

UNDERSTANDING THE FAITH

A SURVEY OF CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS

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THE BIBLE: GOD'S BIG STORY, PART 1

1. THE CAMERAS ARE ROLLING

All the best fairy tales begin, “Once upon a time.” Then comes a description of the world of the story, of the way that world goes, of where the story is happening, and of why—because if we know the story’s world, we can appreciate fully both the rising conflict’s true horror and the hero whose sacrifice sets everything right.

5. OUTLINES OF THE BIBLICAL METANARRATIVE

There are several ways to understand the metanarrative of Scripture. Church of England cleric Vaughan Roberts describes it concisely as “the kingdom of God: God’s people in God’s place under God’s rule and blessing.”¹⁶ For Roberts, the Old Testament gives the pattern of the kingdom, shows how it perished, envisions the promise of a coming restoration, shows that restoration partially, and prophesies about its completion. The New Testament describes the present kingdom, proclaims its presence, and describes what it will be like when perfected.

Authors Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen summarize the biblical story as a six-act drama of the kingdom of God.¹⁷ In Act 1, God establishes his kingdom through creation. In Act 2, humans rebel. In Act 3, God the king initiates redemption by choosing the nation of Israel. In Act 4, Christ comes as king and accomplishes redemption. In Act 5, the news of the king’s redemption spreads, and this forms the church, first from Jerusalem to Rome and then into the entire world. Act 6 describes the return of the king and completion of God’s plan of redemption.

Kenneth Turner, a Bible professor at Bryan College, provides a synthesized approach that focuses on both the flow of Scripture and God’s kingdom work.¹⁸ Here’s a summary chart, adapted from Bartholomew and Goheen’s outline of the drama, that we’ll unpack in a moment.

ACT	KINGDOM	CREATION–FALL–REDEMPTION	PRIMARY TEXTS
1	God Creates His Kingdom	Creation	Genesis 1–2
2	Rebellion in God’s Kingdom	Fall	Genesis 3–11
3	Promise of Restoration: Israel’s Mission	Redemption Initiated: Promise and God’s Plan for Israel (and the World) Redemption Complicated: Israel’s Failure and God’s Covenant Faithfulness [Israel’s Kingdom] Redemption Predicted: The Rise of the Prophets	Pentateuch (Genesis 12; Exodus 19; Deuteronomy 4) Historical Books, Wisdom Literature (2 Samuel 7) Prophets, Postexilic & Intertestamental Literature (Jeremiah 31)
4	Kingdom Restored: Jesus’s Mission	Redemption Accomplished	Gospels
5	Kingdom Displayed: Church’s Mission	Redemption Applied: The Church	Acts; Epistles
6	Consummation of God’s Kingdom	Redemption Completed: New Creation	Revelation

female. In Genesis 2, the man represents the *ʾādām* role. In Genesis 1, God speaks creation into existence. In Genesis 2, the man and woman are handmade. The climax of creation in Genesis 1 is the creation of *ʾādām*, and the woman is the crowning glory of creation, *ʾiššā* (“from man”), in Genesis 2.

And God reveals different aspects of his nature in Genesis 1 and 2. In Genesis 1, God is **transcendent**, or *above* and *outside* of creation. In Genesis 2, God is **immanent**, or *in* the created garden *with* the man and woman.

In some ways, the differences between Genesis 1 and 2 help resolve these two attributes of God’s nature that may seem at odds. Only the Christian concept of God holds these two together. Other non-Christian views of God tend to emphasize one or the other.

Transcendent: an attribute of God that describes him as being both above and outside of his creation.

Immanent: an attribute of God that describes him as being both within and among his creation.

TOPIC	GENESIS 1:1–2:3	GENESIS 2:4–25
<i>Literary Style</i>	<i>Formal, dignified, catechetical</i>	<i>Informal, earthy, historiographic</i>
<i>Place of ʾādām in Creation</i>	<i>Climax of creation</i>	<i>Focus of creation</i>
<i>Meaning of ʾādām</i>	<i>Generic—both male and female</i>	<i>Male—“the Man”</i>
<i>Creation of ʾādām</i>	<i>Special creation (bārāʾ)—as image of God by divine word</i>	<i>“Made” as “living being”; “formed” from dust</i>
<i>Relationship between ʾādām and God</i>	<i>Royal imagery (i.e., “image” as king)</i>	<i>Priestly imagery</i>
<i>Relationship between ʾādām and Creation</i>	<i>Emphasizes distance (“image of God” versus “according to their kind”)</i>	<i>Emphasizes affinity (made from “ground” [ʾādāmā]); as “living being” [nephesh haya])</i>
<i>Climax of Creation</i>	<i>Creation of ʾādām</i>	<i>Creation of the “woman” (ʾiššā) from “man” (ʾīš) as helper and complement</i>

So what are we to learn about God, humans, and the world from the biblical creation account? Here are some important takeaways.

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THE BIBLE: GOD'S BIG STORY, PART 2

1. THE REST OF THE STORY

Far too often, the beauty ascribed to creation in Genesis seems like a distant dream. Bad news is everywhere. Every day, headlines betray the cruelty and anguish all too common in the human story:

- “Long-Running US-Russian Feud Reignited”
- “Syrian Troops Ambush Rebels, Kill 62”

- “Father of Missing Daughter Pleads for Abductor to Release Her”
- “School Shooting Stuns Community”

Doctrine of Original Sin:
the orthodox Christian belief that Adam’s first sin corrupted the nature of his descendants, leading to humanity’s present propensity toward committing sin.

That humans do evil should not shock Christians. The **doctrine of original sin** says humans are so *thoroughly* fallen that nothing remains unaffected by our fallenness. It also says we are so *absolutely* fallen that there’s nothing we can do to fix ourselves. None of this is hidden from view. Christian apologist G. K. Chesterton thought that original sin was “the only part of Christian theology which can really be proved.”¹

All worldviews recognize that something is wrong about the world, but they disagree about what precisely is wrong and what ought to be done about it. The scriptural metanarrative showcases life in a world of sin. Bad people don’t just do very bad things and make life miserable for the rest; *each of us* falls short of God’s glory. Sin affects all of creation. The proper response is to admit this and be reconciled to God. In Chesterton’s reply to a newspaper query about what is wrong with the world, he got straight to the truth: “What’s wrong with the world? I am. Yours truly, G. K. Chesterton.”²

Scripture, however, does not leave it there. It points to a way out: God’s plan for ending sin’s dominion altogether. In the previous chapter, we dove deep into the first act in this story: creation. In this chapter, we’ll unflinchingly examine Act 2: The fall and then burrow deep into Scripture to see how God patiently moves us into Act 3: Promise of Restoration, Act 4: Kingdom Restored, Act 5: Kingdom Displayed, and Act 6: Kingdom Consummated.

So you can see where we’ve been and where we’re going, here’s the chart from chapter 5 representing Craig Bartholomew and Michael Goheen’s “drama of Scripture.” (I’ve simplified their act titles for our purpose in this book.)

ACT	KINGDOM	CREATION–FALL–REDEMPTION	PRIMARY TEXTS
1	<i>God Creates His Kingdom</i>	<i>Creation</i>	<i>Genesis 1–2</i>
2	<i>Rebellion in God’s Kingdom</i>	<i>Fall</i>	<i>Genesis 3–11</i>
3	<i>Promise of Restoration: Israel’s Mission</i>	<i>Redemption Initiated: Promise and God’s Plan for Israel (and the World)</i> <i>Redemption Complicated: Israel’s Failure and God’s Covenant Faithfulness [Israel’s Kingdom]</i> <i>Redemption Predicted: The Rise of the Prophets</i>	<i>Pentateuch (Genesis 12; Exodus 19; Deuteronomy 4)</i> <i>Historical Books, Wisdom Literature (2 Samuel 7)</i> <i>Prophets, Postexilic & Intertestamental Literature (Jeremiah 31)</i>

4	<i>Kingdom Restored: Jesus's Mission</i>	<i>Redemption Accomplished</i>	<i>Gospels</i>
5	<i>Kingdom Displayed: Church's Mission</i>	<i>Redemption Applied: The Church</i>	<i>Acts; Epistles</i>
6	<i>Consummation of God's Kingdom</i>	<i>Redemption Completed: New Creation</i>	<i>Revelation</i>

2. ACT 2: THE FALL

God originally created human beings and his world in a state of *shalom*. This Hebrew word for “peace,” “prosperity,” and “welfare” implies that in creation, everything was good and in order. The existence of our first parents was one of wholeness in their relationship with God, one another, and creation. But in the fall, each of these relationships was ruptured. The world is now, as author Cornelius Plantinga puts it, “not the way it’s supposed to be.”³

What happened? As the creation narrative moves from Genesis 2 to Genesis 3, the focus abruptly changes. A new character, the serpent, comes into the picture. He is “crafty,” a word in Hebrew (*‘ārûm*) that forms a wordplay with the word for “naked” (*‘ārôm*) in Genesis 2:25.⁴ In English, it would read something like this: Adam and Eve were “nude” but the serpent was “shrewd.”⁵ The serpent is clearly more than just a reptilian member of the animal kingdom. It is intelligent, it speaks, it asks thought-provoking questions, and it is antagonistic toward both humans and God.

Right away the serpent challenges Eve’s understanding of what God has said: “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” It’s a simple question, but Eve’s response is revealing: “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, *neither shall you touch it*, lest you die.’” But God hadn’t said anything about touching it. He merely told them not to eat of it. This is our first indication that something is very wrong. Has Eve misrepresented the truth on purpose? Has she misunderstood? Has Adam given her wrong information?⁶ Either way, this confrontation is what scriptwriters call an inciting incident. Once it occurs, things can never go back to the way they were before.

The Genesis 3 account of the fall of humanity calls forth several perplexing questions.

Who was the serpent? The serpent is referred to as one of the wild creatures God made (v. 1),⁷ which would be consistent with the curse about crawling on the belly (v. 14).⁸ Many indicators, including the serpent’s actions and the curse against him in verse 15,⁹ support the New Testament identification of the serpent with Satan (Rev. 12:9; 20:2; Rom. 16:20).¹⁰

What was the nature of the temptation? The man and woman are tempted with “the knowledge of good and evil.” The meaning of this phrase is hard to nail down. It seems that the serpent is offering something to the man and woman that is proper for only God to know (Gen. 3:22).¹¹ Perhaps it has something to do with claiming for themselves the authority to

structure of the Gospels. For example, Matthew intentionally talks of Jesus in a way that shows a clear parallel to the journey of Israel itself.

ISRAEL'S JOURNEY	JESUS'S JOURNEY
<i>Prehistory—Abraham</i>	<i>Genealogy—Abraham, David, Exile</i>
<i>“Birth” in Egypt</i>	<i>Birth</i>
<i>Plagues</i>	<i>Flight to Egypt Death of Firstborn</i>
<i>Exodus</i>	<i>Baptism</i>
<i>Mount Sinai</i>	<i>Wilderness Temptation</i>
<i>Wilderness</i>	<i>Sermon on Mount</i>
<i>Kingdom in Land</i>	<i>Kingdom Ministry</i>
<i>Exile</i>	<i>Death</i>
<i>Restoration</i>	<i>Resurrection</i>

The one sense in which Jesus does *not* equal Israel is that where Israel failed, Jesus succeeded. The Old Testament is filled with tension and confusion to which Jesus brings clarity and resolution. At the moment of despair, Jesus brings hope. The Old Testament raises questions. In Christ, we have answers.

Third Theme: The Kingdom of God

The kingdom of God (or kingdom of heaven) blankets the pages of the New Testament. Taken together, the references to the kingdom of God are not about a *place* but about a *reality*: God is king. This has always been true, of course, but the New Testament shows how the reality of God-as-king over time, space, and history—just as the Old Testament writers anticipated—should affect everything we do. We rejoice in the kingdom of God, anticipating and participating in the removal of everything that plagues us presently: sin, sickness, death, and unfaithfulness. We become vessels of the kingdom by becoming vessels of the Spirit.

But the way in which the New Testament fulfills the Old Testament did not always align with Jewish expectations. For example, Jews expected a *messiah*, but they did not anticipate the *Messiah*, one person who would be both the human messiah and God. This is the culmination of the biblical narrative: God appeared in human flesh as the savior of the world. One person. One reality.

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will be even better than Adam and Eve’s in the original creation because sin will have been conquered once and for all. Everyone—even God’s enemies—will at that time realize that a world that was created, fallen, and redeemed is a greater testament to God’s glory than creation itself.

We cannot fully comprehend the description of the new creation pictured in the book of Revelation. There will be no sun and no sea, for example, and no sin. But what we can comprehend is very exciting: we won’t just be floating around on clouds, playing harps. We’ll be able to watch God at work—and we’ll work alongside him—making all things new.

Bible professor and pastor W. Gary Phillips has shared an exciting insight he found about the unity of the Bible that shows remarkable parallels between the first three chapters of the Bible and the last three.⁹⁶

GENESIS 1–3	REVELATION 20–22
<i>“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (1:1)</i>	<i>“I saw a new heaven and a new earth” (21:1)</i>
<i>“The darkness he called Night” (1:5)</i>	<i>“There will be no night there” (21:25)</i>
<i>“God made the two great lights” (sun and moon, 1:16)</i>	<i>“The city has no need of sun or moon” (21:23)</i>
<i>“In the day that you eat from it you shall surely die” (2:17)</i>	<i>“Death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning” (21:4)</i>
<i>Satan appears as deceiver of mankind (3:1)</i>	<i>Satan disappears forever (20:10)</i>
<i>Shown a garden, into which defilement entered (3:6–7)</i>	<i>Shown a city, nothing that defiles shall ever enter it (21:27)</i>
<i>Walk of God with man interrupted (3:8–10)</i>	<i>Walk of God with man resumed (21:3)</i>
<i>Initial triumph of the serpent (3:13)</i>	<i>Ultimate triumph of the Lamb (20:10; 22:3)</i>
<i>“I will surely multiply your pain” (3:16)</i>	<i>There shall be no more pain (21:4)</i>
<i>“Cursed is the ground because of you” (3:17)</i>	<i>There shall be no more curse (22:3)</i>
<i>Man’s dominion broken in the fall of the first man, Adam (3:19)</i>	<i>Man’s dominion restored in the rule of the new man, Christ (22:5)</i>
<i>First paradise closed (3:23)</i>	<i>New paradise opened (21:25)</i>
<i>Access to the tree of life disinherited in Adam (3:24)</i>	<i>Access to the tree of life reinstated in Christ (22:14)</i>
<i>They were driven from God’s presence (3:24)</i>	<i>They shall see his face (22:4)</i>

IF CHRISTIANITY IS TRUE, WHY DO PEOPLE WALK AWAY?

1. CRISIS OF FAITH

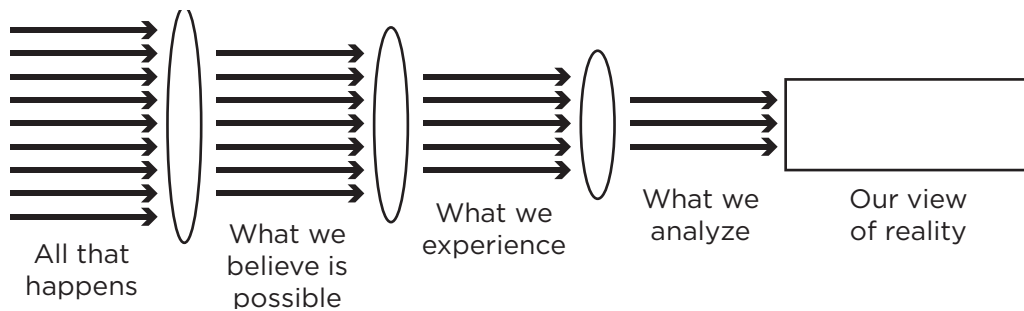
As a teenager, my friend Sean McDowell had a crisis of faith. And because Sean's dad is the world-renowned evangelist Josh McDowell, this event might have morphed into a family

- Is the person saying that everything is fine in the *world* or just in his or her own life? It seems selfish to make life about personal satisfaction rather than about making life better for others.
- Why would a person think that Christianity is only for times of trouble? That's a misunderstanding of what the gospel is all about.

Many embrace practical atheism because they either will not or cannot see the world from God's perspective and so embrace the culturally approved way of living because it just seems like the acceptable thing to do.²³

But how do people arrive at the idea of a culturally approved way of living? Christian apologist Charles Kraft theorizes that it is a matter of what we train ourselves to pay attention to. Of all the things that happen, he says, we acknowledge only that which we believe to be possible. Of what we believe to be possible, we acknowledge only those things we can directly experience. Of the things we experience, we acknowledge only those things we can analyze. Out of this, we form our view of reality.²⁴

Here's what this constrained view of reality looks like visually:



Before explaining how this truncated way of seeing relates to faith, let's try to understand the concept itself through a baseball example. The Chicago Cubs baseball team is known as the "lovable losers" because they have not won a World Series in 104 years, the longest losing streak of any North American team in any professional sport. Let's say that someone rushed up and announced, "The Chicago Cubs have won the World Series!" Assuming you had no contradictory evidence, you might reason this way:

1. The Cubs did *not*, in fact, win the World Series.
2. The Cubs *cannot* win in the regular season, so clearly they *cannot* win in the World Series.
3. I have never *seen* the Chicago Cubs win a World Series, so it didn't happen.
4. It is impossible to *imagine* the Cubs winning the World Series, so it didn't happen.
5. Therefore, I know you think the Cubs won the World Series, *but you must be mistaken*.

GLOSSARY

Abad: from the Hebrew for “to serve”; to work and worship.

Adoption: being included as a rightful member of God’s eternal family.

Agape: from the Greek word *agapé* for “selfless love.”

Age of Enlightenment: an eighteenth-century intellectual movement that emphasized reason, science, and individualism over tradition and religious authority.

Agnosticism: the belief that knowledge of God is ultimately inaccessible or unknowable.

Allegory: a fictional narrative in which characters and events are presented as symbols for moral and spiritual truths.

Anarchy: a society that exists without government control.

Annihilationism: the belief that damned souls are utterly destroyed rather than tormented in hell for eternity.

Anthropic Principle: the theory that the universe contains all the necessary properties that make the existence of intelligent life inevitable.

Anthropology: the study of humanity’s origins, cultures, and behavior.

Apartheid: government-enforced racial segregation.

Asceticism: the practice of avoiding all forms of indulgence.

Aseity: from the Latin word meaning “from oneself”; God’s self-existent and self-sufficient nature.

Astrology: the belief that astronomical events affect human events and that human beings can gain insight by studying the movements and positions of celestial bodies.

Atheism: the belief that God does not exist.

Authority: the power to command or the expertise to influence others.

Baal: meaning “Lord” or “ruler”; a false god who was purported to control nature and was worshipped by the people of Israel.

Basar: from the Hebrew for “flesh”; implies the idea of clan or family.

Beelzebub: a Greek word meaning “Lord of the flies”; references Satan and is a variation of the false god Baal.

Belief: an idea someone holds about the nature of reality.

Best of All Possible Worlds, the: a theory by Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz that states that the best of all possible worlds is the belief that the world we inhabit has been structured by God to maximize good and minimize evil.

Bible Commentary: a verse-by-verse exposition of scriptural passages written to help people better understand the Bible.

Biblical Genre: a classification of literary styles used in Scripture, including poetry, historical narratives, legal prescriptions, prophecies, psalms, proverbs, parables, epistles, and apocalyptic literature.

Big Bang Theory: the theory that the universe arose around fourteen billion years ago from an extremely dense state that rapidly expanded and continues to expand today.

Bourgeoisie: a term used in Marxist theory to describe those who own the means of production.

Canon: from the Greek word for “standard”; the collection of biblical writings commonly accepted as genuine and authoritative.

Chronological Snobbery: a term used to identify the fallacious thinking that ideas of an older time are inherently inferior to present ideas simply by virtue of their temporal priority.

Communicable Attributes: qualities that God and human beings share, such as wisdom, righteousness, love, mercy, and grace.

Content: the meaning of words or passages; the subject matter of a written work.

Context: the discourse surrounding a passage that gives meaning to the content; the historical background and literary setting of a text that helps clarify meaning.

Conversion: a turning from idolatry to the one true God.

Correspondence Theory of Truth: the view that the truth of a proposition is determined by how accurately it describes the facts of reality.

Cosmological Argument (aka Casual Argument): an argument for God's existence that begins with the premise that something caused the universe to exist and ends with the conclusion that God is the best explanation for the existence of the universe.

Cosmology: the study of the structure, origin, and design of the universe.

Covenant: an agreement between two parties that involves both rights and responsibilities.

Cultural Imperialism: the belief that one's culture or race is superior to others.

Dead Sea Scrolls: the oldest surviving collection of Jewish canonical texts written three hundred to four hundred years before the birth of Christ.

Death of God Theology: a theological movement that believes in a god who transcends all being and thus technically does not exist.

Deconstruction: a method of literary analysis that questions the ability of language to represent reality adequately and seeks to discern and expose the purported underlying ideologies of a text.

Deism: the belief that God exists and created the world but currently stands completely aloof from his creation; the belief that reason and nature sufficiently reveal the existence of God but that God has not revealed himself through any type of special revelation.

Derek: from the Hebrew for "the way"; refers to the overall direction of a person's life.

Derived Authority: authority that has been ordained or permitted by God.

Descriptive Passage: a biblical passage that describes specific events.

Descriptive Pluralism: the belief that we should be tolerant of competing religions in order to get along with one another.

Design Argument (aka Teleological Argument): an argument for God's existence that begins with the premise that design requires an intelligent designer and ends with the conclusion that God is the best explanation for the observable design within the universe.

Dialogue: from the Greek for "through words"; the process of talking through thoughts.

Divine Determinism: the belief that God directly determines and causes every single action in the universe.

DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid): a self-replicating, double strand of nucleic acid located in the nucleus of a cell; the storehouse for the genetic instructions used to build every protein within an organism.

Doctrine of Original Sin: the orthodox Christian belief that Adam's first sin corrupted the nature of his descendants, leading to humanity's present propensity toward committing sin.

Doctrine of the Fall: the orthodox Christian belief that sin entered the natural world when Adam and Eve chose to disobey God and ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Doctrine of the Trinity: the orthodox Christian belief that God is one being in three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Doxology: a liturgical or poetic narrative of praise to God.

Dualism: the belief that reality is ultimately composed of two essential substances.

Ebed: a Hebrew word translated as "servant" or "slave"; communicates a relationship of dependency, not ownership.

Elohim: from the Hebrew for "deity"; the generic name used in the Old Testament for the creator-God.

Emotional Doubt: spiritual doubt brought about by pain, anger, or angst.

Epistemology: the branch of philosophy that seeks to understand the nature of knowledge.

Eros: the Greek word for "sexual love."

Essence: defining attributes that give an entity its fundamental identity.

Essenes: a first-century Jewish faction that lived a monastic and communal life in the desert, shared everything in common, practiced ritual cleansing, and produced the oldest known copies of the Old Testament (for instance, the Dead Sea Scrolls).

Eternal: always existing or existing outside of time; everlasting.

Eudaimonia: a term used in ancient Greek philosophy to describe a life of flourishing and happiness.

Eugenics: a social movement advocating the genetic improvement of the human race through such practices as selective breeding, compulsory sterilization, forced abortions, and genocide.

Evil: that which deviates from good; the privation of good.

Evolutionism: the belief that all life arose through random chance processes starting with the first self-replicating molecule.

Exegesis: from the Greek for “lead out”; the exposition or explanation of a biblical text based on careful study and analysis.

Faith: firm trust or confidence in someone or something.

Fatalism: the belief that all events are predetermined and inevitable.

Flow: a state in which a person works intently on something fascinating and is able to work in a smooth rhythm, be creative, and recognize afterward that it was a pleasurable experience.

Free Will Defense: an argument developed by Alvin Plantinga that contends there is no logical contradiction between the coexistence of evil and God because it is at least *possible* that evil exists because even an omniscient deity could not create a world in which human beings simultaneously possess free will yet never choose to do evil.

Functional View of Personhood: the belief that human beings become persons only after gaining particular abilities, such as sentience, higher-level thinking, and self-awareness.

General Revelation: God’s universal revelation about himself (Ps. 19:1–6; Rom. 1:18–20) and morality (2:14–15) that can be obtained through nature.

General Theory of Relativity: Albert Einstein’s geometric theory of gravitation, which proposes that space and time are interwoven and can be curved by the presence of massive objects, such as planets and black holes.

Genocide: the systematic killing of a particular racial, ethnic, or religious group.

Gerotranscendence: the stage in life when a person makes the shift from self-interest toward a genuine concern for others and society.

Glorification: the point at which believers become closely identified with Christ.

Gnosticism: a second-century heretical Christian movement that taught that the material world was created and maintained by a lesser divine being, that matter and the physical body are inherently evil, and that salvation can be obtained only through an esoteric knowledge of divine reality and the self-denial of physical pleasures.

Good: that which embodies or reflects God’s original design.

Gospel: from the Old English for “good news”; the message of Jesus’s saving work and God’s present kingdom.

Grace: receiving what one does not deserve.

Haram: a Hebrew word translated as “total destruction” often used hyperbolically to communicate a strong defeat.

Hard Authority: the power or right to give orders and demand obedience with the threat of punishment.

Hellenization: the spread of Greek culture (language, arts, ideas, religion, government) throughout the conquered ancient world.

Heresy: any belief that is contrary to orthodox Christian doctrine.

Hermeneutics: from the Greek for “interpret”; the process of devising the best methods for understanding and interpreting Scripture.

Higher Consciousness: the supposed state of awareness wherein individuals realize their divinity and the divine interconnectedness of all things.

Historical Context: the time, place, culture, and audience of a text.

Historical Narrative: a story of historical events.

Holy: to be set apart.

Homophobia: the fear of homosexuals.

Horizontal Commands: commandments relating to humanity’s social relationships.

Hubble’s Law: based on Edwin Hubble’s astronomical observations; the law that states that the universe is expanding, i.e., the galaxies within the universe are moving away from one another at a rate directly proportional to the distances between galaxies.

Identity: the set of characteristics, giftings, and convictions that uniquely define who a person is.

Idiot: from the Greek for “private”; a person who fails to be active in society.

Idolatry: the act of worshipping or valuing something above God; entertaining thoughts about God that are unworthy of him.

Imago Dei: from the Latin for the “image of God”; the idea that human beings were created in God’s likeness.

Immanent: an attribute of God that describes him as being both within and among his creation.

Incommunicable Attributes: qualities that belong to only God, such as being holy, eternal, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent, and unchanging.

Inerrancy: the doctrine that the Bible is without error.

Intellectual Doubt: spiritual doubt brought about by rational questions regarding God's existence.

Intelligent Design: the study of information, complexity, and design in life and the cosmos; the theory that life could not have arisen by chance and random natural processes but was designed by an intelligent being.

Intertestamental Period: the four-hundred-year period between the completion of the Old Testament and the writing of the New Testament.

Intrinsic View of Personhood: the belief that human beings are inherently persons.

Irreducible Complexity: a concept that considers the complexity of integrated systems such that if any part is removed, the system ceases to function, and that when applied to biology, challenges the notion that complex biological systems (such as the eye) could have gradually evolved through a series of intermediary steps.

Islam: a theistic worldview centered on the life of the prophet Muhammad that derives its understanding of the world through the teachings of the Quran, Hadith, and *Sunnah*.

Judgment: the act of ruling or sentencing based on the careful deliberation of evidence and circumstances.

Justice: the act of making things legally and morally right.

Justification: being declared righteous by God through the work of Jesus Christ.

Kalam Cosmological Argument: an argument for God's existence that begins with the premise that something caused the universe to exist and ends with the conclusion that God is the best explanation for that cause.

Karma: a concept found in Eastern religions that states that good is returned to those who do good, and evil is returned to those who do evil (either in this life or the next).

Knowledge: justified true belief.

Koinonia: from the Greek for “community”; the role of fellowship within the Christian church.

Lexicon: an alphabetical dictionary that translates and defines words from another language, particularly Greek, Hebrew, and Latin.

Literary Context: the genre, structure, and grammar of a text.

Lost Gospels: a collection of fifty-two gnostic texts discovered in 1945 in Nag Hammadi, Egypt, and written sometime between the second and fourth centuries AD.

Love: a commitment to cherish others regardless of how one feels about them.

Macroevolution: the belief that small, adaptive changes are capable of accumulating over time to produce entirely new species.

Marxism: an atheistic and materialistic worldview based on the ideas of Karl Marx that promotes the abolition of private property, the public ownership of the means of production (such as socialism), and the utopian dream of a future communistic state.

Materialism: the belief that reality is composed solely of matter.

Megalomania: a psychopathic condition characterized by delusions of grandeur.

Mercy: not receiving what one deserves.

Metanarrative: a single, overarching interpretation, or grand story, of reality.

Microevolution: the belief that small, adaptive changes are capable of producing variations within the gene pool of a species.

Middle Knowledge (aka Molinism): first proposed by the Jesuit priest Luis de Molina; the belief that God knows all future contingent possibilities and that through his omniscience can accomplish his divine will through the lives of free human beings.

Miller-Urey Experiment: a 1952 experiment conducted by Stanley Miller and Harold Urey that produced amino acids through the combination of electricity and gases thought to be present in Earth’s atmosphere around three to four billions year ago.

Mind/Body Dualism: the belief that human beings are composed of immaterial minds and material bodies.

Minimal Facts Approach: a method formulated by Gary Habermas for investigating the resurrection of Jesus that concentrates only on the historical facts that are so well evidenced that they are accepted by nearly every scholar who studies the topic.

Miracle: a supernatural sign or event that is intended to highlight the power and goodness of God.

Misandry: the hatred or dislike of men.

Misogyny: the hatred or dislike of women.

Modalism (aka Sabellianism): the belief that the Trinity is composed of one God who has presented himself in different modes, or forms (the Father in the Old Testament, the Son in the New Testament, and the Holy Spirit today) throughout time.

Modernism: a broad term used to describe a range of arts, attitudes, philosophies, and cultural moods that emerged following the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. It is characterized by a strong belief in rationalism, empiricism, science, and technological progress as well as skepticism toward the supernatural, special revelation, and the authority of religion.

Monism: the belief that reality is ultimately composed of one essential substance.

Moral Absolute: an objective, unchanging, and universal standard of right and wrong.

Moral Argument (aka Axiological Argument): an argument for God's existence that begins with the premise that objective morality exists and ends with the conclusion that God is the best explanation for the existence of an objective morality.

Moral Doubt: spiritual doubt brought about by personal sin and rebellion.

Moral Evil: evil brought about by the actions of human beings (for example, rape, murder, and genocide).

Moral Relativism: the belief that morality is relative to, or defined by, the individual or culture.

Multiverse Theory: a theoretical reality that postulates an infinite set of parallel and diverse universes, of which our own universe is just one instantiation.

Mutation: a change in the genetic makeup of an organism.

Natural Evil: evil brought about by acts of nature, such as fires, earthquakes, and diseases.

Natural Selection (aka Survival of the Fittest): the process by which organisms better adapted for their environment tend to survive longer, reproduce, and pass along more favorable biological traits.

Naturalism: the belief that all phenomena can be explained in terms of natural causes.

New Atheism: a contemporary form of atheism that not only denies the existence of God but also contends that religion should be vehemently criticized, condemned, and opposed.

New Spirituality: a pantheistic worldview that teaches that everything and everyone are connected through divine consciousness.

Nihilism: the view that the world and human existence are without meaning, purpose, comprehensible truth, or essential value.

Objective Morality: the belief that morality has a universal and unchanging standard that is independent from human opinion, culture, and sentiment.

Objective Truth Claim: a claim regarding an independent fact about the world.

Omnipotent: God's unique ability to do anything that can be done.

Omnipresent: God's unique ability to be present in all places and at all times.

Omniscient: God's unique ability to know everything that can be known.

Open Theism: the belief that God does not have divine foreknowledge but that through his omniscience is able to deduce the most probabilistic future.

Pantheism: the belief that God is in everything.

Panspermia: the belief that life exists throughout the universe and has been dispersed by interstellar bodies such as asteroids, meteoroids, and comets.

Pantheism: the belief that everything in the universe is ultimately divine.

Pantheon: the collection of gods belonging to a particular religion or mythology.

Parasite: an organism that survives at the expense of a host (for example, viruses, bacteria, tapeworms, flukes, fleas, ticks, and louses).

Pentateuch: the first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy).

Perfect Being Theology: a view of God formulated by Anselm of Canterbury that defines God as "the greatest possible being" and "that than which none greater can be conceived."

Pharisees: a first-century Jewish faction that practiced a legalistic interpretation of the Torah, accepted the Talmud as authoritative, believed in the concept of an afterlife, and opposed the Roman occupation of Palestine.

Philos: the Greek word for “brotherly, familial love.”

Polygenesis: the evolution of species from several independent sources.

Polytheism: the belief in a multitude of deities.

Postmodernism: a skeptical worldview, founded as a reaction to modernism, that is suspicious of metanarratives and teaches that ultimate reality is inaccessible, that knowledge is a social construct, and that truth claims are political power plays.

Practical Atheism: believing in the existence of God but living as if he doesn’t exist.

Prescriptive Passage: a biblical passage that prescribes how people ought to live.

Prescriptive Pluralism: the belief that we should be tolerant of other religions because no single religion can be universally true for everyone.

Prime Mover (aka Unmoved Mover): Aristotle’s conception of an utterly transcendent, impersonal, immortal, immaterial, necessary, and unchanging being that set the universe into motion.

Primordial Soup: a theory that proposes that life arose from a water-based sea of simple, organic molecules.

Progressive Creationism: the belief that God created the cosmos and all life in its present forms, in progressive stages, over a long period of time.

Proletariat: a term used in Marxist theory to describe the working-class wage earners who do not own the means of production.

Protevangelium: the first gospel or God’s first promise of coming redemption through Jesus Christ (Gen. 3:15).

Psychoanalysis: an approach to psychology developed by Sigmund Freud whereby a psychologist attempts to resolve a patient’s psychological problems by uncovering and discussing the patient’s unconscious, unfulfilled, and repressed desires.

Quantum Physics: the branch of physics dealing with physical phenomena on the subatomic level, where particles behave in a fashion difficult to quantify and understand using the scientific method.

Real, the: defined by John Hick to be ultimate reality and the source of all world religions.

Recapitulation: a storytelling technique in which an overview of a story is given before the story is laid out in specific detail.

Red Shift: the expansion of the frequency of light toward the red end of the electromagnetic spectrum.

Regeneration: God's making people new through his Holy Spirit.

Reincarnation: the belief that after biological death, the soul is reborn in a new body—either animal, human, or spirit—to continue its quest for enlightenment.

Relativism: the belief that truth, knowledge, and morality are relative to the individual, society, and historical context.

Religious Pluralism: the acknowledgment that many different religions exist in today's diverse society.

Repentance: from the Greek for “changing one's mind”; the process of reviewing, regretting, and then changing direction with one's thoughts and actions.

Revelation: the act of making something known that was previously hidden or unknown.

Righteousness: the quality of being morally and spiritually right with God.

RNA World Hypothesis: a theory that proposes that early life was based on RNA instead of DNA and protein.

Sadducees: a first-century Jewish faction of priests and aristocrats who expressed complacency toward the Roman occupation, denied the concept of an afterlife, rejected the Talmud, and believed that only the first five books of the Torah were authoritative.

Sanctification: the process whereby believers advance in holiness.

Science: the process of using observable evidence to construct testable explanations and predictions for natural phenomena.

Scientific Method: a process of empirical inquiry that seeks to understand the phenomena of the physical world through hypothesizing, observing, measuring, experimenting, predicting, and testing.

Scientism: the philosophical belief that reliable knowledge is obtained solely through the scientific method.

Second Law of Thermodynamics: a scientific law that states that the amount of usable energy in a closed system will decrease over time.

Secular Humanism: a religious and philosophical worldview that makes humankind the ultimate norm by which truth and values are to be determined; a worldview that reveres human reason, evolution, naturalism, and secular theories of ethics while rejecting every form of supernatural religion.

Secularism: an atheistic and materialistic worldview that advocates for a public society free from the influence of religion.

Self-Refuting Claim: a statement that attempts to affirm two opposite propositions at the same time and in the same sense.

Sentience: the ability to feel and experience sensations.

Septuagint: the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Shalom: from the Hebrew for “peace, prosperity, and wellness”; implies harmony in creation and with one’s neighbors as well as a right relationship with God.

Socialism: an economic system based on governmental or communal ownership of the means of production and distribution of goods and services.

Soft Authority: the power to influence and persuade others because of a person’s knowledge or out of an earned respect.

Sojourner: someone who lives in a particular place for an extended period of time but whose home is somewhere else.

Sovereign: possessing supreme authority.

Special Revelation: God’s unique revelation about himself through the Scriptures (Ps. 19:7–11; 2 Tim. 3:14–17), miraculous events (dreams, visions, prophets, prophecy), and Jesus Christ (John 1:1–18).

Specified Complexity: any event that is contingent, complex, and exhibits an independently given pattern.

Spiritual Monism: the belief that reality is ultimately divine.

Spontaneous Generation: the belief that nonliving matter produced living matter through purely natural processes.

Subjective Truth Claim: a claim regarding a dependent fact about a subject.

Suffering: pain or discomfort that results from such things as disease, injury, oppression, fatigue, old age, loneliness, and betrayal.

Systematic Theology: a form of theological inquiry that aims to arrange and categorize religious truths into an internally consistent system.

Textual Variants: differences between particular words, phrases, or passages within multiple copies of the same ancient manuscript.

Theism: the belief in the existence of a God or gods.

Theistic Evolution: the belief that God created the cosmos billions of years ago and then guided the process of biological evolution to produce the diversity of life seen today.

Theodicy: a rational justification for why God would allow evil.

Theological Context: the theological purpose of a text.

Theological Dictionary: a reference book of words and phrases found in the Bible.

Tolerance: the willingness to recognize and respect the dignity of those with whom one disagrees.

Tort Law: the area of law governing remedies for those wronged by others, such as through negligence.

Transcendent: an attribute of God that describes him as being both above and outside of his creation.

Tree of Life: a metaphor used to illustrate the belief that all of life originated from a common ancestor and gradually branched out into the wide variety of species seen within the fossil record.

Tritheism: the belief that the Trinity is composed of three separate and distinct Gods.

Ummah: from the Arabic word for “nation”; the collective community of Muslims around the world.

Universal Common Ancestry: the belief that all life originated from a common, single-celled organism.

Universalism: the belief that all human and angelic beings will eventually be restored to a right relationship with God, either while alive or sometime after death.

Vertical Commands: commandments relating to humanity's relationship with God.

Vocation: from the Latin for "to call"; the work to which a person is drawn or well suited.

Watchmaker Argument: an argument for God's existence that compares the design of a watch to the design found within the cosmos and concludes that the universe, like a watch, can be best explained by the existence of an intelligent designer.

Wicca: a neopagan, religious form of witchcraft.

Wisdom: the ability of thinking and acting with good judgment.

Wrath: retributive punishment for an offense.

Yahweh: from the Hebrew for "I Am"; the personal and covenantal name of God used in the Old Testament.

Young-Age Creationism: the belief that God created the cosmos and all life in its present forms, in six literal days, around six thousand years ago.

Zealots: a first-century Jewish faction that militantly opposed the Roman occupation of Palestine.