

Why I Believe, Terry Duschinski

There's an Eternity beyond this Life

For years I felt as if I was in a medieval castle, seated at a table with a gas lantern on it. I had the feeling there was something greater around me, but I couldn't see it. I guess that's the darkness that exists when God is only a vague concept in your life.

I ridiculed what I deemed to be religious fanaticism. I was too proud. My sister and brother-in-law tried many times to break through my barriers. They demonstrated to me the power God can have in your life by the changes I saw in them. Yet, I resisted. Gradually, other people came along who impressed me the same way.

It's frightening to realize that until June 1991, I was but a heartbeat from hell...for all eternity. And eternity is a long time!

In assessing my life, I knew something was missing. I figured Father's Day would be an appropriate occasion. In an airplane high above somewhere between Orlando, Florida, and Cincinnati, Ohio, I claimed my passport into eternal life. Essentially, I cried "Abba, Father."

I didn't want an airplane flight to be as close as I'd ever get to heaven.

Now I know that no matter what challenges or tragedies lie just around the corner, God will - in eternity if not sooner - wipe away every tear. This supplies enormous peace of mind. My wife and I have each lost close friends the past couple of years, but we know we'll see these people againin a world where there are no cancer cells, no money worries, no demanding schedules, and no sorrowful partings.

You live a lot differently when you're no longer panic stricken that time is getting away from you, and fearful that people you love may not be around tomorrow. The most profound realization I enjoy is that there is an eternity beyond this life.

I'm no longer in darkness. Now I feel as if there are lights going on all over the castle. There are still shadowy areas, but I know where to find the light switches - in the Bible.

It's 'a letter your Father has written...'

I can still picture the dead-eye look of Wade Rowdon, the man I had recruited to explain Christianity to me. "Do you accept the Bible as the inspired word of God?" he asked. Inspired word of God...I remember my sister using that phrase in one of her attempts to hook me into what I then thought was born-again baloney. "If you don't accept it," Wade explained, "we have nothing else to talk about."

All I knew of the Bible was that in freshman religion class at a Catholic high school in Cincinnati in 1968 we were allotted 15 minutes each day for reading it. I usually slept or daydreamed. As Catholics, we had Sunday missals, which is a Vatican-style Bible paraphrase.

I really didn't know whether or not I accepted it, but I wanted Wade to get on with our discussion. "Yes," I said, making a mental asterisk that could trigger an escape hatch later if God's inspiration did not stand my scrutiny.

Everything Wade said from that point was based on quotation from a hand-sized New Testament he cupped in his palms. He would eventually make a statement of lasting impression:

"The bible is a letter your father has written to you. Don't you think you ought to read it?"

That seemed reasonable but a major stumbling block was that I could not grasp the meaning amidst the thees and thous and term the likes of "Thus saith." My sports-page mentality wondered how Wade, a former Major League baseball player, ever made sense out of the Bible. Still, Wade's idea of a father's letter was a point worth exploring: perhaps there was truth and direction camouflaged in that strange phraseology. I needed something to elevate my life several notches.

Discipleship

We met in a small group at Wade's house several times over the next few weeks, a course of action Wade termed discipleship. This was after I had become born-

again, accepting Jesus in John 3:3-16 fashion. Grasping the Bible was comparable to learning a new software program, I surmised. Master a few conventions and this thing will start humming, or so I figured.

Wade made another statement that echoed a point my brother-in-law had regularly mentioned. The Word of God has to flow through your heart first, and then to your mind. What? This was a concept totally foreign to Mr. Analytical, as I fancied myself. (Later I would come to respect the admonishment of Proverbs 3:5-6: Trust not in your own understanding...) Upon Wade's mention it struck me that there must be something I had yet to figure out.

Thousands of hours of bible study later, I've devised an analogy that will sound silly, but should be effective. Think of the Bible as being like a hologram - you know, those three-dimensional pictures you stare into at displays the shopping mall. You won't see the picture without looking into it deeply enough, and from the proper angle. The Bible is that way.

Not Like Newspaper

The Bible doesn't read like a newspaper. It wasn't written yesterday by a cultural contemporary aiming at those of a 6th grade level. You need insights into Judaism, along with the culture and circumstances from which the verse was birthed. When these factors are meshed into a heart that's longing and tender toward God, the majesty of the Bible bursts forth.

The text of the Bible was compiled by 40 writers - from fishermen to kings - encompassing empires from Babylon to Rome, in life-spans of 16 centuries. Its 66 books are divided into Old and New Testaments (or Covenants), originally written in Hebrew or Greek, etched on everything from papyri to parchment, preserved through pre-Xerox generations by tedious scribing.

The first suggestion I have for grasping the Bible is to get a good pastor. Link yourself to a preacher who is continually mining the deep treasures of Holy Scripture - and not one who promotes his own philosophy. I have such a pastor.

Here are some practical Bible-deciphering techniques.

1. Use Bible aids. Indispensable to any examination of Scripture are a bible concordance and dictionary. The concordance lists other passages containing the identical word. Along with its definition, context in other passages can be used to pinpoint meaning.
2. Start with an easy translation. The Holy Bible undergoes almost continual translation, each aimed at making its meaning more clear through use of contemporary nomenclature. Precise meaning can be sacrificed, however, in translating the original word, or simplifying the King James English translation of the 16th century. It is generally perceived that the easier to read, the less precise. Probably the loosest translation now popular is The Living Bible. The versions I like best and quote most often are: the New International Version [NIV], New American Standard [NAS], New King James [NKJ], and King James [KJV].
3. Grasp the time line. The New Testament was written in a span of little more than one-half century, but the Old Testament encompassed more than a dozen. Who came first: Abraham or Moses? Was Daniel before David or after him? When did Noah enter the ark? The sequence of events makes a difference, as does the evolution of nations and inhabited lands. You can find various materials to assist learning this.
4. Understand Jewish feasts and customs. Jesus was Jewish, and you can't appreciate much of the Bible without understanding matters such as Temple worship, Jewish feasts and customs. You'll also miss the undercurrent of friction between Yeshua (Hebrew for Jesus) and the religious establishment of the day. Usurping the promises made to God's Chosen People, many Christian denominations push Judaism aside and miss out on the deep treasures of the Bible. Christianity has a Jewish heritage, and I believe Jesus will come back as a Jew.
5. Learn the culture. The culture of Jesus' time is reflected in passages such as "It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven." And "heap hot coals of fire upon your enemies' head." These are just two examples. Reading such sayings in

today's understanding provides a totally different meaning than what Jesus intended. The "eye of a needle" was a smaller inner gate within the city gate (kind of like a pet door) that could be more easily guarded. It allowed travelers and merchants arriving at night entrance into the city fortress, instead of having to camp outside where they would be vulnerable to thieves. But they would have to unload their camels which would then crawl through on their knees. The eye of the needle, therefore, was an after-hours safety precaution. "Heap hot coals" refers to the practice of lending coals to a neighbor who had run out. The coal was carried in a large saucer placed on top of your head, so "to heap hot coals" means to be gracious in lending even your enemy what was then an essential element in heating and cooking.

6. Remember English is ever-changing. What do words such as bad and gay mean today, compared to what they meant decades ago? Hebrew and Greek, the original languages of the Bible - along with perhaps Aramaic - are more precise. For instance, we translate eight different Hebrew Words into l-o-v-e. But God had a specific reason for using agape, phileo, or eros - slightly varying types of love. This is why the Bible has to be studied, and not merely read.
7. Recognize prophets' dilemma. Put yourself in Ezekiel's place. It's 500 B.C. What words do you pull from your vocabulary to describe automobiles, tanks, airplanes, 20th century weaponry (perhaps), and maybe some things we don't even know about yet? How would readers pre-dating these inventions understand?
8. Grasp the full impact of descriptions. The apostle Paul called himself a servant or "bond-servant" of Jesus in Romans 1:1 and Titus 1:1. This term indicates that he had the chance to go free, but freely chose to serve a master - in this case, Jesus. Serving God as an expression of our love for Jesus means that we are totally sold out to him as both Savior and Lord. The concept of a "kinsman redeemer" (book of Ruth) is another example.

9. Realize Jesus may have been intentionally vague. Why was Jesus so vague, particularly toward his apostles? Why didn't he just lay it out for them in terms that would be obvious, instead of things such as "In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a while you will see me." (John 16:16)? Why didn't he say, "Hey, they're going to arrest me, put me through a bogus trial, then hang me on a cross? The third day in the tomb I will resurrect from the dead." Some people think that Jesus was intentionally vague. One reason for this would be so that total dedication would be required in order to dig out the meaning of Scripture, resulting in the divine gift of a discerning spirit. Jesus didn't want the devil, a keen eavesdropper, to know the plan. Remember that Satan quoted scripture - or at least his distortion of it - both to Eve in the Garden, and to Jesus in the wilderness.
10. Don't expect instant explanation. God had to build understanding in small steps. For this reason, He did not explain everything the first time a topic is introduced. This makes us keep searching and digging.

Scientific Support

"The greatness of God will not fit into the smallness of our understanding." This statement leapt at me from the pages of a discipleship manual. God is not limited by our scope of comprehension.

Jonah's survival for three days in the belly of a great fish (commonly considered to be a whale but not actually stated so in Scripture). This still has me perplexed. But the parting of the Red Sea and some of the other amazing Bible episodes have garnered scientific explanation, even to the point of being aired on prime-time CBS television in May 1992 ("Ancient Secrets of the Bible"). According to scientists, at this particular point along the Red Sea, called the Mouth of the Gorges, there is a land bridge submerged beneath the water. A forceful wind very possibly could blow this water back so that this submerged land bridge would become visible.

Whether that is the way it happened we don't know. But we do know from Scripture that God caused a strong eastward gale. The waters separated wide enough for approximately two million people to cross in one night.

Bible proof is an extensive and perhaps endless topic. The key to unlocking your understanding is a willingness to hand over control of your life to Jesus, subjugating every thought and action to his lordship.

If you have wanted to believe the Bible but can't figure it out, generations ago Mark Twain recognized your predicament. "Most people are bothered by those passages of Scripture they do not understand," said the American literary giant, "but the passages that bother me are the ones I do understand."

Abraham Lincoln said "Take all of this book upon reason that you can and the balance by faith, and you will live and die a better person."

As for me, whatever asterisk I attached to my affirmative response about accepting the Bible as God's inspired word has long been expunged. My scrutiny dissolved quickly decades back once my pastor, Mike Coleman, started laying out his insights into Bible prophecy during Wednesday night class at the Sanctuary, DeLand Church of God.

Its prophecies come true

The words set off alarm bells. "This is so cool," said a client and cherished friend, embarking on a story involving her cocker spaniel. "I took Maggie to the vet," she said, "and he implanted a computer chip in her back. Now if she's ever lost we can identify her by using a scanner."

She even went on to add, "I told him this is such a great idea! We ought to do it with all the kids at the junior high."

Revelation chapter 13, verses 16 and 17 apparently have never caught my friend's attention.

"And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand, or on their forehead, and

he provides that no one should be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, either the name of the beast or the number of his name," (NAS).

I later prodded her gently, "Isn't it amazing that these words were written 2,000 years ago - before computers, electricity, and possibly even before surgical procedures?"

End-time Bible prophecy study is a subject that fascinates me. Can you write a description of the world 2,000 years from now? Then it should amaze you, too, to read of:

- The regathering of the Jews to their Promised Land.
- Wars, rumors of wars, and nation rising against nation.
- Pestilences.
- Famines.
- Earthquakes in divers places.
- A revived Roman Empire (the European Community, perhaps?).

Many more elements of today's world could be enumerated. But you quickly realize that correlating world events to endtime Bible prophecy involves a good deal of speculation. Credibility is crushed whenever a doomsday prophet misses the mark, overlooking the fact that "no man knows the day nor the hour."

If you believe that Jesus died, resurrected, and ascended into heaven, then you have to know he's coming again - because he said he would.

But you don't have to agree with speculation to see how the Bible proves itself. Just look at the correlation of Easter and Passover, and how Jesus fulfilled this event.

Messiah Pinpointed

The Easter story was a hallmark of Catholic childhood. I remember being dragged each Good Friday to noon-to-3:00 p.m. stints at Our Lady of Victory church, where we would perform the stations of the cross. It is because of Station 12, a depiction of Jesus dying on the cross, that I vividly recall the impassioned plea of his almost-last breath:

"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

I was approaching 40 years of age when Psalm 22 zinged my consciousness, inattention for which I am responsible. Written by King David approximately 500 years before Jesus, Psalm 22 begins with the precise statement Jesus gasped while dying upon the cross.

Crucifixion as a form of execution did not exist at the time of David's writing, yet his psalm pinpointed much of what our Lord experienced on Calvary.

Don't be confused by Psalm 22 sounding as if David, the writer, is making the statement in reference to his own situation. That's typical of Old Testament prophecies. Our Lord was speaking through the prophets, which in this case was David. This is evident in the New Testament, where writers such as Paul and Peter (read 1 Peter 1:10-12) apply the first-person words of David to Jesus the Messiah.

Perhaps Jesus was calling out a scripture reference so that we would read the entire psalm, as one last confirmation of his saviorship? At that time, the Bible was without verse indexing. Bible references were made by reciting the opening line of the particular book, psalm or proverb.

Or, perhaps Jesus was reacting naturally - without premeditated thought - to the ultimate penalty of sin, which he took upon himself for us (2 Corinthians 5:21). That penalty is separation from God.

Either way, Psalm 22 is a prophesy of Jesus' crucifixion. Its verses indicate the piercing of his hands and feet; the casting of lots for his garments, the ridicule directed toward him, and many other events climaxed at Calvary.

The Odds on Jesus

Our Lord fulfilled - in part - the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament, written hundreds to thousands of years before his birth (the part not yet fulfilled relate to his Second Coming, likewise recorded in the Old Testament). From 20/20 hindsight, fulfilled prophecy seems obvious and is easily overlooked.

From his birth to his death, resurrection and ascension - recorded historical facts - Jesus fulfilled an estimated 300 Old Testament prophecies. The probability of one man satisfying all these predictions is beyond comprehension. A researcher named Peter Stoner took just eight of the prophecies Jesus fulfilled - eight of approximately

300 - and computed the mathematical probability as being one in 10 to the 17th power, meaning one out of 100,000,000,000,000,000. This number of silver dollars would provide a two-foot-thick layer of carpet over the entire state of Texas.

No other religion in the world, incidentally, can match the historical basis of Christianity. None other offers sacred writings with the proof of prophecy.

The Bible is not a fairytale. This is true of the Old Testament as well as the New. The writings of the Apostles clearly indicate knowledge of and reliance upon Hebrew Scripture. Furthermore, the apostles wrote about contemporary events to an audience containing eye witnesses. Any fabrication could certainly be investigated and denounced.

Remember, also, that these writers lived during a time without cable TV, movies, compact discs, and professional sports. Their attention was not diverted to technologically dazzling amusements. Their existence depended on their fields and their herds. People everywhere were interested in the concept of a supreme being or beings. As the seed of Abraham, the Jews knew the one, true almighty God, because He chose to reveal himself to them.

Unlike apathetic America approaching the 21st century, these people were well versed in the five books of Moses (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy), as well as the prophets and other books of what would later be formalized into the Old Testament.

In his New Testament letter designated 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, Paul indicated:

"For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins *according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures..." (emphasis mine).

Notice prevalence of the phrase "according to the Scriptures." It reminds me of a college journalism class where the professor demanded "attribute, attribute, attribute," concerning information in news articles. In this passage, Paul seems to place authority of prophetic scripture ahead of even eyewitness accounts. As earlier mentioned, many who had seen Jesus and witnessed his miracles were alive at the time.

In Psalm 68, verses 10 and 11, Jesus speaks through David of his resurrection:

"For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore."

Sheol was then the holding place of departed souls. It is where Jesus descended upon his death in order to lead the righteous to heaven. References to the right hand correspond to his position with God Almighty - he's seated at the right hand.

In Psalm 71:20-21, David writes on behalf of Jesus:

"You, who have shown me great and severe troubles, shall revive me again, and bring me up again from the depths of the earth. You shall increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side."

The prophet Hosea also foretold Christ's resurrection.

"Come, and let us return to the LORD; for He has torn, but He will heal us; He has stricken, but He will bind us up. After two days He will revive us; on the third day He will raise us up, that we may live in His sight. Let us know, let us pursue the knowledge of the LORD. His going forth is established as the morning; He will come to us like the rain, like the latter and former rain to the earth," (Hosea 6:1-3).

If the meaning of these scriptures is unclear, remember that English is an ever-changing, imprecise language, as indicated earlier. Apply the deciphering techniques mentioned.

The Cyrus Sign

Those as skeptical as I used to be might think of Bible prophecy as being a case of mixing a zillion words with enough intervening years and, presto, sooner or later you have a match! If the 300 events relating to the life of one man, Jesus the Messiah, don't convince you, examine King Cyrus II of the Medo-Persian Empire circa 558 to 529 B.C.

Two hundred years before this man's birth the prophet Isaiah recorded that:

1. A man named "Cyrus" would arise and overthrow Babylon.

"Thus says the Lord to His anointed, To Cyrus, whose right hand I have held - to subdue nations before him and to loose the armor of kings, to open before him the double doors, so that the gates will not be shut: I will go before you and make the

crooked places straight; I will break in pieces the gates of bronze and cut the bars of iron. I will give you the treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places, that you may know that I, the Lord, who call you by your name, am the God of Israel," - Isaiah 45:1-3.

2. This man would not only allow the Jews to return to Jerusalem, but they also would be granted the privilege of rebuilding the temple.

"Who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd and he shall perform all My pleasure, even saying to Jerusalem, 'You shall be built,' and to the temple, 'Your foundation shall be laid,'" - Isaiah 44:28, NKJ

The startling aspects of Isaiah's Cyrus prophecies are:

- Isaiah called Cyrus by name.
- The Jews were not in captivity at the time.
- The nation of Israel was then well established and secure.
- It had been 800 years since deliverance from Egypt.
- Jerusalem had become a bustling city of commerce.
- Solomon's Temple, which Isaiah said would be rebuilt, was still standing.
- The city of Babylon was identified in Isaiah 45:1 by its "the double doors," or "two leaved gates." These gates were as indigenous of the Babylonian Empire as the Eiffel Tower is to Paris, Big Ben is to London, and the Lincoln Memorial to Washington, D.C. The "two leaved" gates were the most familiar entrance into the city of Babylon and were well known by that name.
- The Babylonian Empire was unequalled at the time of Isaiah's prophecy, making it inconceivable that anyone would even attempt to overthrow Babylon.
- Approximately 100 years after Isaiah's prophecy, the Jews signed a peace treaty with Babylon. This was still 100 years before the prophetic fulfillment of their return from captivity.
- History records that Cyrus escaped a king's death sentence at infancy. His grandfather, King Astyages, was troubled by a dream in which he saw Cyrus lead an uprising. He therefore ordered the infant put to death. But

just like Moses (Exodus Chapter one) and later Jesus (Matthew 2:16-18), each of whom escaped attempts on their lives at infancy, Cyrus was preserved. Even when Astyages 10 years later discovered that a stillborn child had been substituted for Cyrus, the king was persuaded to let his grandson live.

Prophecies of Doom

Ancient Babylon is merely one of numerous empires whose demise was scripturally foretold. The most magnificent city of ancient times, and perhaps forever, could not defy what God's word predicted:

"Babylon, the jewel of kingdoms, the glory of the Babylonians' pride, will be overthrown by God like Sodom and Gomorrah," (Isaiah 13:19, NIV).

The city had been an impregnable fortress. Its walls were 187 feet thick at the base, 200 feet high, with towers that extended to 300 feet. It enclosed 196 square miles. But God said, "Babylon's thick wall will be leveled and her high gates set on fire," (Jeremiah 51:58a). Julian the Apostate fulfilled this prophecy in the 4th century A.D. But not only was Babylon to be destroyed, according to Scripture it would also be forever desolate (Jeremiah 50:13, 39). Situated in the most fertile part of the Euphrates valley (modern-day Iraq), this unlikely situation persists today.

From Sodom and Gomorrah to Tyre and Sidon, Old Testament prophecies concerning cities and empires always hit their mark. God explains why He provided this pinpoint accuracy of prediction:

"Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please." - Isaiah 46:9-10, NIV.

The apostle Peter relied on the prophecy proof of God's mandates to counter blasphemous instruction that was affecting an infant church of the first century. "And so we have the prophetic word made more sure," he recorded in 2 Peter 1:19, "to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts."

Historical Collaboration

If you are skeptical enough to lament the Bible as both predictor and recorder of the events it has forecast, remember that the historical scribe was a venerated professional. He was similar in status to the White House photographer. Where would we be without those intimate, behind-the-scenes pictures of President Kennedy?

The works of Flavius Josephus can be consulted for collaboration on the life of Jesus of Nazareth. You'll find it in Christian bookstores. Although it is not the purpose of this chapter, archaeology provides even more testimony to the bible's accuracy. Many discoveries have borne out the words and indications of holy scripture.

The ultimate proof of God's word is inner feeling, knowing in your knower. This comes through relinquishing control of your life. But with 8,352 verses out of a total of 31,124 possessing predictive value, bible prophecy fashions its own proof positive. In chapter 9 we will examine "Today's Pearls of Prophecy."

"Predictions are also promises," points out Dr. D. James Kennedy, in *Why I Believe* (1980, Word). "He also promised that he that believeth on the Son shall never die, but have everlasting life; and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but shall have the wrath of God upon him forever. The truthfulness of those words and the certainty of their fulfillment is attested by over two thousand prophecies which have already come to pass."

You will see even stronger evidence as we continue.

It exceeds our understanding

At the time that I first considered becoming a Christian, I held an assortment of provocative opinions on social, political, as well as spiritual issues. Many of these were formulated directly from videotapes of the *Phil Donahue Show*, meshed with my vast experience of life and penetrating intellect. I had always reasoned things

out, basing my acceptance on whatever viewpoint as it making sense to me. I deemed this strategy to be enlightenment.

Ha ha!

When God started awakening me, the chambers of my mind kept echoing: The Word of God has to flow first to your heart, and then to your head. Huh? What is that supposed to mean? Though miles and years apart, my Christian witnesses - first my brother-in-law and later Wade Rowdon - had concurred in this sentiment.

As I became acquainted with Scripture, I looked up "understanding" in a bible concordance and found:

- "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths." - Proverbs 3:5-6, NKJ "...incline your ear to wisdom and apply your heart to understanding." - Proverbs 2:2, NKJ
- "My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ." - Colossians 2:2, NIV
- "O you simple ones, understand prudence, and you fools, be of an understanding heart." - Proverbs 8:5, NKJ.
- "For You have hidden their heart from understanding; therefore You will not exalt them." - Job 17:4, NKJ.

You've noticed that understanding is linked to the heart, not to the mind? The parable of the sower in Matthew Chapter 13 demonstrates that the Word of God (the seed) must take root in the heart. *"For this people's heart has become callused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts and turn, and I would heal them,"* (verse 15).

The story of Job (the book of Job in the Old Testament) shows that wisdom lies in submission to God, not Donahue. God challenged Job's arrogance:

"Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me. Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding. Who

determined its measurements? Surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? To what were its foundations fastened? Or who laid its cornerstone?" (Job 38:2-6).

Perhaps you're not convinced the universe is strictly the handiwork of God. *In Beyond Death's Door*, a book about near death experiences (more elaboration in Chapter 8 of this book), Maurice Rawlings, M.D., addresses those who are too smart to believe in God. Writes Dr. Rawlings:

"The late scholar Edwin Conklin, a professor of biology, compared the probability of life originating by accident to the probability of an unabridged dictionary being produced by an explosion in a printing shop. Yet many highly educated men say there is no God - just science. They forget...the god of science is forever changing and requiring updating and revision, while the God of the Bible remains the same yesterday, today, and forever. Perhaps some people try to hide themselves in atheism or agnosticism since belief in God would require accountability to Him. Other people are looking for God through a myopic vision, when they merely need to look up from themselves and see His creation that speaks of Him everywhere. Certainly the chaos of chance could not have evolved into the present cosmos of order."

It takes faith, actually, to believe in both the big bang theory, and its paganistic cousin - evolution. It is a faulty faith. There has never been factual evidence of cell mutations breaking the species barrier. Yet this is the premise upon which evolution is based?

God is the creator and master. It's as if He's playing six billion chessboards simultaneously. Rarely being able to beat a computerized chess game, I try no more to second-guess God.

Isaiah 55:8-9 makes it clear: *"For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways,"* declares the LORD. *"For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."*

Daily Submission

Everyday life furnishes abundant precedents of submission to someone else's knowledge, wisdom, or authority. In large corporations, a common malady is lower-

level workers not understanding the initiatives of management. Seeing not the big picture of corporate operation, the whys and wherefores of their directives escape and frustrate them.

Would a parent want his or her 5-year-old child deciding what time to go to bed, what to eat, when to bathe, what to watch on TV, whether or not to go to school, and what to wear?

The disparity in competence and capability is far greater between God and you or me, than between a parent and a 5-year-old. And yet we insist on making our own decisions, apart from God.

This doesn't mean God wants us to stop thinking; as if it is possible to be bible robots. Faith is not something that is blind and ignorant. You won't find *Thou shalt not think* among the ten commandments. Examine the claims of Christianity and challenge its authenticity. It is recorded in Acts 17:11 that *"the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true."*

Analyzing the Word of God - the Holy Bible - is an intriguing intellectual endeavor. There are countless intricacies to figure out. This could be why we are told to love God with all our heart, soul, and mind (Matthew 22:37).

You don't have to be a blaspheming, liberal philosopher to employ brain power. But everything has to be filtered through the heart, the holy portal of understanding. Zig Ziglar, famous author and motivational speaker, says that "apart from the Word of God, there is no wisdom." The verse resting squarely in the middle of the Bible, incidentally, says *"It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man,"* (Psalm 118:8).

We seem to have degenerated into a nation of people trying to impress one another with how smart we are, how open-minded, and how tolerant (and generally how miserable). It's interesting that Matthew 7:14 indicates: *"But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."*

The Bible is full of examples of the consequences that occur when *"everyone did what was right in his own eyes,"* (Judges 21:25). So many of us want to ignore God in

our assessment of important matters. We listen to people who dazzle us with their rhetoric, or articulation, or eloquence.

The second chapter of Isaiah admonishes: *"Stop trusting in man, who has but a breath in his nostrils,"* (verse 22). And Isaiah 5:21: *"Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!"*

The Hebrew word from which "trust" is derived occurs 36 times in the Old Testament in verb form. It frequently paints a picture of nesting under God's wing, taking refuge (Psalm 57:1, 91:4, and Ruth 2:12).

Clenching the reigns of your own life to the point of squeezing out God restricts you from enjoying the full measure of promises enumerated in the Bible. You strike EUREKA over hard-to-decipher scriptures from a heart that is submissive to God, a heart through which understanding can flow.

Patriarchs Proved Trustworthy

The Old Testament shows us how Noah, Abraham, and Moses, as well as many others, learned what God would do in their lives once they fully trusted Him. The story of Noah building an ark is a familiar one (Genesis 7). What eludes the casual Christian, however, is that previous to Noah it had never rained. The earth was moistened by only the morning dew. Furthermore, Noah and his sons were constructing an ark when there was no body of water upon the earth.

Genesis 7:11 records that *"In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on the same day all the fountains of the great deep burst open, and the floodgates of the sky were opened,"* (NAS). This was the first rain from the sky, and the springs of bodies of water.

Hebrews 11:7 explains that *"By faith Noah, being warned {by God} about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith,"* (NAS).

Noah obviously trusted not in his own understanding. Abraham indicated that he likewise relinquished self rule by addressing God as *Adonai*. It means "master, ruler,

owner." The first reference to it is in Genesis 15:2, when Abraham is still known as Abram.

Adonai is one of several Hebrew words the English text translates "God." But in references to God, Hebrew uses different distinctions to be more specific. Jehovah, for instance, signifies the holiness and righteousness of God. Words prefixed by El express the might and power of God.

(Why would there be more than one name for God? Think about yourself: are you husband/wife, father/mother, uncle/aunt, brother/sister, doctor, manager, nurse, engineer, and an assortment of other identifications for various roles? A bible concordance will indicate the original Hebrew or Greek, and thus provide insight into the specific scripture.)

God promised Abram that his seed would be as numerous as the stars of heaven. But it was not until Abram had totally yielded that fulfillment arrived; the birth of Isaac years later. The ultimate test of Abraham's trusting, however, came when he placed Isaac on the altar of sacrifice (Genesis 22:2).

Moses acknowledged God as master, owner, and protector in Exodus 4:10. Still, he hedged on his burning bush mandate to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt (Exodus 4:13). Eventually, when he was wedged in by mountains, sea, and Pharaoh's fast-approaching army, Moses' trust in Adonai produced the parting of the Red Sea.

God Seeks Our Trust

And God still works this way today. A young woman who visited my church in 1993 explained how God directed her to leave China to attend an American university to learn the Russian language. After three years of study, the Lord told her to go to Israel; Hebrew-speaking Israel! She was perplexed, but obedient. Once she arrived in Jerusalem and made contact with the International Christian Embassy (ICEJ), she started to see what God had in mind. The ICEJ was beginning to bring Jewish immigrants out of the dissolved Soviet Union (more in chapter 10).

I can claim being at least partially yielded to God, striving to be totally submissive. Thus, God parted a Red Sea, of sorts, in my life in July 1992.

My wife Cathy, and I were excited about partaking in a Holy Land pilgrimage with Pastor Mike and a couple dozen of our church family. But Cathy's persistent, chronic back problem caused serious concern. Would it endure 20 hours in an airplane, plus bus rides through the Israeli countryside, and various rigors associated with international travel?

A week before our departure, a two-hour automobile trip inflamed Cathy's back. The pain was temporarily debilitating. We prayed that her sciatica would not cause Cathy to be sequestered in the hotel room all of our pilgrimage.

We boarded the plane packed with precaution: medications, heating pad, and a strategy. We were relieved that the flight did not trigger back pain of the type that had been so common in recent weeks. Once on Israeli soil, Cathy had not a hint of the problem that had plagued her for months. She ran, crawled into a cave, bounced along on bus rides, and ambulated without the least limitation.

It is important to note that it was clear to us that God wanted us to make the pilgrimage. We knew this by the financial arrangement that enabled us to go. We trusted that Cathy's back condition would not ruin our trip.

It is also interesting to note that Cathy's back did not heal earlier, when the Israel pilgrimage was in its contemplative stage. I don't think the Red Sea parted until Moses lifted his foot and was about to place it in the water. He took a step of faith, and at a less dramatic level so did Cathy in proceeding through her pain to board an airplane for God's chosen land.

Though I certainly have not perfected this strategy, I strive to keep Proverbs 3:5-6 at the forefront of my life, trusting not in my understanding, but in all ways acknowledging God and letting Him direct my path.

The Bible tells us in Hebrews 11:6 that without faith it is impossible to please God. Like a muscle, faith is something that has to be exercised in order to grow stronger.

Most of those interesting opinions I used to store in a reservoir of intellect have been washed away by the majesty of God. When He touches your heart, the foolishness of your thinking becomes unmistakable.