Reason for Hope

ἕτοιμοι δὲ ἀεὶ πρὸς ἀπολογίαν παντὶ τῷ αἰτοῦντι ὑμᾶς λόγον περὶ τῆς ἐν ὑμῖν ἐλπίδο.

"Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you." from 1 Peter 3:15

The central claim of the Gospel is that it offers a hope to humanity; or rather a set of things to hope in, which is really the same hope by different descriptions. It is called the hope of eternal life (Titus 1:2), or the hope of salvation (1 Thessalonians 5:8); it is also called the hope of righteousness (Galatians 5:5), referring to the work of the Messiah to redeem and purify His people from sin (Titus 2:11-14; Matthew 1:21). These are all bound up in the promise, made available by Christ, and which is in fact a unique claim of the Bible, that we can have a real and loving relationship with our Creator - we can know Him. This, Yeshua said, is eternal life. (John 17:3)

The chief response from those who reject the Gospel, however, is that this is a false hope. Because of this challenge, it often becomes part of the Christian's work, according to the passage quoted above, to provide a reason for this hope that is in us. And there is a long list of reasons from which to choose. In these pages, we will offer concise descriptions of some of the reasons for our Christian hope, a sampling of lines of evidence which have proven effective in surprising skeptics with the strength of the case for the Gospel.

First, however, we will need by way of introduction to clear up some common misconceptions which have muddled these issues in the minds of many modern thinkers. Much too often we hear the statement, for instance, that faith and reason are mutually exclusive; i.e., that anyone who uses faith must of necessity reject logic, and vice-versa. This is a really remarkable confusion, largely confined to our own superficial, materialistic, propaganda-laden age and society; and so, in what follows, we present ten points concerning the relationship between reason and faith which, we trust, will dispel enough of the confusion to allow an honest consideration of the evidence which supports the message in which Christians place their hope.

Of Faith and Reason

01) Proper faith is not a blind leap into the abyss.

No passage in Scripture defines faith in this way. Instead, the Scriptures teach to "examine [GREEK WORD, test] all things," and "hold fast that which is good." (1 Thess 5:2) We are not to merely "believe every word" we are told, but rather carefully consider the way in which we go. (Proverbs 14:15) We are invited, in Isaiah 1:18, to "reason together" with our Creator; and later in the same book, the prophet presents the following challenge to those of pagan persuasions: "Bring forth your strong reasons." (Isaiah 42:21) In the context, the passage is offering them the opportunity to produce a basis for their beliefs. This general theme, of thinking about and pondering our path, of being careful to consider, whether something is true, of serving Elohiym with our mind as well as with our heart, and so forth, is repeated commonly in Scripture. Thus, the idea that faith is opposed to logic, or that there is something wrong with believing a statement on the grounds that we have good reasons for thinking it to be true, is strictly nonsense from a Biblical point of view.

A much more accurate description of proper faith would be along the following lines: The step we take to accept as true something for which we have some reasonable, warrant, but which has not been proven absolutely true. This brings us to the second point.

02) Very little, if anything, can be proven absolutely true.

It is not possible to prove, with absolute certainty, even that an external world exists outside of our own minds; for there is no evidence that can be offered for an external world which could not be offered in a dream or a hallucination. And if something as mundane as the world we see about us cannot be proven in an absolute sense, it is difficult to see how anything of real philosophical interest could be proven with absolute certainty.

Further, any argument we use to prove anything will necessarily begin with premises which we have not yet proven. If we wish to prove them, we can only do so by beginning with other premises which we have not yet proven; and so on ad infinitum. Moreover, most (if not all) of the premises we use to construct our arguments consist of, or depend on, generalizations; and these generalizations will be drawn from our own finite experience. To illustrate, imagine a young man living

in a 9th century Scandinavian fishing village. All of the people he has seen are fair-skinned, and all of the Viking warriors whom he knows, who describe their raids in Ireland, in France, in England, etc., also tell him of seeing only fair-skinned people. And so, he concludes that all people are fair-skinned. And he would be wrong. His generalization would be in error despite being based on all of his experience, plus the combined experience of everyone he knows.
In the same way, as we expand our own experience, our generalizations gain more credibility; but there always remains a measure of uncertainty, since our experience in this world, and therefore our database, must of necessity be limited-none of us can claim omniscience. Thus, our premises will always contain an element of uncertainty; and obviously, no "absolute proof" can be constructed from premises which are uncertain, regardless of how small that uncertainty is.

03) Therefore, the Demand for "Absolute Proof" is absurd.

No one lives his or her life suspending judgment on everything that has not been proven true with absolute certainty; and nobody could live that way even if he or she wished to do so. Those who claim to only accept as true what they have proven have simply never considered very carefully their own daily thoughts and actions. Every time you drink water from a fountain, you do so assuming that it is safe to drink; but you haven't proven it. You are taking water from a source of which you are ignorant, which has been through a process you likely know very little about, performed by people whom you have never met. Any number of such examples could be given; but the point is that none of us can wait until we have rigorously proven everything before believing it. We would have no time to even live our lives.

The sum, therefore, of the points discussed so far is that absolute certainty derived from human reason alone is neither necessary nor possible. This brings us to the following common sense solution:

04) Normal, Healthy human Thought Consists of a Spectrum of Probability.

There are statements which are highly probable, and those which are merely probably, or reasonably plausible. There are yet other statements which are somewhat implausible, rather improbable, wildly improbable, and so forth. The principle job of logic is not to provide "absolute proof"; rather, it is to determine the most reasonable inference; I.e., to find out what is most probably true.

To illustrate, imagine driving to a store, and pulling your car into a parking spot. Locking the door with your key, you go inside to buy something; and ten minutes later you come back out, unlock the car, climb in, and start up the engine. Just before you begin driving off, however, a man asks how you can know the car is really yours. Responding graciously to an eccentric question, you point out the matching characteristics of your car: the year, make, model, and style; the color, the dings, etc.

"Yes", he concedes, "but it is still possible that your car was stolen, and that someone else driving the exact same type of car, with all of those same characteristics, took your parking spot. So, how do you know that this is really your car?

You then patiently point out that all of the belongings in the car match up: the pop bottle in the cup holder, the blue sweater in the passenger seat, the books and papers and dirty socks and other items in the back seat just the way you left them; and besides, the key works.

"It's not as though those things couldn't also belong to someone else," the skeptic insists. "It's always possible that somebody else left all of those same belongings in the exact same configuration in his vehicle; and of course, auto companies make multiple copies of similar keys for their cars. So, how do you know that this is your car?"

Getting a bit annoyed now, yet still desiring to prove your point, you pull the registration from the glove-box, and bring the man to the back of your vehicle, to show him the license plate. "It matches, and it's in my name," you state triumphantly; "so it's my car." With that, you get back in, and prepare to leave.

But the skeptic is not impressed. "Computer glitches happen, you know. It is always possible that someone else with the same name as your got his registration at the exact time, on the same day, that you did, but at a different office; and the computer system didn't catch it, and so issued the same plates. So, how do you know that this is really your car?"

By this time,, however, the eccentric doubter is left behind, as you drive off to let him finish framing his question alone. It is true that each scenario brought up by the skeptic is, strictly speaking, possible. Yet the improbabilities of them all, put together, render the case so implausible that there is no rational basis for doubting that the car is yours. That is why a normal, healthy car owner simply gets in and drives away, without a worry that it's an exact look-alike, for which he

could face serious legal consequences if it turned out, upon police inspection, that the car he is in actually belongs to someone else.

There is such a thing as unreasonable doubt, a point at which a matter is, or at least ought to be, considered settled in the mind of any sane and honest person, and where it becomes irrational to ask for more evidence. Some things are so wildly improbable that it is irrational to cling to them; other things are so highly probable that it is irrational to reject them. A healthy thinker can require that an important conclusion be established beyond reasonable doubt; but there is no way to prove anything beyond unreasonable doubt.

05) There Are Ways of Knowing Things to be True Besides Either the Empirical, Scientific Method, or Logical Demonstration.

One alternative means of acquiring knowledge is by the authority of some reliable source, such as maps, atlases, well-researched referenced books and articles, etc. Most of us have never seen DNA ourselves through an electron microscope; instead, we rely on the authority of biologists who have studied it. Reading an article in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Science is obviously not the same as doing the work in the lab yourself. Likewise, most of us have never been to Zimbabwe; yet it is reasonable to believe that such a country does in fact exist in Africa. Someone might respond, "But I could go to Africa, and verify that Zimbabwe does exist." Indeed you could, but that misses the point. You already believe in the existence of Zimbabwe, before you have seen it, and you believe it based on the word of geographical works published by people whom you have never even met.

Similar statements can be made about facts of history. Nothing that happened in the past, which we ourselves did not actually witness, can be proven true either by experiment or logical demonstration. Instead, we must rely on the record of somebody else who was there to know what happened. So, as a matter of fact, most of what we know depends on the authority of a source which we hold to be reliable; and anyone who rejects this as a valid means of knowing things must therefore esteem as uncertain most of what they have held to be true for all of their lives.

Another means of knowing is what philosophers refer to as intuition. If you believe that wanton cruelty to children is morally wrong-as any sane person does-you are holding an intuitively based dogma which cannot be proven either by

laboratory experiment or logical demonstration. If you believe that your mother loves you, then you are accepting something as true based on intuition; for there is nothing a mother could do that an assassin could not do, who is simply waiting for the right time to strike. There is, in fact, a sizeable list of human beliefs which all sane persons hold intuitively to be true, none of which can be proven either experimentally or logically; this will be examined in more detail on pages (27-28).

Christians, and those of a number of other faiths as well, accept super-natural revelation as yet another means of knowing things. (More about this will be discussed on pages 31-34).

06) Many of the Most Important Things in Life are Extra-Logical, Without Being Illogical.

Love, for instance, is extra-logical, in that it is not the result of a logical deduction. No man proposes to his prospective wife using a syllogism. But that does not by any means imply that love is contrary to reason. It is, however, beyond reason; it is outside of the boundaries of logic proper. So are meaningful, enjoying watching children play, experiencing beauty or happiness, and so forth. Likewise, true, undefiled religion-a real, meaningful relationship with our Creator-being life, it too has elements which are extra-logical without being illogical; e.g. love, joy, worship, meaningful experiences, and so forth.

07) The Worldview of the Philosophical Materialist Contains a Number of Very Large Steps of Faith Which are Not Supported by Any Evidence Whatsoever.

Philosophical materialism is the view that the material realm is all there is. A philosophical materialist, therefore, believes that nothing exists outside of matter, energy, space and time; and he or she holds that all that happens must be explained as the results of the interactions of these things as described by the laws of physics and chemistry. In this view, there is no supernatural realm of spirits, souls, God, or anything at all beyond the physical universe.

Those who hold this view must believe either that the physical universe itself is eternal, or else that it sprang into existence without cause. They must believe that life originated spontaneously from mindless chemical reactions. They must hold either that huge amounts of meaningful information can be, and has been, generated by natural forces, or else that meaningful information doesn't

really exist. They must maintain that consciousness and human personhood arose from matter. And they must explain the appearance of all the higher taxa in the living world (kingdoms, phyla, classes, orders and families) as the result of unintelligent natural processes. These are some of the major doctrines that every philosophical materialist is compelled by hi paradigm to believe, all of which are robustly contradicted by the evidence which is presently available.

08) In Fact, the Worldview of the Philosophical Materialist is Incoherent; In That It Consists of Systematic Contradiction.

The philosophical materialist must simultaneously hold that morality and values are objectively real, and that they are actually a Mirage; that human logic is both reliable and completely unreliable; that love is not only real and important but also illusory and meaningless; and he must presuppose free will all the while denouncing it as false. These are a few examples. (More will be said about this on pages 8-10 & 13-14).

09) The Central Messages of the Christian Faith are Capable of Being Proven Beyond Reasonable Doubt.

These messages would include the following statements:

- An eternal, Almighty Creator of the universe exists, who personifies all good principles.
- This Creator is the Ground of Being, of Morality and Values, of Knowledge and Reason, of Love and Meaning; and so forth.
- The creation, including human nature, has been marred by a Fall, due to sin.
- The Creator has communicated to humanity by means of the Bible.
- The Creator revealed Himself to the world in the Person Of Yeshua the Messiah.
- Yeshua authenticated His message by means of His death and resurrection.

The main text of this present work will concern itself with going over some of the evidence for these messages.

10) Saving Faith is a Gift of Elohiym; It is Ultimately a Miraculous Work of the Holy Spirit.

As noted in Point 9, and as the following reasons will seek to demonstrate, the main Gospel messages can be shown to be true beyond reasonable doubt. The evidence establishes the truth of Elohiym as so highly probably that souls are left without excuse before Him (See Romans 1:19-21). Yet, Christians do not pray, "The Lord is probably my Shepherd." This brings into focus the difference between knowing that the Gospel is true, and showing that the Gospel is true.

Saving faith is the gift of Elohiym, according to Ephesians 2:8; it is the result of the witness and work of the Holy Spirit in a person's life. This is subjective, in the sense that none of us can transmit our certainty into anyone else's heart. Objectively, we can show that the Gospel is reasonable, that it is so highly probable that it is irrational to reject it, and that every alternative is highly implausible, factually incorrect, or even incoherent. That is as far as human reason can take someone: to objective high probability. If we wish for certainty, for a saving faith, that is not within human means. With our reasons, our testimony, and our sharing of Christ's goodness, we can break down barriers to faith. But we cannot give anyone faith. That is, and will remain, the gift and work of Elohiym.

If you find the following reasons for the Christian hope to be sound, or if they even make the case seem reasonable, we invite and encourage you to pray to be given this saving faith. Yeshua says, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you." (Matthew 7:7) If all you can muster up is, "Lord, I believe: help my unbelief," as the man prayed in Mark 9:24, Yeshua can make this hope of the Gospel real for you, as He has for us.

Evidence For a Supernatural Realm

These are but three broad categories of human worldviews, and they break upon two distinct questions. The first question is whether there is a supernatural realm at all. If there is no such reality, then all discussions about the truth of the Christian faith-or any other message about the spiritual world-are in vain. On the other hand, if there is a spiritual realm, this by itself does not prove the Gospel true. It would simply mean that the Christian Faith has cleared the first hurdle; it would have to establish a good deal more to

make its case. Without skipping too far ahead, then, we can narrow our present focus to determining the answer to this first important question.

What we are asking, for the moment at least, is whether there is anything objectively real outside of the physical, material, natural world. Is there anything at all besides energy, matter, space, and time reacting according to the principles of physics and chemistry? As mentioned above, philosophical materialism says no. This view affirms that the physical realm is all there is, and that absolutely everything must be described and explained in terms of this realm. Any non-physical, non-material entity that does actually exist, therefore, would by definition need to be considered supernatural; and establishing the reality of a single such entity would automatically signify the collapse of materialist views. And this is not, as a matter of fact, all that difficult of a task.

I.) Of Reason Itself.

The ancient Greek philosophers, two and a half millennia ago, described a human as a rational animal; and they argued that if a man is rational, he must be free. That is, a human being can only have access to logical thought if he or she possesses some amount of free will, being capable of understanding inferences and the meaning of implications, and is able to choose to accept what the evidence indicates. If we are not free to follow the evidence where it leads, and even to change our mind based on new evidence, then we could have no access to logical thought.

Materialist philosophy is incompatible with free will, and the reason is not hard to see. If only physics determines what happens in the material realm, and everything is included in this realm, then everything is determined by physics. This conclusion, which is the direct result of materialist philosophy, is called Determinism; and it rejects entirely the notion of free will.

According to this view, then, a human is no more than matter, and all of our thinking is fully explained in terms of the physico-chemical interactions of material entities (e.g., the brain's neurons). Such reactions make no choices; they occur because they have to occur, in accordance with the laws of physics. If an apple is dropped, it doesn't hang in the air, saying, "To fall or not to fall: that is the question..." It falls because it cannot do anything else; gravity pulls the apple towards the center of the earth, and it has no choice in the matter.

When one man shoots another, we do not hold the bullet responsible; for even though it's the bullet that did all the damage,, it had no choice in its participation. It flew precisely at the speed, and by the trajectory, imposed upon it by the powder and the gun; it could have done nothing else. But should we blame the gun? No, the gun is also merely a physical object; it fired because the trigger was pulled, and it as well could have done nothing else. Well then, shall we blame the finger that pulled the trigger? Again, no; the finger has no ability to choose what to do. It did what it did because impulses came from the brain, causing the finger to move a certain way. But then, what about the brain: is it to be blamed? The answer is still no; for the brain is fully physical, acting in accordance with the physico-chemical principles which govern such reactions-just like an apple falling, a bullet flying, a gun firing, and a finger moving-and these chemical reactions make no choices. A brain just does what it does due to neru-chemistry; no free choices are made by neurons. And, according to materialist views, this is the end of the story: there is no free will, because a human is no more than a material thing, and every action of every material thing is determined by physics.

This would mean, however, that humans have no access to logical thought. For logic is not a physicochemical process; it is a mental process, by which one weighs out evidence, and chooses to believe what the evidence seems to indicate. For instance, if I present to you a valid logical argument-in which the premises are both true, and put together lead directly to a particular conclusion-then the conclusion must be true; but you would not be automatically, mechanically compelled to accept it as true. You might believe the conclusion, or you might not. You might simply reject it; you might ignore it, or you might suspend judgment, in order to think about it some more. But a logical argument, even if it is fully valid, has no physico-chemical force to compel assent.

In light of these considerations, if I ask a determinist, "Why do you believe in determinism?"-she cannot answer, "Because I have sorted through the evidence, and chosen to believe it; it makes more sense to me." By such a response, she would be contradicting her own determinist philosophy. The only answer she could give that would be compatible with her own views would be along these lines: "I believe in determinism because the molecules in my head make me believe it. I don't know if it's true; I can't even test it. I just believe

whatever my brain chemistry causes me to believe; and right now it's causing me to believe in determinism."

The only way we can be rational, therefore, having access to logical thought, is if there is some portion of us that is non-material-not reducible to physics, and thus not determined by physics-which can weigh out evidence, and choose to believe what the evidence indicates. The ancient argument still holds true: if a man is rational, he must be free. If we are free to choose what is rational, then we must have at least some freedom to choose. If we have no freedom to choose, then we are not free to choose what is rational. And this freedom to choose can only abide I some entity that is not determined by physics-that is, a non-material entity. This is what we may refer to as the human soul or spirit; it is that spiritual being who interacts, by means of our physical body, with the physical world. This soul is the personal being of a human, the real "us" who chooses, and thinks, and believes, and loves, and understands meaning.

The materialist, of course, cannot accept the concept of an immaterial soul, and thus has no basis for believing in free will. There are some materialists who do accept the concept of free will; but this is simply an example of muddled thinking, for the notion of free will cannot be true, nor even faintly sensible, within a worldview which sees all entities as material things and all material things as determined by physics.

Materialists of the 18th century referred to themselves by terms such as Rationalists and Freethinkers, believing themselves to be dedicated to human reason (as opposed to religious faith), and thus free to think for themselves, fully logically, outside of the confines of religion. It is one of the great ironies of history that by the end of the 19th century they had become determinists, apparently oblivious to the glaring contradiction into which they had placed themselves. Without free will, there can be no access to logical thought; and thus the Rationalists cannot believe that they are rational, anymore than the Freethinkers can believe that they are free to think.

II.) <u>Of Meaning.</u>

Imagine two men, total strangers, standing together in a hospital waiting room, engaging in small talk to pass the time while they await their loved ones.

A nurse comes up to one of the men and says, "I'm sorry, sir, but your wife has just died." The man who receives this report will almost certainly experience some sort of physiological response. He may faint; he may become weak or dizzy, and need to sit down. He might cry, or throw up, or have a heart attack; and in any case he will in all probability feel tremendous sorrow. All of these are physical reactions occurring within a material, flesh and blood body; but the cause itself was not physical. It was not caused by the volume or pitch of the nurse's voice, nor by the hissing sound of how she pronounced the letter "S". It was not the result of her breath, nor her size, nor how near she was when she spoke to the man, nor any other physical characteristic about her or her words. Instead, it was directly caused by the meaning of her message. The other man who is standing by will likely also be affected, seeing the suffering of the fellow human whom he has just met; and he will probably feel sorrow, or compassion, or some other emotional response. These will also be physical, physiological reactions; and they will as well be caused by the meaning conveyed by the nurse's words, and by the man's pitiable eresponse. But meaning is unquestionably non-material. Nobody an pour out two cups of meaning, nor measure its potential energy. Meaning takes up no space, and has no mass.

Certain materialist philosophers have even argued that meaning doesn't actually exist. Whether their own arguments are meaningless, I will leave such philosophers to worry out for themselves; but at any rate, what we have in this scenario is an example of a non-material entity-namely, meaning-somehow crossing the border into material realm, and causing a physical reaction. This is, admittedly, a hypothetical scenario; yet no one can honestly deny that scenarios like it occur every day. Every time you say something that makes someone laugh, or cry, or get angry or afraid; indeed, in any number of ways, words are conveying meaning which cause physical reactions in people on a continual basis. Therefore, we may conclude that there is something that does exist, that is objectively real, and yet is non-material. Here we should recall that the existence of non-material entities does not, by itself, prove the truth of the Christian message, nor even monotheism. However, it must be conceded that the Christian faith, and thus monotheism, are compatible with non-material entities, in a way that philosophical materialism is not compatible.

III.) The Argument From Information.

We may define information as "a meaningful message encoded by means of symbols." Consider the words on this paper. This is information it is a meaningful message. I am using ink and paper to draw symbols (English letters and punctuation), and employing a code which specifies how these symbols are to be strung together (English syntax), in order to communicate my message. Note, however, that the ink and paper are not the information. This same ink could be smeared or scribbled on these pages in an essentially infinite number of ways, without producing any meaningful message at all. Further, the symbols are not the information, either; for these same letters and dots and lines could be arranged in all sorts of ways as well, without it constituting any meaningful message. What we can accurately say is that the matter and the symbols, and code, convey the information. But the information itself is not a material thing.

This argument gains strength the more we study it. Consider, for example, what would be the case if someone wrote down on paper a unique item of information; I.e., a meaningful message which had never been heard or written before, such as a poem, or an essay, or a set of instructions. Now imagine that, centuries later, the single copy of the writing was burned, and the message contained in it was completely forgotten. The matter which had once been paper and ink would still exist, in the form of ashes, gas, and heat; and as long as the physical universe endures, that same material quantity will remain, in precisely the same amounts. But the information would be lost. Neither matter nor energy can be created, by either human or natural means; nor can they be destroyed. New information, however, can be created, and is created daily; and information can be destroyed. Further, matter can be converted into energy, and energy into matter. But neither matter nor energy can be converted into either matter or energy.

The sum is that information is not a material quantity. However, despite its non-material nature, it is still quantifiable. Information is measured, by the symbols that convey it, in terms of "bits" (binary digits); and for English, the average amount of information per written letter is just over four bits. Thus, items of information exist-they can be transmitted, received, stored and processed, bought and sold, and even measured; and the meaning contained in items of information can observably affect physical things (such as human

bodies). Yet items of information are not material: they are neither matter nor energy.

If a meaningful message is not a material quantity, what is it? We may describe information as a mental quantity; it is thought which is transmitted by means of symbols. And this brings us to another, related argument. The materialist who holds that the mind is to be equated with the brain is compelled by his logic to believe the implication which follows, that thought is chemical reactions in the brain. But this is plainly false; for thoughts and chemical reactions have differing characteristics. For instance, a coherent thought can in principle be either true (in the sense of factually correct) or false (I..e., factually incorrect). But no chemical reaction can be described as true or false; if you observed water boiling, it would be nonsense to say, "unfortunately, that reaction is false."

Secondly, coherent thoughts have what philosophers refer to as "intentionality"; they are <u>about</u> things. I can have thoughts about a person, about a house, about an abstract concept or a state of affairs; I can even have thoughts about things which do not exist. Chemical reactions, though, have no intentionality to them. A reaction is not intrinsically about anything else. To use the same example, a pot of boiling water is not about the economy, or about a house on 4th Street.

Thirdly, coherent thoughts have semantic content, i.e., meaning. These are all intrinsic characteristics of thoughts, in that it is difficult to see how something that lacks intentionality, meaning, or any possibility of being classified as either true or false could be considered a thought. It is just as difficult to defend the notion that a physical, chemical reaction has any of these characteristics, intrinsically. Instead, physical things and chemical reactions have characteristics such as height, weight, density, heat, potential energy, and so forth; none of which are attributable to meaningful thoughts. If therefore physical, chemical reactions have characteristics which differ so greatly from the characteristics which thoughts have, then it is not possible for thoughts and chemical reactions to be the same thing.

Thoughts, then, are not chemical reactions in the brain. This means that mental activity cannot be equated with cerebral activity, and thus the mind cannot be the same thing as the brain. Further, thoughts which are expressed

as information, and the meaning contained in these messages, are not material quantities; they are non-material mental quantities. We thus have quite a firm basis for believing that non-material entities do in fact exist; and this means that philosophical materialism must be abandoned as false.

IV.) Contradictions of Materialism.

A Christian holds that humans have been created by Elohiym, in His image, for the purpose of having a relationship with our Creator. From this it naturally follows that we have needs which can only be met by Elohiym. This is, human nature is such that we depend, for healthy functioning, upon things which are spiritual, things that can only be possible in a world where God can be found.

Nevertheless, human beings also have free will, and thus are capable of being willingly ignorant of their dependency on Elohiym. But this leads, necessarily, to discrepancy. Earlier, we saw how materialist philosophy, by way of its denial of free will, cannot be reconciled with human access to logical thought-although the continual boast of the entire materialist movement has been its rigorous devotion to being logical. This, though, is but one item in a long list of the contradictions inherent in the rejection of the supernatural realm. Indeed, this philosophy produces a steady stream of discordant statements and assumptions, as the humanity of the materialist continuously clashes with the inhumanity of materialism.

Thus the materialist skeptic heaps criticisms upon the hypocrisy of religious institutions, and then flings away, as a subjective delusion, the concept of morality-the very thing upon which his criticisms depend. As an activist at a demonstration, he protests that international corporations are treating native people in distant countries as if they were beasts. He then goes to the monthly meeting of the Anthropological Society, where he argues that people essentially are beasts. As a politician, he cries out that war is a waste of life; as an existentialist author, he writes that life is a waste of time. Researching Artificial Intelligence, he sets as his goal the creating of computers, which will be capable of understanding meaning, assuring us that success is only several years away. Then he takes his books and papers, and hurries on to his philosophy class, where he carefully takes notes on how meaning doesn't even exist. As a father, he enjoys tucking his children into bed at night, and telling them of his love for them; as a follower of the latest fads among his

biochemist associates, he holds that love is just an illusion produced by hormones and neural chemistry, believed in only by sentimentalists. Claiming that we live in a universe without plan or purpose, and which therefore contains no obligations, he takes it as the purpose of life to convince us that we all have an obligation to believe precisely that.

In short, every healthy and sane man and woman believes in objective values and moral obligations, in meaning and purpose to life, in the intrinsic worth of a human being, in love and beauty and free will and responsibility, in the validity of logical thought and the importance of truth, and in a good number of other mystical and supernatural realities. These are the things which make us human;;and materialist philosophy places all of these concepts out of bounds. Yet, nobody can live in that inhuman philosophical wasteland; and thus every materialist survives by smuggling concepts into his life which his dogmas keep claiming are unreal. Among the surest disproofs

Of materialism, then, is that nobody appears to actually believe it. The more devoted to it that people claim to be, the more thoroughly they contradict its basic tenets. As A. N. Whitehead once remarked, those scientists who are animated by the purpose of proving that life is purposeless constitute a very interesting subject of study.

Evidence for Monotheism

We find, then, that materialism is much too simple. It cannot account for things which are quite plainly real, such as mind, meaning, information, free will, human access to logical thought, and, by extension, the human soul. These are all outside of the physical, material realm, and thus must be accepted as supernatural. And once a supernatural realm is accepted, the next question to address is whether there is ultimately a mind behind this realm. The pantheistic view is that there is no personal mind behind all of reality. According to this view, there is only an impersonal Spirit or Essence, of which everything is a part, which some call God. This is the teaching of the mystics of the East, such as those of, the Hindu or Buddhist traditions, that everything-people and animals, rocks and plants, mountains and planets and stars, all physical and even spiritual things-<u>all</u> of

these are merely different manifestations of the One Divine Essence of Cosmic Spirit.

It is worth repeating that, in the pantheistic worldview, this Spirit is not believed to be a personal Being, a Someone who is conscious of its own existence, or aware of ours. It is not conceived to be a thinking Being whom we can know and have a relationship with, or to whom we can pray expecting to receive an answer. Instead, this Spirit or Essence is viewed as an impersonal Force which permeates the universe, operating everywhere and on everything, somewhat like gravity, without being aware of us or of what it is doing. For the Pantheist, ultimate reality behind everything is this impersonal Cosmic Force, which neither knows nor cares that we are here, of which we are all a part.

Monotheism, on the other hand, is the view which holds that there is one God, the Creator of all, who is:

- Eternal and transcendent-having neither beginning nor end, without cause, and not limited to space or time;
- Spirit-distinct from the material realm, which was created;
- Personal-someone who is self-aware, conscious of existence (I.e., able to say, "I Am", and know what that means), and who is also aware of <u>our</u> existence; someone who has the characteristics of personhood;
- Absolutely good-the Ground of values, whose nature constitutes the Standard by which right can be known from wrong;
- Omniscient and Omnipotent-all-knowing and all-powerful, having complete mastery over creation; knowing the end from the beginning.

The remainder of this section will be devoted to presenting the case for the monotheistic view. If these arguments succeed, we will still not quite have arrived at the Gospel; for there are several monotheistic faiths, such as Judaism, Islam, the Baha'i tradition, Deism, and some others besides Christianity. However, we will at least have narrowed considerably the field of valid candidates. Note, further, that these three categories (materialism, pantheism, and monotheism) constitute an essentially exhaustive list of possible ways of viewing reality: for there either is a supernatural realm or there isn't; and if there is a supernatural realm, it either has a mind behind it or it doesn't.

I.) The Cosmological Argument.

This line of reasoning is simple, yet quite powerful. It is based on the principles of cause and effect, on the fact that the physical universe does exist, and on the premise that it has not existed eternally. It is not necessarily incoherent to believe that the universe is eternal, I.e. without beginning; however, it does contradict all of the presently available evidence. For instance, according to the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics, also called the law of increasing entropy, the net effect of every reaction in the universe is an increase in the total amount of energy that is unavailable for future use. At some point in the future, therefore-assuming the cosmos is allowed to naturally run its course-all energy will become unavailable; that is, the universe will reach 100% entropy. Extrapolating backwards in time, all of the universe's energy was once available-entropy was at 0%. Zero entropy equals Time Zero; for there is nothing less than zero entropy, and not one second ever passes without a net increase in unavailable energy. Other lines of evidence as well brings us to the same conclusion, that the universe is not eternal.

Thus, whatever one's view, the best inference from the actual evidence is that the physical universe came into existence. The Cosmological Argument begins here, and goes as follows:

A.1.) All that comes into existence is caused.
2.) The physical universe came into existence.
Therefore, the physical universe is caused.

B.1.) Every effect is distinct from its cause.
2.) The physical universe, being caused, is an effect.
Therefore, the physical universe is distinct from its cause.

C.1.) The physical universe was caused by something other than itself(i.e., it is distinct from its cause).
2.) The physical universe is such that it consists of energy, matter, space, and time interacting according to the principles of physics.

Therefore, the physical universe was caused by something other than energy, matter, space, and time interacting according to the principles of physics.

D.1.) The cause of the physical universe is either material (of matter), or mental (of mind).

2.) <u>The cause of the physical universe is not material (as shown by A, B, and C above)</u>.

Therefore, the cause of the physical universe is mental.

The conclusion, then, is that the cause of the physical universe must be described, at the very least, as being non-material, outside of the limits of space and time, eternal, uncaused, and both unimaginably powerful and extremely wise. Further, the cause of the universe must be personal, in the sense of possessing both mind and will, in order to be capable of deciding to create a universe. This description is in quite good agreement with the characteristics of the monotheistic concept of God.

II.) <u>Arguments from Design</u>.

There are many different lines of reasoning which indicate that living things are the products of a Creator's mind, rather than the results of mindless forces (whether natural or spiritual). Due to space limitations, however, we will limit our discussion to three main points. The first of these is the origin of life.

According to standard evolutionary scenarios, disorganized chemicals, sloshing about in water formed biologically useful compounds, which then spontaneously combined to become functioning cellular components. These, in turn, came together and organized themselves into highly complex living entities, encasing themselves in a functionally operating membrane, purging out excess water, and beginning to perform everything necessary in order to survive: selectively bringing in raw materials, while keeping out toxins and exporting waste; producing and storing energy which can be used by the organism when needed; constructing new parts, and repairing existing ones; eliminating and/or recycling components which have become worn out; creating systems for reproduction, quality control, intracellular transport, monitoring external conditions and maintaining function, and so on.

Even the most rudimentary form of life would necessarily require all such systems, and more, just to be capable of the minimal tasks of survival and reproduction. Therefore, even the theoretical "first cell" would have to be an amazingly sophisticated system of complex molecular machinery.

This is all in direct violation of the laws of physics, however. The 2nd Law of Thermodynamics states that, in spontaneous reactions, matter proceeds in the direction of lower and lower energy states, in the direction of equilibrium. That's why a ball rolls downhill spontaneously, but not uphill. That's why a punctured inner-tube will leak air, until it reaches equilibrium with atmospheric pressure. That's why ice in a drink on a warm day will melt, and the drink itself will warm up, until it reaches thermal equilibrium (the same temperature) with its surroundings. The above evolutionary origin of life scenario, by contrast, begins with disorganized chemicals, and assumes that by spontaneous processes, they will organize into higher and higher energy states, further and further from equilibrium, to become extremely complex functioning cells.

The typical evolutionist response to this argument from the 2nd Law is that energy from the sun is what drove the process in the direction of higher energy states; but this is inadequate. Raw energy, by itself, breaks things down, in accordance with the @nd Law. You need only observe what occurs when you leave complex objects, such as cars or computers, to bathe in sunlight for a few years, in order to confirm what raw, undirected energy actually accomplishes. To stave off the effects of the 2nd Law, more is needed than merely an energy source. There is also a need for a set of mechanisms which can harness the energy, and direct it into useful work. A refrigerator, for instance, as long as it is operating, maintains thermal disequilibrium with its surrounding (keeping the heat out); it serves to stave off the effects of the 2nd Law. If you unplug it, the fridge stops working, and begins moving towards thermal equilibrium. But if all that is needed to overcome the 2nd Law is raw energy, then we ought to be able to set the fridge in the sunlight outside, and watch it work. But it doesn't. You may do this test yourself and see. However, if we bring in a large enough solar panel, and plug the refrigerator into that, then the thing will work just fine. Thus, the difference between staving off the effects of the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics, and having these effects run their course, is not merely introducing raw energy. A mechanism

for harnessing the energy, and for converting that energy into useful work, is absolutely necessary.

Yet, in the pre-biotic world, no such mechanism would be available. According to the scenarios, there were only disorganized chemicals in water. Such an environment would break down functional parts of living cells within days or years; but it would not spontaneously build them up. Some may invoke millions of years to explain the process; but this is not an explanation, but rather a muddle. The rate at which functional biomolecules (such as enzymes or DNA) degrade is well known, being observable and measurable; depending on temperature and pH, it is on the order of years or less under any plausible pre-biotic conditions. The rate at which functional biomolecules form, under pre-biotic conditions, must be much, much slower than this; for after several decades of experiments, no one has ever observed it occurring.

The sum, therefore, is this: The minimum requirements for the most rudimentary type of living organism would necessarily include hundreds, and probably thousands, of complex, functioning biomolecules. For an accumulation of such biomolecules to occur, the rate at which they form would have to be faster than the rate at which they degrade. If the rate at which they degrade is over a period of years-or even centuries-and the rate at which they form spontaneously is theorized (due to lack of observation) to occur over many millennia, then simple arithmetic shows that the necessary accumulation is not possible. You cannot get from zero to several hundred (let alone thousands) by a process that subtracts much faster than it adds. Thus, evolutionary scenarios for the origin of life, are about as formally disproven as anyone could ask for them to be; and this leaves design as the best inference from the data.

A second argument for design concerns the combination of the three most obvious characteristics of the biological world: complexity, discontinuity, and stasis. When one carefully and honestly considers the sophistication of biological systems-technology which routinely outperforms anything produced by human engineering capabilities-it is difficult to avoid being impressed by their complexity. Some examples would include the nervous system, photosynthesis, vision, blood circulation, gas exchange, digestion, echolocation, rotary motors for motion and for producing energy, magnets, pumps, filters; and so forth. If we were to estimate the total number of these complex innovations-counting every individual type of molecular machine and cellular system, and all of the various

types of tissues, organs, and systems in the bodies of all of the kinds of living things which ever existed-the total number would certainly be in the hundreds of millions, and probably in the billions. And bear in mind how often, and how significantly, these biological innovations excel the efforts of intelligent engineers and other scientists to produce similar things. For instance, DNA is trillions of times more efficient, per unit volume, at storing information than the most sophisticated systems produced by human technology. Spider web thread is much stronger than any fibers we are able to create; and remember, spiders produce eco-friendly material. Human brains work at computational speeds that are much faster than supercomputers, despite being hundreds of times lighter and using only ten watts of power-only a small fraction of the power used by a typical house light bulb.

If we ask the evolutionist why these biological innovations regularly outperform the works of human engineers, the typical response is to invoke long periods of time. "Over millions of years of evolutionary tinkering, these systems have become highly complex." But we are here being offered yet another muddle. Let us take a low estimate that, say, 400 million such innovations have existed in all of biology, throughout earth's history, which have been able to outperform human engineering efforts. If evolution requires even a million years to produce each one, on average, then 400 trillion years of evolutionary history on earth would have been necessary to produce them all-100 thousand times longer than the four billion years usually claimed for the process. To have all of these innovations appear within the period of time normally assumed for evolution, a new one must have appeared, on average, every ten years. Again, simple arithmetic demands this to be the case. Yet, it is highly implausible to say that mindless nature can invent such complex systems at such a rapid rate, continuously, for millions of millennia, while intelligent humans can only study them and wonder at their sophistication.

Next, the discontinuity of biology. In the animal kingdom, there are about 35 known phyla that are extant, and some ten or so extinct phyla. These major groups are readily distinguishable; for few would confuse a crab with a starfish, a jellyfish with an earthworm, a clam with a mammal, or a snail with a coral. All of these are of different animal phyla, and the body plan of each is radically distinct. One phylum, called Pogonophora, is a group of deep sea tube worms, which lack a mouth, an alimentary canal, and a stomach; their feeding process is not yet

determined. Another phylum, Cycliophora, consists of tiny animals shaped somewhat like a boxing glove, that live on the lips of lobsters and filter feed from the leftovers of their host. And then there are those extinct phyla, known only as fossils, such as Hallucigenia, with seven pairs of stilt-like legs coming out of its worm-shaped body, and seven tentacles rising from its back, each ending in a pincer.

Similar points can be made about the subdivisions of animal phyla, such as the differences in body plans between the classes within phyla, or the orders within classes; and equally impressive biological differences separate the various types of plants (to say nothing of the enormous differences between the kingdoms: animals, plants, fungi, the two distinct kingdoms of bacteria, etc.) Discussion of all of these points is beyond the scope of this work; here we simply note the obvious, and well-documented, discontinuity between major categories of living things. Briefly stated, there is not a single example of a reasonably graded series of intermediates known to bridge the wide gaps between any two phyla of animals, or any two divisions of plants. This holds true for both extant, living organisms and extinct, fossilized organisms. Just as we never observe new, complex biological innovations coming into existence, so we find no case of a species-by-species, or genus-by-genus, or even a family-by-family series of transitional forms between any two of the major categories (phyla and divisions) of animals and plants. One may explain this by saying that no matter where we are looking, evolution is always happening somewhere else; but at some point such explanations become more than a little implausible.

We can now combine these two elements, complexity and discontinuity, with the third: Stasis. Fossils, of course, are remains of organisms which lived in the past; and they consist of two types. The first type is of things so dissimilar to living, known creatures that they have to be classified into new major categories, such as new phyla, classes, and orders; and these constitute yet more instances of discontinuity. The second type is of organisms with which we are already familiar. Hundreds, perhaps thousands of examples of this are known: sea urchins, ferns, conifers, bats, sharks, ants, jellyfish, cockroaches, etc.; the fossil representatives look recognizably similar, or even essentially indistinguishable, from their living counterparts today. The term used to describe this latter data, among secular biologists, is "evolutionary stasis' but this is obviously academic double-speak. Since the word evolution means "change", and the word stasis means

"staying the same", the phrase evolutionary stasis is a glaring example of a contradiction in terms. We should rather call this data "non-evolution", or better yet "biological stasis", and leave it at that.

The sum of this argument is that all living things consist of enormous amounts of extremely complex components; their major categories are separated by very wide gaps, and the record of their history gives no evidence of major transformations from one category to another, but rather stasis. Thus, evolutionary ideas cannot explain the actual data; and this makes the case for creation by design quite solid.

The final argument for design that we may discuss concerns evidence, from genetics. The standard evolutionary dogma is that mutations are the source of all of the genetic information in the living world. It is a simple matter, however, to show that data from genetics challenge this dogma, rather than support it. We can focus our attention on a specific case: the hypothesized transition from an ape ancestor to ourselves. Let us first establish some variables:

1) The current consensus among evolutionary anthropologists is that the line which led to humans split off from that which led to the anthropoid apes approximately six million years ago. Let us assume an average generational time span of twelve years; i.e., the length of time it would take, on average, for a male and female hominid pair to be born, reach maturity, mate and produce 2.1 offspring (21 per ten pairs), in order to maintain a stable population level over time. This would yield about 500,000 generations from the hypothesized split unto the present.

2) In the 1970's, it became fashionable to affirm that human and chimpanzee DNA differ by only 1%. This was, of course, years before the Human Genome Project was even in the planning stages; and chimp DNA has only recently begun to be sequenced in detail. In theory, then, there has long been legitimate cause to be skeptical of the claim of 99% similarity; and in fact, such skepticism is turning out to be justified. (1) The actual overall similarity between the genomes of chimps and humans is still not known with certainty, but recent reports (2) suggest that it may turn out to be around 70-80%. Indeed, in a chimp-human comparison of the Y-chromosome; published in the periodical Nature (3), it was found that over 30% of the respective sequences were so dissimilar that no alignable counterparts for

comparison could be discovered. Nevertheless, to extend the full benefit of the doubt, let us assume the conventional wisdom of 99% similarity of genetic material. Let us further assume that the DNA of the hypothesized ape-human, ancient common ancestor was midway intermediate between apes and humans, so that the difference between modern human DNA and the ancient hominid ancestor's DNA was 0.5%. Since our modern genome contains one billion codons, 0.5% of them would be five million codons. (A codon is one set of three consecutive nucleotide bases in the DNA).

3) It has often been asserted that most of the human genome is redundant, and has no function. Evolutionist biologists have relegated as much as 90% of the human genome to this functionless status, referring to it as "junk DNA". However, this is now known to be wildly in error. A joint publication of 30 research papers appeared in 202, reporting on the results of the ENCODE Project. This acronym stands for "Encyclopedia of DNA Elements", and is a spin-off of the Human Genome Project. The Encode Project is an enormous research program, involving over 440 scientists in 32 institutions performing at least 1,600 experiments. The summary report published in Nature (4) stated that biochemical functions have already been assigned for over 80% of the human genome. The research has begun by studying nearly 150 types of human cells; but since there are hundreds of different cell types in the human body, the research is really only getting started. As more kinds of cells are studied, it appears nearly certain that biochemical functions will be discovered for increasing amounts of the human genome. In fact, Ewin Birney, the lead research coordinator, said in an interview with Scientific American that the very phrase "junk DNA" should be "totally expunged from the lexicon," since it is not an adequate description of the facts.

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1) Cohen, Science 316 (29 June 2007), p. 1836, "The Myth of the 1%".
2) Proceedings of the National Academy of Science 99 #21 (2002), p. 13633-13635; American Journal of Genetics 70 #6 (2002), p. 1490-1497; Molecular Biology & Evolution 24 #10 (2007), p. 2266-2276.
3) Nature 463 (14 January 2010), p. 149; ibid. (28 January 2010), p. 536-539.
4) Nature 489 (6 September 2012), p. 57-74

Now, the Neo-Darwinian evolutionary model explains all useful, functional genetic information as the result of inherited beneficial mutations. Accordingly, then, out of the five million codons in the human genome which are assumed to differ from the ape-human ancestor, at least 80% of them (i.e., four million) are useful for function, and so would be considered beneficially mutated. Thus, evolutionists must hold that at least four million beneficial mutations have been added to the human genome, within the last 500,000 generations. The British biologist and geneticist J.B.S. Haldane published a study on the rate at which beneficial mutations might appear, become established, and finally be spread universally through a population. (5) The principle is known in biology as "the cost of Natural Selection", and refers to the number of individuals which have to die off in order for a beneficial mutation to become widespread, as those who have inherited the mutation replace those who did not inherit it.

If the cost per generation is very high, the population might easily go extinct before many individuals inherit the mutation. If the cost is low, as evolutionists generally assume it to be, then many generations would be required for the mutation to become widespread. Haldane estimated that it would take about 300 generations, on average, for a beneficial mutation to become common throughout a population. One may agree or disagree with this precise figure; yet since a beneficial mutation is universally conceded to be a rare occurrence, and is generally understood (among evolutionists) to confer, typically, a survival advantage of only 1% or less, it is highly implausible to claim that new ones could become widespread at a rate of, say, one every ten generations. Thus, even granting quite generous assumptions, Natural Selection cannot account for more than several thousand beneficial mutations within the allotted time span of six million years for the hypothesized ape-human transition.

However, according to the most recent data, at least four million beneficial mutations have to be accounted for, within 500,000 generations. This would mean that eight new ones would somehow have to be inherited by the entire population, <u>every single generation</u>, 500,000 times in a row! This is a major dilemma, that even six million years is too short of a time-at least a few orders of a magnitude too short, in fact-for standard Neo-Darwinian evolution to bridge the gap of genetic difference which divides humans from apes.

Further, it seems all but certain that this dilemma will only become more acute in the future; for both the percentage of genetic dissimilarity between apes and humans, and the total amount of useful functional DNA, are likely to be revised upwards as research continues. A difference of just 5% between the genome of the hypothetical hominid ancestor and that of modern humans, multiplied by a functional status for 90% of the human genome-both of which are much more likely than the figures we have assumed in this study-would mean that 45 million beneficial mutations have to be accounted for, within the allotted 500,000 generations; i.e., ninety new ones, on average, becoming widespread throughout the population, each and every generation.

Darwinists may, if they wish, stand firm and assert the wildly improbable: that, indeed, the very same brand new sets of numerous, harmonious, beneficial mutations have been simultaneously inherited by the entire hominid population every generation, over and over, hundreds of thousands of times, on the evolutionary journey from ape to human. But such a scenario would fly in the face of everything we know and all we observe about heredity and genetics and probability, as well as standard Darwinian beliefs. Alternatively, evolutionists could greatly multiply their estimate of the age of the earth, in order to grand billions of years, rather than mere millions, to the hypothesized transition from ape to human. However, this would contradict everything that is known and believed about geology and geochronology. In short, evolutionists have a choice between the Scylla of empirical observation, and the Charybdis of implausibly long periods of time.

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5) Haldane, "The Cost of Natural Selection", Journal of Genetics 55 (1957), p. 511-524.

It should be pointed out as well that this same dilemma afflicts every other major transition theorized in Darwinian evolution; and so the problem must be multiplied by a factor of many thousands. This is much more than enough justification for rejecting the evolutionary paradigm as irrational.

So, if evolution cannot explain the genetic data, what is the alternative? Recalling that information is a mental quantity, rather than a material quantity (pg. 12), the source of any significant amount of meaningful information is, ultimately, a mind. That is what we immediately assume every time we receive a letter, a phone call, or an email: the message originated in someone's mind. And DNA is undoubtedly a form of meaningful information. It consists of symbols (adenine, cytosine, guanine, and thymine), and a (genetic) code; and it certainly exists in significant amounts. A typical gene contains about 2,400 bits of information, and there are hundreds of millions, if not many billions, of substantially different genes in the living world. Thus, we may safely attribute genetic information to a mind.

A major strength of this argument is that it can be put to the test; it is potentially falsifiable. All evolutionists would need to do is document a single case in which mindless natural forces, by themselves, are observed to generate a significant amount of new, meaningful information. By "a significant amount", I mean at least five hundred bits, which in English is about one hundred and twenty-five letters, roughly the length of this sentence. This should not be difficult to document, if it is in fact true, as Darwinists assure us, that natural forces have generated all of the living world's genetic information (I.e., many hundreds of billions, and probably even trillions, of bits) within the (assumed) 4 billion years of evolutionary history. Since this comes out to 500 bits of genetic information every few months (if not weeks), if mindless nature is capable of that, and has been doing it continuously for that long, it ought to be possible for us to observe it occurring.

The sum of these points is that creation-the physical universe itself and the living world within it-declares clearly the power and eternal divinity of the Creator (Romans 1:19,20). Evolution has never been a particularly good explanation for these things; it is merely the only explanation possible once the concept of a Creator is rejected. But if a man argues that evolution is true on the grounds that there is no Creator, and then argues that there is no Creator on the grounds that evolution is true, his argument is perfectly and completely circular. The arguments

from design, by contrast, are based on the very same assumptions that sane men and women use everyday to function: that spontaneous reactions tend to break things down, that highly complex machinery doesn't invent itself, that meaningful messages do not spring out of mindless matter; and so forth. These common sense notions, when applied to the world around us, give firm support to the conclusion that this world is indeed the result of a mind-the Mind of the Creator. And, if the Creator has a mind, then pantheistic, impersonal conceptions of God are simply false.

III The Argument from Morality

This is a particularly fascinating topic, since it is so intimately related to virtually everything of importance to human beings. Yet, modern thought has managed to make a complete muddle of this as well. Due directly to the influence of materialist philosophy, with its rejection of the spiritual realm in general and of Biblical faith in particular, the concept of an eternal, holy God whose nature makes up an Absolute Standard has been abandoned by large segments of our society. And since no other concept can serve as such a standard, the inevitable conclusion has followed, in the minds of many, that there is in fact no objective basis for morality. You hear this opinion quite commonly on college campuses, that nothing is really right or wrong, that it is all "a matter of perspective," and that there is no such thing as objective evil. However, although masses of people continue to repeat this creed as they have been carefully trained to do, nobody actually believes it. Moral Relativism, as this position is called, simply leaves the flogger flogging, and no sane person can really live that way. If you were to see, across the street, someone strangling an infant for the enjoyment of it, you would not merely say, "I don't like to do that. He might like to do that, which is his own personal preference; but I don't like it." Neither would you say "That is a rather inefficient use of an infant." Instead, you would recognize the action as wrong, as wicked, as a moral abomination. It is something that ought not to be done. Even if the man doing it thinks it is O.K.--if, for instance, he is some crazed White Supremacist who sees it as his duty to kill the baby since it's African-American - the act would still be wrong. Any sane human would recognize the action as an atrocity; and by this recognition, we are presupposing a standard of morality that is over us as well as over the person whose actions we oppose.

But aside from such a graphic example, if we simply analyze our own thoughts and attitudes, we will notice that we are using moral judgments on a nearly continual basis. As we approve of or criticize things, as we protest for Justified, as we oppose or support various things that people do or say, we demonstrate our own dependency upon moral Concepts. Indeed, a person who even attempted to purge yourself of all morality related Notions would have to throw out something like half of what she normally says every day. And to be consistent, she would also need to just act haphazardly, and ignore most of what goes on around her.

In fact, it is necessary to presuppose moral obligations even to make a rational argument: that it is right to be rational, that we are obligated to have the intellectual Integrity to follow the evidence where it leaves semicolon that it is right to believe and speak the truth, and that we ought to be courteous enough to listen to each other's paste semicolon it cetera. These are moral judgments that we have to assume even in order to begin to make an argument for our views. Thus, if someone even attempts to form a rational argument against objective moral values, he must of necessity presuppose such values in the process - and consequently, his argument will unavoidably be incoherent.

If therefore we are healthy enough to acknowledge that at least some things are right, and some things are wrong, then we need to follow the implications of this position. It is intellectually inconsistent to accept the reality of moral obligations, but then reject the concept which that reality necessarily requires. If we believe in fire, then reason requires that we believe in the necessary conditions for fire: oxygen, fuel, and heat. In the same way, once we come to accept moral obligations as real. We must also accept the necessary conditions for Morality. First and foremost is an Absolute Moral Standard, with which we can compare actions, to determine whether they are right or wrong. Such a Standard would need to be <u>intrinsically</u> good, to begin with. This is the problem with Society itself being the source of what is right: entire societies can be, and often have been, wrong (e.g., Nazi Germany).

Second, the standard would have to be <u>eternally</u> good, meaning that it's goodness didn't come from anything else. If something's good news was learned from, or received from, or contingent upon, some other thing, then we have not yet reached the <u>ultimate</u> source of goodness. Third, the standard would need to

be authoritatively good. If a directive has no authority over us, then it can be safely ignored. If I were to walk into a room and which a radio was playing, and immediately heard, "Hurry in today and buy a car from us", I would not be obligated to do so; for a voice in an advertisement over the radio has no authority over my life whatsoever.

Finally, the Standard would have to be personally good; it would need to be a Someone Who is these good things. Good and right characteristics are characteristics of personal beings: an orange cannot be said to be generous, a stone wall cannot be courageous; and a tree, or the sky above us, cannot be called kind and wise. Only a person can be these good sorts of things.

Thus, if moral obligations are real - and every sane person knows that they are - then there must exist a personal, authoritative, eternally and intrinsically good Being who is the Ground and Ultimate source of moral values. This agrees in detail with the monotheistic concept of God. Pantheistic conceptions of the Divine Essence are impersonal; and further, they include both anything called good and anything called evil. This world view, then, has no basis for recognizing moral obligations.

Besides the Absolute Standard, morality requires other necessary conditions. One is the recognition of a supernatural realm; for morality is not a physical, material thing. You will never bump into a moral obligation in a dark room. Another is free will; for no one can be either blamed or praised for something they could have had no way to avoid doing. If they have no choice in the matter, then they have no personal responsibility for it. Yet another necessary condition is the intrinsic worth of human life; for if humans have no value, it doesn't matter what you do to them.

All of these concepts are necessary to recognize objective moral values. Pantheism has a difficult time with at least some of them, while philosophical materialism has no room for any of them. I am not here arguing that pantheists and materialists cannot act in decent, kind and humane ways. Of course they can. What I argue, instead, is that their own professed worldviews give no basis for saying that acting in these ways is morally "right" in an objective sense. They can say that they like, or prefer, to act in these ways; and I for one would certainly not try to talk them out of it. However, they are being inconsistent if they state that it is an "obligation" to do so, or "objectively better"; because neither the

pantheist nor the materialist, by their own admitting, has a Standard of comparison by which to know or measure whether anything is right or wrong.

We have therefore two, and only two, logical alternatives: to accept objective morality as real, or to reject it as a illusory. Following the latter leads to the madhouse. Following the former leads to monotheism. It should be obvious to any honest person that monotheism is much more rational, and for healthier, then insanity.

IV). The Intuitive Argument

There are certain assumptions about reality which all human beings hold to be true, and indeed most hold to be true, in order to function as healthy persons in our normative, daily lives. These beliefs, however, are not capable of proof; rather, they are held intuitively. They are presupposed by our actions and reactions, by our attitudes and reasonings, by the whole of our conscious lives. And many of these assumptions, which we hold intuitively to be true, carry certain implications. Above we saw how morality is one of these assumptions that all sane people do in fact hold, which carries with it the implication of an eternally holy, personal God. It also includes the Assumption of Free Will, and the intrinsic worth of human life, both of which are also intuitively held beliefs. Other beliefs of this sort are that human life has objective meaning and purpose, and that logic is a systematically reliable means by which we can, in principle, arrive at objective truth.

None of these beliefs can be proven true by laboratory experiment; nor can they be logically demonstrated by beginning with the raw facts of the natural realm. They are all compatible with monotheism, and some of them strongly imply it. But the point of this argument is that many of our intuitively held beliefs, such as these examples just cited, are incompatible with both pantheism and materialist philosophy.

Pantheism holds that no two things are, ultimately, distinguishable; for everything is equally a part of the same impersonal Divine Essence. In that view, then, what we call Good and Evil are ultimately the same thing, and there is no real difference between them. If kindness and cruelty are, really, indistinguishable, then all discussions of morality are in vain. Logic is useless as well if truth and falsehood, reason and unreason are all ultimately one. Similarly, if humans and frogs and flowers and rocks are all to be considered the same thing, then human

life can have no special, intrinsic value. To say that we may throw rocks, but we may not throw humans, would be assuming a distinction between the two that pantheism cannot justify. As for meaning and purpose to existence, these are also outside of pantheist philosophy. For neither meaning nor purpose can hang in mid-air by themselves. They exist in the mind of someone who has a plan, and who understands the significance of something, just as a memory can only exist if it abides in the mind of someone who remembers.

The incompatibility of materialist philosophy with these intuitively held beliefs is even simpler to demonstrate. By this view, humans are merely the incidental by-product of chemical reactions, who have emerged only fairly recently on a tiny rock that is lost somewhere in a mindless universe, and are ultimately doomed to perish forever, by extinction, within a relatively short time, without anybody knowing or caring. There is no way to begin with this set of premises, and arrive, step by step, using rigid logic, to any conclusions that human life is intrinsically valuable. Nor can we infer anything about how we are obligated to treat humans. In such a world view, there can be no Ultimate Plan or design to the universe, and certainly no Person overseeing it who understands purpose or meaning; and therefore, to the materialist, all such talk is reduced to nonsense.

As mentioned above, monotheism is, at least in principle, compatible with these intuitively held beliefs. If an eternally holy, all-good, personal Creator made humans with a plan in mind which has ever lasting significance, then concepts such as morality, human worth, and objective purpose and meaning are live options. It is worth repeating that the truth of these statements cannot be proven either experimentally or by rigid logical demonstration; rather, we know them to be true intuitively. But if we know them to be true, it is intellectually inconsistent to claim beliefs which are systematically incompatible with them. When what a man claims to believe is in nearly continuous conflict with how he thinks and speaks and lives his life, we submit that it is high time to seek an alternative belief system; and the only view which is not contradicted by our intuitively Hillbillies is monotheism.

Evidence For The Bible

The principal forms of monotheism are Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; and both the Christian and the Islamic Traditions acknowledge the ancient Jewish

religion as being the legitimate root of their own faith. Indeed, Christianity sees itself as the proper continuation of that Jewish root, and Islam sees itself as the proper next step after the Jewish and Christian traditions. Thus, once we come to accept the monotheistic worldview, the only really coherent option is to begin with the Elohiym of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; i.e., the ancient Jewish faith. And this necessarily includes accepting the Hebrew scriptures - the Old Testament - as the Word of Elohiym; for these writings are the basis of that ancient faith, and tell The Narrative of how Elohiym has dealt with the Jews as a people.

We must note, however, that the Old Testament does not claim to be the end of the message from Elohiym; quite the opposite. Numerous passages in the Jewish scriptures anticipate more Divine messages, and even foretell of a New Covenant to come (see Deuteronomy 18:15-19; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 37:26). In fact, the last prophet of the Old Testament refers to the "messenger of the Covenant" who was to be sent (Malachi 3:1); and the closing words of his book are of the promise of more to come (see the final verses of Malachi).

The task of the Christian, therefore, is to demonstrate the compatibility of the Old and New Testaments; or, to establish that the Christian faith really is the proper continuation and completion of the message of Elohim. In this section, we will bring together several lines of reasoning into an argument for the Divine authorship of the Old and New Testaments, which together form that set of writings known as the Bible.

I) The Historical Nature of The Bible

One of the most obvious characteristics of the Bible is that it tells a story. The Old Testament begins with the creation of the world, and presents a flowing historical narrative which brings us to just a bit before 400 BC; at which point, it should be noted again, the Scriptures anticipate more to come - in particular, the arrival of the Messiah, and the New Covenant. After a pause of some four centuries, the New Testament picks up the same narrative, and carries it forward to just after 60AD. The Bible, then, is a story, largely written by Jews, about Elohiym, the world, the Jewish people, and the Divine Plan of Salvation by means of the Messiah; and it is the only religious text which is also a historical narrative.

Other peoples have written down their own sacred texts, such as the Hindus their Vedic literature, or the Sikhs the Granth; and of course cultures from around the world have their various mythologies. But none of them are anything

like a historical narrative. The reason there is a field of study known as Biblical Archaeology is that the story of the Bible is literal history. A detailed treatment of the many archaeological discoveries that confirm both major and minor points in the story of the Bible is outside of the scope of this work. Suffice it to say that the cities and kings, the nations and individuals, the wars and cultural practices, and many other details described in both the Old and New Testaments were quite real; and archaeology has shed an enormous amount of light on these things. By contrast, no corresponding field of study exists for the Vedic scriptures, nor for other pagan mythologies; for those writings are not history, and in fact were not intended to be received as history.

This historical nature of The Narrative of both the Old and New Testaments is one argument for the compatibility of these two; for no other religious text in the world possesses this characteristic. In this significant detail, therefore, the New Testament is the sole match to The Old Testament among all of the religious texts of the world.

II) The Unity of Thought in The Bible

A fascinating Mental experiment will help to make this argument clear. Imagine gathering together ten men chosen at random from some city in America, such as Cincinnati, Ohio. Think of what a decent cross-section of the population of that area might look like; a school teacher, a fireman, a gas station attendant, an office worker, a traveler staying at a rescue mission, a biology student, an elderly grandpa, and so on. If we were to separate these men, placing each one in a separate room, and were to ask each of them to write out his understanding of world history, his own personal philosophy of life, and his opinions on a few controversial issues - such as US immigration policy, abortion, or the proper balance of civil liberties and security from terrorist activities - we could then collect all these writings, and compare their views. What might we expect to find as a result of this experiment? Without a doubt, we would have in our possession a jumble of wildly conflicting views on just about every topic. And remember, this is just ten authors, from the same time period, all of whom are writing under quite similar conditions. They would be residents of the same city, and most (if not all) of them would have been raised in the same culture, speaking the same language and being familiar with many of the same events and trends and technologies which have swept through their shared society.

Let us now compare this with the authors of the books of the Bible. Between the Old and New Testaments, there were about forty authors or more; and they were mostly separated from each other, in many cases by centuries. They lived on three different continents, and spoke a number of diverse languages. They came from a very wide variety of backgrounds, were familiar with quite different levels of political and economic strata, and wrote under all sorts of circumstances. Some were wealthy and powerful rulers; others were peasants. Some were honored as poets, while others were persecuted, or hunted, as criminals. Some wrote while living in a city; others wrote while living out in the wilderness, or while journeying, and still others wrote while living in exile in a strange land, or even while in prison. Some were expressing their message while being overwhelmed with intense joy; some were pouring out their souls in deep anguish of spirit, and others calmly wrote in precise terms, exhorting, instructing, explaining, or recounting what had happened.

Now, despite the enormous variety, the authors of these books managed to write out, over a period of more than 1,000 years - and in three languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek) - a flowing historical narrative, a coherent and comprehensive belief system, and blueprint for life which meets the deepest needs that humans have. It is the story of one and the same Elohiym, the God of Israel, who created humanity, who formed a plan to save us, who came in the flesh as the Messiah, and who has promised to return to judge the wicked and redeem His own at the end. Even if someone wishes to argue that "any people could have done that", the fact remains that only one people ever did it: the Jews. In sum, the unity of thought in the Bible is obvious: even children can follow the Biblical story, and grasp the basic contents. And the variety of the human sources is undeniable: it took many centuries and dozens of authors, most of whom never met each other, to produce the text. For these reasons, no set of writings has ever appeared that is anything like the Bible, nor will anything remotely resembling it ever be accomplished again. This gives extra weight to the observation that the New Testament is a match to the Old Testament.

<u>III) The Argument From Prophecy:</u>The more one studies this subject, the more remarkable it becomes; but it requires some time and effort to understand a

number of points. In particular, one needs to understand the historical context during which the prophecy was written down. In order to adequately present the case, then, while being mindful of space limitations, we will go over important details of a small number of Old Testament prophecies, rather than giving superficial treatment of many. But note that examples such as the following could certainly be multiplied.

We can begin with the book of Jeremiah, which was written during the sixth century BC. The historical context is important here; for this was one of the really low points in ancient Jewish history. The Kingdom of Judah was the last remnant of what was once a powerful Israelite state. Over the previous century and a half, the descendants of Israel had suffered being slowly devoured by two mighty empires: the Assyrians, and then the Babylonians, both of which came from the land now known as Iraq. The Jewish people at that time were the lone guardians of the monotheistic tradition, just several thousand Souls surrounded by a sea of hostile pagan nations and their mighty armies, some of whom were then actively engaged in capturing the Jews' cities, one at a time. In 587 BC, their capital city, Jerusalem, was finally taken and destroyed; and nearly all the Jews who remained were deported to Babylon.

This, then, was the background of the book of Jeremiah: the Jewish people being gradually overrun by a foreign army, ultimately being carried away captive to faraway Mesopotamia, without any visible evidence that they would even survive as a people. With <u>that</u> as a context, consider this remarkable prophecy recorded in Jeremiah 10:11: "Thus shall ye say unto them, The gods that have not made the heavens and the Earth, even they shall perish from the Earth, and from under these heavens".

One significant detail of this passage is that it is the only verse in the book of Jeremiah written in Aramaic. Why was it in Aramaic, rather than in Hebrew? Because this message is addressed to the pagans, in their own tongue. Aramaic was the common language of the Middle East at that time. So, this is a bold, direct challenge to the pagan nations of the region, proclaimed in words they could not fail to understand, that "Your gods shall perish". In this chapter (Jeremiah 10:1-16), the prophet is comparing the idols of the nations, the gods of the peoples who surrounded the Jews, with Yahveh, the Elohiym of Israel. In the very face of the Jews' looming disaster, he was confidently, even cheerfully, issuing this challenge!

That ancient world was crowded with literally thousands of gods and goddesses. The Assyrians and Babylonians had Bel (also called Marduk), the god of magic, the national god of Babylonia. According to legend, his son was Nebo, the god of learning. There was Shamash (the sun god) Enlil (the storm god), and Sin (the moon god). The Ammonites and Moabites worship Chemosh (probably the same as Milcom), the Canaanites had Baal; and the Egyptians served many gods, including Atum-Re (the creator and sun god), Horus (the sky god), the son of Osiris (the grain god), and Isis (sister and wife of Osiris). There were gods of the Greeks, of the Arabs, of the Philistines and Hittites and Aramites and Elamites and Indians and many other peoples. The gods of mighty empires, of populous nations, of all sorts of cultures, from the time when Jeremiah issue his Challenge - they are now gone. They have perished from the earth, and from under these heavens, being known now only as curiosities of the historians and archaeologists. The Elohiym of Israel promised to wither (shrivel, starve) all the gods of the Earth (Zephaniah 2:11). And thus it happened.

And there is a further detail concerning this point. Several passages in the Old Testament state that people from all nations would worship Yahveh, the Elohiym of Israel. (See, for example Zechariah 2:11, Zechariah 8:20-23, and Psalms 22:27). This doesn't necessarily mean that everyone in those nations would serve Yahveh; only that from all nations, many would. Now, it is one thing to preach to people "You need to worship my God". It is quite another to declare, "One day, you will abandon your gods, and worship mine". This is what the prophets of Israel did, repeatedly. And bear in mind that when these passages were written (in the centuries BC), there was no indication whatsoever that it was remotely likely that the pagan nations would ever come to worship the Elohiym of the Jews. However, though it was unlikely by all appearances at that time, it was foretold, and it did happen.

At this point, no doubt, we will need to answer the skeptics' question: Didn't all of the nations expect their own gods to triumph, and be worshipped around the world? Did Yahveh, the God of Israel, simply win the lottery?

The answer, from any survey of history, is an emphatic . Pagan nations did not think of their religions in those terms. A pagan did not see his own god as something that other nations even needed. There was no "Good News" of Dagon of the Philistines; there were no Norse missionaries, dedicated to converting the

world to Thor and Wodin. We have abundant and detailed records of how ancient pagans viewed their gods - from the Assyrians and Babylonians, from the Greeks and Romans, from the Egyptians and Indians and others - and these sorts of claims are not made for them. When Alexander ("the Great") of Macedon went conquering the known world in the fourth Century BC, he actively sought to spread Greek thought and culture; but he had no intention of spreading Greek religion. He worshipped at the temples of the nations to which he came. The Romans accepted deities of all sorts of Nations; sometimes they identified the gods of other nations with their own. The pagan view, in general, was to see various religions as essentially different versions of the same reality.

So, only the Elohiym of Israel had prophets declaring, repeatedly, that His salvation would spread to people among all of the nations of the world (See Isaiah 49:6). When these prophecies were written - and indeed, for centuries after they were written - their fulfillment appeared extremely unlikely. Today, however, the Elohiym of Israel is indeed worshipped in nations throughout the world; and His message, the Bible, is the world's most studied set of writings. More copies of the Bible (or some significant portion of it) have been printed than any other book in history: with well over three billion copies of it printed so far, it continues to be the international best-seller year after year, having been translated into more than 2,000 languages and dialects.

One thing that combines the argument from the unity of the Bible with the argument from prophecy in the Bible is the set of prophecies in the Old Testament writings, known to have been an essentially their present form centuries before Christ, with their fulfillment in the New Testament. In fact, Jeremiah prophesied specifically (in Jeremiah 31:31-34) that Elohiym would make a new covenant, which would consist of four elements:

1) Holiness - Elohiym would write His law in the hearts of His people (making it their nature to do His law; see also Ezekiel 36:26,27)
2) Adoption - by entering into this Covenant, one could become part of the people of Elohiym;
3) Fellowship - in this Covenant, the people of Elohiym would know Him; i.e., His people could have a real and living relationship with Him; and
4) Atonement - the sins of His people would be forgiven.

These are the four elements which Jeremiah foretold would make up the New Covenant; and these are precisely the four subjects which the New Testament, written more than 500 years later, has as its central messages. Even more striking is that most of these elements are completely absent in every major religious text besides the Old and New Testaments, which makes these two a unique match.

Next we may point to the Old Testament prophecy most often cited in the New Testament: Isaiah 52:13 through 53:12. The most ancient Jewish understanding of this passage, as witnessed by both the Targum and Jewish commentators, from the centuries before Christ until more than a thousand years after Christ, was that it is a prophecy about the Messiah. Note some details about this prophecy:

Isaiah 52:13 - This man is of exceptional importance to the plan of Elohiym. Yet,
52:14 - He didn't receive just a few wounds, but was disfigured, beaten.
52:15 - "Thus," in this way, He "startles many nations". Here, again, is this promise, that this would be for the nations; and even kings.
53:1 - This was written by a Jew, for a Jewish audience; and so, it is referring to how few Jews would receive him. (See also Isaiah 49:5-7).
53:2,3 - He was poor and despised.
53:4-9 - The passage repeatedly refers to Him suffering for our sins, and even states that He would be killed for our sins.
53:11 - This man makes many righteous, a reference to both atonement and holiness, two of The elements referred to in Jeremiah 31:33, 34.

Lest any should claim that this passage is translated by Christians to make it fit the Gospel, let it be noted that we are here following the wording of the 2000 edition of the Jewish Publication Society translation - which is not Christian, and in no way seeks to accommodate Christian beliefs.

A final prophecy specifies the time period in which the Messiah would arrive: Daniel 9:24-26 - Verse 24 tells of several things which are to take place, including, explicitly, atoning for sin, and bringing in eternal righteousness (again, two of the elements of the New Covenant according to Jeremiah 31:33,34.) Then, verses 25 and 26 give the time period: First, there would be a decree to rebuild

Jerusalem. This occurred in the middle of the fifth century BC, under the Persian emperor Artaxerxes I (reigned 464-424 BC). Second, the Messiah would come, and "be cut off" - that is, killed. Finally, Jerusalem and its Temple would be destroyed. This occurred in 70 AD, when the Roman army captured Jerusalem after a siege lasting many months.

Thus, "Mashiyach nagiyd", Hebrew for "The Anointed Prince", the Messiah, was to come, be killed, and yet make available atonement for sin and eternal righteousness (among other things), sometime during the period between the fifth century BC and 70 AD. This is, of course, the period during which Yeshua the Messiah came.

It is worth noting again that only in the New Testament are these prophecies even claimed to have been fulfilled. This reinforces the argument that the New Testament is a unique match to the Old Testament.

IV) The Argument From the Comparison of the Bible and the Quran

The Quran is the sacred text of Islam. Just as Christians believe that Christian faith is the continuation of the ancient Jewish faith, and that the New Testament is the proper companion of the Old Testament, so Muslims hold that Islam is the continuation of the Judeo-Christian tradition, and that the Quran is the final companion of the Bible. However, it is fairly easy to show that the Islamic claim fails. For a number of important reasons, the Quran cannot be considered compatible with the Bible.

First, the Quran is not a story. Even though the Quran was written several centuries after the Bible was completed, it does not in any way attempt to continue the narrative which is central to the Bible's message.

Second, the Quran does not even make the claim that Islam, or the life of its Prophet Muhammad, was a fulfillment of Biblical prophecies (either from the Old or New Testament). Despite the Islamic statement of faith that Muhammad was the greatest Prophet - i.e., more important to the plan of God than Moses or Jesus - there is nothing in the Bible that anticipates Muhammad's arrival.

Third, although there is some overlap in the ideals of Morality In the Bible and the Quran, there is also a good deal of conflicting views. For example, according to the Bible (Genesis 2:18-25), Elohiym gave to Adam one wife; and thus marriage was to be for life. Moses in the law allowed for divorce and remarriage (Deuteronomy 24:1.2)' but Yeshua later taught that Moses only allowed it because

of the hardness of men's hearts (see Mark 10:2-12). Thus, Yeshua restored the original intention of the Creator: one man and one woman, bound in marriage for life. Divorce and remarriage is not permitted under the New Covenant (Luke 16: 18). The Quran, however, teaches that remarriage after divorce is permitted - see Surah 2.230; 4.20, 24; 60.10; and 65.1, 2, which clearly state this. In fact, Muhammad's adopted son Zaid divorced his wife, Zaynab, and Muhammad then married her (see Surah 32.37). Numerous examples of such conflict could be given. It is not easy to see, for instance, how Muhammad's exhortation to "Kill the unbelievers wherever you find them" (Surah 2.186-194; 4.89-92; 9.5) should be considered compatible with - much less a progression over - Christ's commandment to "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." (Matthew 5:44)

Fourth, the elements of the New Covenant, prophesied of in Jeremiah 31:31-34, and nearly constantly discussed in the books of the New Testament, receive essentially no treatment in the Quran, aside from some overlap in moral ideals. There is no mention of the means by which to reach holiness, no teaching on how atonement is to be obtained, and not the slightest suggestion that adoption by God, or fellowship with him, is even possible.

Fifth, the Quran claims to confirm what the Law of Moses and the Gospel teach. (See, for example, Surah 4.47; 5.48; 6.92; 10.37; 46.12,30). In fact, Surah 5.68 declares, "You have no ground to stand upon unless you stand fast by the Taurat [the Law], the Injil [the Gospel], and all the revelation that has come to you from your Lord." However, the Quran itself does not stand upon the Injil; it contradicts the Gospel at various central points. The Gospel, for example, calls Yeshua the Son of Elohiym. (See Matthew 11:27; 16:15-17; Mark 1:9-11; 9:5-7; Luke 1:31,32,35; John 5:25-27; 9:35-38). The Quran, by contrast, teaches that no one can be called the Son of God. (Surah 6.101; 9.30; 17.111; 18.4,5; 21.26; 23.91; 37.152; 72.3; 112.1-4).

Further, the title Son of God" is merely one of a number of titles of divinity which the Gospel attributes to Yeshua. He is also called the Word (John 1:1,14). He is called the Bridegroom (Matthew 25:1-13; Mark 2:18-20), which is a reference to Old Testament passages such as Isaiah 54:5 and Isaiah 62:5, which speak of Elohiym as the Bridegroom. And Yeshua told us that He shall be the King who will preside over Judgment Day (Matthew 25:31-46). The Quran, however, states that it is blasphemy to call Jesus God. (Surah 9.31), insisting that Jesus

was only a messenger and servant of God, not God Himself (Surah 4.171; 5.75; 9.31; 43.57-59).

Finally, the Gospel teaches that Yeshua died on the cross, and rose from the dead, to atone for our sins (see Matthew 16:21; Mark 10:33,34; Luke 22:19,20; Luke 24:1-47; John 18-20). Thus was the central message of the earliest church (see I Corinthians 15:1-18; I Peter 2:21-25); and that is why all of the major writers of the New Testament books state that Yeshua was the fulfillment of Isaiah 53 - the prophecy of the One Who would be slain to atone for our sins. See Matthew 8:17 (citing Isaiah 53:4); Mark 15:28, Luke 22.37, and Hebrews 9:28 (citing Isaiah 53:12); John 12:28 and Romans 10:16 (citing Isaiah 53:1); Acts 8:32, 33 (citing Isaiah 53:7,8).

In the Quran, however, Surah 4.157-158 is understood by nearly all Muslims to mean that Yeshua did not die on the cross; and the Quran teaches nothing at all about Yeshua's resurrection from the dead. Further, the Quran states that no one can bear the burden of another (Surah 6.165 [6.164 in some versions]; 17.15; 39.7; 53.38); and thus Islam denies that atonement can be obtained through Yeshua's death.

In short, the Quran teaches to stand upon the Injil (the Gospel), and then goes on to contradict the Injil in its central points. These differences cannot be glossed over by dismissing them as irrelevant. If someone were to argue that the standard story of Alexander ("the Great") is essentially correct, except that he wasn't really a king and never actually bought any battles, his case would be not merely wrong, but incoherent. In the same way, if someone attempts to claim that "The Gospel is something we must stand upon, except that Yeshua was not God in the flesh, cannot be called The Son of God, did not die on the cross for our sins or rise from the dead, has no power to make atonement for us, did not make available adoption by or fellowship with God, has no power to make us holy", and so forth in points that are central to the New Testament message, he or she would simply be talking nonsense. For all these reasons, and more, it is not possible for the Quran to be the companion to the Bible. Yet, neither can it claim to stand without the Bible. The Quran is either wrong, or wrong. That leaves the Bible as the Word of Elohiym.

Evidence for the Gospel

In summary thus far, we have considered various lines of reasoning which give good grounds for accepting the reality of a supernatural realm, and for holding a monotheistic view of Elohiym. Further, among the several versions of monotheism, the Bible stands out as having the characteristics which uniquely favor it to be received as the word of Elohiym. Yet, the case for the Gospel can be made independently of these lines of reasoning. The facts which support the message of the Gospel are certainly compatible with the points made so far, and corroborate them. However, it is not necessary to begin by presupposing the truth of monotheism, or of the divine origin of the Bible, to establish the Gospel's main points. We need only to treat the writings of the New Testament as we would any other set of ancient writings, to assume that humans normally act in human ways, and to be honest with the evidence.

I) The High Standard of Purity Taught in the New Testament

Yeshua spoke, and His disciples wrote down for us in the New Testament, instructions in righteousness to live by that make up a very high standard of purity, combined with a grace and soundness which set it apart from all other ethical systems. It is true, on the one hand, that not many in our day who profess to be Christian make a serious attempt to live by these instructions; and, on the other hand, that it is not possible for anyone to live by them consistently without the divine intervention of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, there have been, and continue to be, dedicated Christians who have received the supernatural power to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this world (Titus 2: 11,12); and by doing so, they have been a light and testimony for Yeshua to those around them.

Let us take some specific examples of these instructions. Most societies have some sort of prohibitions, or at least disapproval, of cheating on one's spouse. "Thou shalt not commit adultery" is a rule of conduct held in common throughout the world for most of history - in theory, if not always in practice. Similarly, "Thou shalt not kill" - the prohibition against the unjustified taking of human life - is another common denominator in essentially all human societies. But where, outside of the New Testament teachings, are we to find it stated that having lustful thoughts about a woman is adultery, being committed in the heart? (Matthew 5:27,28). What other system equates hatred with murder?

(1 John 3:15; see also Matthew 5:21,22). This is a repeated theme in the New Testament, that not only our actions and words, but even our thoughts, are to be pure. Yeshua taught us that evil thoughts defile us (Mark 7:21,23); and the Apostle wrote of the types of things which we ought to be thinking about (Philippians 4:8).

The Gospels and the Epistles, in fact, are full of exhortations about living in, and pursuing holiness (see, for example, Hebrews 12:14; I Thessalonians 4:3-7; Romans 12:9-21; I Corinthians 13:1-7). This purity in deeds, words, thoughts and attitudes is actually possible through Christ; and the Christians of the earliest centuries were known, even by their adversaries, as a virtuous people who had strong convictions about holiness.

II) The Sermon on the Mount

The three chapters, Matthew 5 through 7, constitute the world's most perfect sermon. The combination of righteousness and mercy, of what is practical and of what is poetic and beautiful, makes this set of teachings unique in the history of religion or philosophy. To those who have not yet read these chapters, I encourage you to take the time to do so; for it will give some background or context to the following argument, as we turn to consider the person of Yeshua, Who spoke the words of this sermon.

III) The Person of Yeshua

No one can dispute the fact that Yeshua is a unique person in history. First, he is arguably the most famous man who ever lived. Christians around the world worship Christ, and Muslims consider him to be the greatest Prophet after their own, Mohammed. Hindus call him an Avatar of God, many Jews see him as a rabbi, Buddhists and many others regard him as one of the great enlightened teachers of humanity; and even the most secular of academics must concede that his brief ministry, only a few years long at most, changed the course of world history. This does not, of course, prove Yeshua's divinity; but it certainly is compatible with the view of Christ as Divine. Indeed, if Elohiym really did come to the Earth as a man, it would be very strange if only relatively few people outside of the circle of his followers had ever heard of him.

But what makes the argument so interesting is that Yeshua had none of the characteristics which usually make men so famous. The Greek conqueror

Alexander, or the Roman ruler Julius Caesar, are so well known due to their military genius, by which they remade the geopolitical realities of their world. Much of Muhammad's fame, as well, could plausibly be explained as a result of his military triumphs, and those of his four immediate successors. Yeshua, on the other hand, was never a military man; and in point of fact, He taught against taking up arms against anyone, telling us instead to "turn the other cheek" and to love our enemies See Matthew 5:43-48; 10:16; 26:47-52). Indeed, the followers of Christ continued to teach - universally - against Christians participating in warfare for more than 250 years after him.

Other men have become famous for their wealth or their political clout, for their writings or their art, for their extensive traveling or their technological breakthroughs or their academic learning and scholarship. But Yeshua's life included none of these. He never wrote a book or a song, never ruled a nation or even a city, never painted, or sculptured, or pioneered a field of science, nor even traveled very far from his home. This leaves very few explanations for Yeshua's enduring - and, in fact, continually increasing - world fame. This is one piece of the puzzle; but let us pass on to point out more.

There is a hunger in the hearts of human beings for Wonder. By this I mean that longing for something meaningful, for something enduring that is more than mere survival, for something beyond this physical realm that will make us feel complete. Modern existentialist philosophers, such as Nietzsche, Sartre, and Lamus constructed much of their views on the fact of this longing, combined with their materialist opinion that nothing exists to satisfy that longing; and thus concluded that life is meaningless and absurd. Buddhism as well recognises this same longing, referring to it as the Tanha - Desire or Hunger - and teaches that this Desire for something eternal, unchanging and ultimately satisfying is the cause of our suffering; because, according to the Buddhist view of enlightenment, no such thing exists to meet the longing.

In short, thoughtful people throughout recorded history have sought to find something that brings meaning to existence, something that gives purpose to life, something that makes sense of the world, to know what we ought to be doing and where we are going. Countless times, men and women through the ages have stopped to look up from their daily routines - whether rich or poor, struggling or at ease - and have been struck by the question, "Is this all there is to life?". To

ask such a question obviously indicates a longing for something wonderful and fulfilling, something not found in typical, mundane existence. And while multitudes of people, from all sorts of philosophical viewpoints, have recognized this longing, only One person in known history ever claimed to be the means of fulfilling it.

"I am the bread of life", Yeshua stated; "He that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst". (John 6:35) Elsewhere, Yeshua says, "If any man thirst, let him come to Me, and drink". (John 7:37; see also John 4:13,14). And again, He tells us, "Come unto me, all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest", and went on to refer to this as "rest unto your souls". (Matthew 11:28,29) Thus, our hunger, our thirst, our search for something that will bring peace of mind and rest for our souls, Yeshua says, is answered in knowing Him.

Further, Yeshua's followers, since the earliest times of the church in the first century, have expressed having experienced this fulfillment. In the Epistles, for instance, Christian's write of being "In heavenly places in Christ" (Ephesians 2: 6), of experiencing "The love of Christ, which passeth knowledge" and of being "Filled with all the fullness of Elohiym" (Ephesians 3:19), of being "Complete in Him" (Colossians 2:9), and of rejoicing "With joy unspeakable" by believing in Him (I Peter 1:7,8). And people have continued to speak and write - and even sing - about finding just this kind of fulfillment in Yeshua, over the centuries since, unto this very day. One has only to flip through a typical Church Hymnal - new, old, or ancient - or read testimonies of conversions from all over the world, to verify this point.

The skeptic may, of course, respond to Yeshua's claims by arguing that anyone could say such things about himself. However, it is a fact that no founder of any other movement - religious, philosophical, or political - ever did announce himself to be the answer to our deep human longings. Further, the followers of such movements have not made the claim that their prophet or teacher or leader was the fulfillment of those longings. No Buddhists go about preaching of how Siddhartha Gautama came into their lives and answered the Tanha by filling their hearts. Indeed, if a Buddhist did so, he would be contradicting in detail the very things the Buddha taught.

Now, a Muslim, or Hindu, or follower of some other religion may here respond that he or she finds satisfaction and fulfillment in his or her faith. We can concede that believing in a spiritual realm, and in particular believing in God,

does bring a certain comfort to human hearts, in a manner that cannot be claimed for materialist philosophy. Nobody ever wrote a heart-warming hymn inspired by discovering the joy of atheism. The Christian would explain this by saying that our Creator designed human beings specifically to be sustained by faith in God. It makes much more sense to assume that a benevolent Creator made humans with an essentially universal need for the Divine, than to believe that unplanned chemical reactions over millions of years turned a ball of slime into a mass of self-conscious humans, who then suddenly started crying out, "Where is God?".

At any rate, there is no honest way to deny that humans, whether modern or ancient, have found and do find comfort in faith towards Elohiym. But actually, humans need more than this. The most important thing, to healthy humans at least, is their relationships with other persons. That is why the most common theme of popular songs and classic stories is love, and why our happiest moments are those spent in company with those whom we care about deeply. We were designed to love and to be loved; and this says quite a bit about our Designer. Just as the telephone, which has both a receiver and a speaker, was designed by someone who obviously wished to both speak and listen, so our Creator made us with the need to both receive and give love, indicating that Elohiym both loves us, and desires that we return this love.

In a word, the human longing for Wonder, for meaning and fulfillment, is met, not in a mere general belief in the existence of some sort of God, but rather in knowing Him, in having a loving relationship with Elohiym. And this is precisely why, according to the Gospel, that Yeshua could claim to be the answer to our hunger and thirst: because Yeshua the Messiah is Elohiym in the flesh. Our Creator took human form, in the Person of Yeshua, and lived among us as one of us, to suffer our pains, and to die for us, to make available to us a relationship with Him.

Being Emmanuel - "God With Us" (Matthew 1:23) - Yeshua could call Himself The Bread of Heaven Who gives life to mankind (John 6:32-58). And, of course, this is not the only claim of this sort that Yeshua made. He called Himself the Light of the World (John 8:12); He described Himself as One with the Father (John 10:30-33; John 14:8,9), and He declared that He shall preside over Judgment Day (See Matthew 25:31-46; Matthew 7:22,23; Luke 13:25-27) Yeshua made numerous claims of this sort, as recorded in the Gospels; and, in general, the main points of His message pre-suppose this kind of authority.

There are those who would respond to this by saying that Yeshua never actually thought these things about Himself, but that these claims were put into His mouth by His disciples. In order to believe this, however, it would be necessary to accept one or more highly implausible scenarios. The first would be that Yeshua was such a poor communicator that none of His Disciples understood any significant part of His message. It is very difficult to see how Yeshua could have attracted a following at all if He had nothing of real interest to say, or if He was unable to communicate any of it. The second assumption would be that Yeshua's disciples, who were only bound together by their love for their teacher and by their devotion to what He taught, unanimously hasted to throw away most or all of His teachings after He died. This makes no sense at all, in light of their willingness to be arrested, beaten and killed for their faith in Yeshua. Indeed, the Christian church, from its earliest days, insisted on holding fast to what they had learned from the Messiah, equating any significant change with heresy. Thus, if we merely assume that Yeshua's disciples were ordinary people, sincere and earnest Jewish peasants of at least average intelligence, it follows that they generally understood their Rabbi's message, and passed it on faithfully without major changes.

This, then, is the sum of our brief survey of Yeshua. The most famous man in history was a poor Jewish Rabbi Who had absolutely no political connections, and Whose enemies in the circles of authority had Him put to death after a ministry of only a few years at most. He stated things about himself which, within a strictly monotheistic context, could only be understood as a claim to Deity. Yet He possessed the wisdom and soundness to attract to Himself a large body of devout Jewish followers, who had a very high code of ethics, and who passed on a set of teachings which changed the course of world history. He was unique among the founders of history's movements, in claiming that He Himself is the answer to the hunger that humans feel in their souls, and is correspondingly unique in having large numbers of followers, over a period of centuries, who report having that hunger being answered by Yeshua coming into their lives. He called Himself the Messiah, Christ (Matthew 16:15-17; John 4:25,26; John 17:3), and His disciples preach Him as such; and He appeared during the time of which the Prophet Daniel foretold that the Messiah would arrive (Daniel 9:24-26; see pg.?). He is the only Person for Whom the claim has been made - or even could be made - that He fulfilled the Messianic prophecy about suffering and dying for our sins

(Isaiah 52:13-53:12; see pgs ?). And the effect of His ministry was the bringing in of the New Covenant of which Jeremiah prophesied (Jeremiah 31:31-34; see pg.?). The four elements of which Jeremiah wrote in this prophecy - holiness, adoption, fellowship, and atonement - are precisely the four subjects about which the New Covenant centers itself. Further, this New Covenant Gospel spread not just among the Jewish people, but has attracted followers from nations around the world, thus fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies about the Gentiles coming to worship the Elohiym of Israel (see pgs ?).

IV) Miracles Attributable to Yeshua

There are a variety of lines of evidence to support the reality of Yeshua's power to work miracles. First, of course, is the testimony of the Gospels, which contain many accounts of Yeshua healing the lame, the deaf, the blind, and all sorts of other diseases. Recalling that these reports were made by people who had a very high standard of ethics, and who had a zeal for the truth which could not be shaken even by threat of death, this evidence cannot be lightly dismissed.

Next is what historians call "adversarial testimony". Even if someone dismisses the testimony of the Gospels by saying that any great man's close friends or earnest followers could exaggerate or invent his good qualities, the testimony of his enemies cannot be thus explained. And this is the case concerning the miracle-working power of Yeshua. When the multitudes began to wonder aloud whether Yeshua was the Messiah, based on His abilities to heal, the Jewish authorities who were opposed to him attributed this power to demonic sources. (See Matthew 12:22-24; Luke 11:14-18). More than a century later, the famous pagan philosopher Celsus, in his work "True Doctrine" (דוקטרינה נכון) attributed Yeshua's ability to work miracles to sorcery, and accusation he probably borrowed from rabbinical Jewish sources. In fact, this accusation was a standard argument in the rabbinical tradition, being included later into the polemic Jewish work against the gospel entitled "Toldot Yeshu". It would have been much simpler for pagan Romans and rabbinical Jews who opposed Yeshua to simply deny that He ever did any miracles; but apparently, Yeshua's acts of healing were too many and too well known to make such a denial possible (Hundreds, probably thousands of people, surviving for several decades after Yeshua's ministry, we're living examples of His power to heal). Thus, their only recourse was to attribute this ability to dark powers. Yet, this leaves all ancient parties

who were involved in full agreement on a historical fact: Yeshua was a worker of Miracles.

In the present day as well, there are many known cases of healings and other miracles occurring in Yeshua's Name. It is true that there are hoaxes performed by cranks who are merely seeking their own interests; but we need not distract ourselves with such people. I refer, instead, to instances of healing which those in our fellowship have seen and experienced personally. Having operated as a faith-based traveling Christian ministry since the early 1970's, we have seen first-hand the power to heal available to those who put faith in the Messiah.

One example is Lalo Falcon, a young Hispanic man whom we met with his family in the El Paso area in 1983. Each spring, Lalo would have serious bouts of allergies, combined with his asthma, requiring at times medications and a machine to enable him to breathe. After some of our members prayed for him, he was still having difficulty breathing; and so his mother came to him, as any concerned parent would, ready to relieve him. "Lalito," she asked, "quieres tomar tus medicinas?" (Do you want to take your medicine?) "No mama", the boy insisted, "los hermanos ya oraren por mi" (the brothers already prayed for me). Shortly after, the trouble subsided; and since that day, neither the allergies nor the asthma have returned.

In the late 1990's in Seattle, a young woman who had just recently become a believer in Yeshua came to stay with us. She had worn thick-lensed glasses for quite some time, unable to see clearly even a short distance away without them. However, one morning after prayer, when she arose and looked out at the window, she was surprised to realize that her vision was quite sharp - without her glasses! She saw fine details of the trees far off in the distance, and rushed downstairs just to enjoy looking around and _____ things. Very many examples of this sort of thing could be given, of members of our own fellowship, of people we have personally prayed for, of people we personally know, and from other credible sources. The modern cases merely corroborate the historical evidence, presented above, that there is healing power in Yeshua. And this leads us now to consider the evidence for the central miracle of the New Testament.

V) The Resurrection of Yeshua the Messiah

There is yet another characteristic which makes Yeshua unique. Among all of the great men of history, Yeshua is the only one to state that after His death, He

would rise from the dead. During His ministry, Yeshua referred often to his coming death and resurrection; it was a central part of His message (Matthew 16: 21; 17: 9; 20:17-19; 26:31,32; Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:32-34; Luke 9:22; 18:31-33; 24: 5-8; John 10: 17, 18). Further, Yeshua is the only one for whom a plausible case can be made that He did rise from the dead. In fact, the evidence makes the resurrection of Yeshua one of the best attested events of ancient history.

Let us present the case as simply as possible. There are only two coherent possibilities concerning this subject: either Yeshua rose from the dead, victorious over death as the Son of Elohiym; or He did not. Christians believe that He did; and this statement, that Yeshua the Messiah died for our sins and rose from the dead, is the single most central claim of the Gospel. As the Apostle Paul says, if this claim is false, then the Christian faith is in vain (I Corinthians 15:1-4, 13-17).

On the other hand, for those who deny Yeshua's resurrection, only two alternative scenarios are possible. The first is that the disciples knew He didn't rise from the dead, and were deliberately lying about it. The second is that the disciples did <u>not</u> know that Yeshua didn't rise from the dead, and were mistaken. Whichever of these views is taken will require a set of explanations that can adequately incorporate the historical facts. An idea is not evidence, and bald skepticism is not scholarship.

The first scenario, that the disciples were lying, is patently absurd, and in fact is not taken seriously even among secular historians. All of the earliest disciples were simple, devout Jewish men and women who were earnestly seeking to be faithful to their own Jewish faith. All the evidence we have about them indicates that they held to a very high standard of purity, including being honest about their own faults; and they were so convinced of what they believed to be true that they held to it even while suffering ostracism from their own Jewish community and families, while enduring imprisonment and beatings, and even while facing death. Most of the Apostles, in fact, as well as a number of other early disciples, ended up being brutally murdered for their faith. To propose that these original followers of Yeshua all decided to invent a story, and then make major changes to their Rabbis' teachings in order to fit them to their story, and then suffer all these things without compromising, just for the enjoyment of making up a new religion, is simply preposterous.

What, then, shall we make of the second scenario, that the disciples were sincere but mistaken? This doesn't fare any better than the first, for several

reasons. First, it is very difficult to see what the disciples might have been mistaken about. For the claim was not merely that one or a few people thought they saw Yeshua alive for a moment in a crowd. Rather, the claim was that many different individuals, both men and women, singly and in groups, spent time with Yeshua. They spoke with Him, touched Him, ate and drank with Him; they spent hours, and in some cases many days with Him, while He taught them from the Scriptures why He needed to suffer and die, and gave them instructions for spreading his message.

These were the experiences which inspired the disciples to preach Yeshua's resurrection in the face of gravest danger from both Jewish and Roman authorities. A list of people who are reported to have seen Yeshua alive from the dead is given in I Corinthians 15:3-8; and the Apostle states there that most of these eye-witnesses were still alive at the time of his writing (Circa 55 AD), issuing what amounted to a challenge to the doubters in Corinth that they could question these witnesses themselves if they so wished. This challenge could not have been given if such witnesses were not available. In fact, Cephas (Simon Peter), whose name appears first on the list, was personally known by the Corinthians (see I Corinthians 1:12; 3:22); and it is likely that the Corinthians knew others among the witnesses as well.

Second, Yeshua's appearances caused the conversion of skeptics, one of the best examples being Yeshua's own brother, James. During Yeshua's ministry on Earth, His brothers did not believe in Him (John 7: 3-7). However, after Yeshua's death, those same brothers were living with the disciples (Acts 1:13-15); and James became one of the elders of the church in Jerusalem. In fact, around 62 AD, this James was put to death by the Jewish authorities for his faith in Yeshua (This is recorded by the Jewish historian Josephus in his work "Antiquities" 20.9.1 S 116 - 119). If you have a brother, ask yourself what it would take for you to believe that your own brother is the Messiah - so much so that you would risk everything, and be willing to be killed, for that faith. The best explanation for James's conversion, then, would seem to be that he saw his brother alive from the dead (James is included in the list of witnesses in I Corinthians 15:7). Thomas, one of Yeshua's original twelve Apostles, was a doubter until seeing (and touching) Yeshua himself (see John 20:24-28); and the Apostle Paul, before his conversion, was actively hostile to the Christian church, searching disciples out to put them to death, until Yeshua appeared to him (Acts 9:1-6). The conversion of such skeptics

effectively refutes the idea that the appearances of Yeshua were the result of "wish fulfillment"; for an antagonist like Paul, before his conversion, had no desire whatsoever for Yeshua's resurrection to be true.

Third, the empty tomb requires an explanation. The first Jewish response to the report of Yeshua's resurrection was that the disciples stole the body from the tomb (Matthew 28:13-15). In the latter half of the second century, this was still the standard Jewish response, according to what Justin Martyr writes in his work "Dialogue with Trypho" (Circa 165 AD)., and Tertullian's "De Spectaculis" (30.6), written about 200 AD. But by this response, it is clear that both sides recognized the same reality: the tomb was empty. The disagreement was over how the tomb came to be empty. Indeed, the very fact that Yeshua's resurrection could be successfully preached - within a mile of the tomb in which He had been buried - argues for an empty tomb. For if the Jewish or Roman authorities could have produced Yeshua's body, or brought people to see that the body was still dead in the tomb, the message of Yeshua's resurrection would have been stopped in its tracks. No first-century Jew could believe in a resurrection while the body was still obviously dead.

One other detail may be added to this discussion. The resurrection of the Messiah was not the result of the process of legends gradually built up over decades after the original witnesses had passed away. Instead, belief in this event sprang up very soon after Yeshua's death. The enemy of Christianity, Saul of Tarsus, who came to faith suddenly, and came to be known as Paul the Apostle, converted no later than about 34 AD, and likely earlier. By that time, the church already had a formal belief in Yeshua's resurrection; Paul received this and later passed it on to the Corinthians (see I Corinthians 15:3,4). Paul preached the same message about the Messiah's death and resurrection that the other Apostles preached (I Corinthians 15:9-11), which was the same faith which, earlier in his life, he had sought to destroy (Galatians 1:21-23). Thus, there is no good reason to doubt the record in Acts, that the preaching of Yeshua's resurrection began only several weeks after His death on the cross.

These, then, are the main relevant facts which must be accounted for, widely recognized even by secular historians:

1) Yeshua was a Jewish preacher of first-century Judea, Who attracted to Himself a following of earnest, sincere Jewish peasants.

2) Yeshua died by crucifixion under Pontius Pilate circa 30 AD, and was buried in a tomb near Jerusalem.
3) Not many days later, Yeshua's tomb was empty.
4) Yeshua's disciples had genuine experiences which they believed to be literal appearances of the resurrected Messiah.
5) The resurrection of Yeshua was central to the early preaching of the church, and to the books of the New Testament as well.
6) All of the apostles who originally preached this message were persecuted for their beliefs and convictions; most were put to death for holding these things.
7) The resurrection of Yeshua was first proclaimed in the environment most hostile to it: Jerusalem, within a mile of Yeshua's tomb.
8) James, Yeshua's brother, was skeptical, and Saul of Tarsus openly hostile, to the message of Yeshua's resurrection; both were converted as a result of believing that they had personally seen the risen Yeshua.
9) The earliest church was fully Jewish, and considered themselves followers of an authentic Jewish tradition.
10) The early apostles and disciples of Yeshua, who had personally known the Messiah and were eyewitnesses of His ministry, death, and resurrected state, were present, living, authoritative sources for Christian doctrines and traditions until their deaths (in the last half of the first century), by which time most (if not all) of the books of the New Testament (including the Gospels and Acts) were already written.

Neither the scenario of Yeshua's disciples deliberately lying,nor the scenario of them being mistaken, can accommodate coherently all of these historical facts. The former is incompatible with their devotion to Yeshua, their insistence that they were faithful Jews, or their willingness to be persecuted and killed for their faith. The latter cannot explain the empty tomb, the number and duration of the appearances of Yeshua, and the conversion of skeptics.

If none of the alternatives can avoid being absurd, we would do well to receive the explanation that actually fits all the evidence: that Yeshua really did rise from the dead, as He had foretold.

We have come full circle. The Gospel is a message of hope; it is the Good News that the Creator of the universe loves us, desires to have a relationship with us, and came to earth in Person to make that relationship available to us. The message that Elohiym loved us enough to become one of us, and to suffer and die to save us from ourselves-though some may criticize it as a false story, nobody calls it a bad story. Even if the mercy of Elohiym were only a dream, it wouldn't be a nightmare. The Gospel offers to us something that humans deeply desire: a loving relationship that will endure forever. Our Maker designed us with this need, and then provided the answer to the need; and that answer can be summed up in the phrase "Elohiym is love". (I John 4:8)

This message is not available anywhere else. Neither the Quran nor the Jewish Talmud ever states that God is Love; and both Islam and rabbinical Judaism argue strenuously that the Creator would never come to earth to suffer and die for us. Indeed, in no other faith on earth can we find a message of this intense love for us, that Elohiym was willing to lay down His life to save ours.

Pantheism has no basis for stating that God is Love; for an impersonal Force cannot love anyone. The abstract concept of poetry has never written a poem; it takes a person who is poetic to compose one. In the same way, the abstract concept of love cannot love you; only a loving person can. If it is true that Elohiym is love, then Elohiym is a Personal Being; an impersonal Cosmic Force neither knows nor cares that you even exist.

As for the materialist, he not only cannot believe in Elohiym, but he can't even believe in love. After all, love is not a material thing. It is a spiritual thing, involving free-will decisions to sacrifice of one's self for another, meaningful tokens of affection, genuinely caring thoughts and attitudes, and so forth. The momment the mmaterialist begins to explain love in terms of hormones and neural biochemistry, he has left off even talking about it. If you are speaking about love-as in what poets and peasants and parents and every sane person has understood for all of recorded history-then you are speaking about more than chemical reactions; if you are talking about mere chemical reactions, then you are not talking about love. And, since chemical reactions constitute the only set of possible explanations in the arsenal of materialist philosophy.

In conclusion, then, the Gospel offers a hope which no other religion or philosophy even claims to offer, a hope that meets the deepest needs for which we were designed. In these pages, we have traced out some lines of evidence to show that there are good reasons for accepting the Christian hope, and no good reason to reject it. To those who have not yet received this hope, we invited you to read the Gospels in the New Testament, to get to know the Person of Yeshua; and talk to Elohiym in prayer, to begin this relationship that He wishes to have with you. There really is nothing hindering you from knowing your Creator except your own self-will.

We may close with the words of Yeshua from Revelation 3:20:
"Behold, I stand at the door and knock:
If any man hear My voice, and open the door,
I will come in to him, and will sup with him,
and he with Me".