Jesus was at the very least a special person for God. Final confirmation for me is of an historical nature involving the person of Jesus.