

The Discerner

the voice of... **Religion Analysis Service**

A QUARTERLY EXPOSING
UNBIBLICAL TEACHING & MOVEMENTS

Volume 39, Number 2

April • May • June 2019

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Hare Krishna

Freemasons

Jehovah's Witnesses

Humanism

Jainism

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*"Hereby know we the spirit of truth
and the spirit of error" 1 John 4:6*

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The Discerner
A Christian Apologetics & counter-
cult Ministry

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WITH THIS ISSUE

Our feature article is an interesting and balanced look at how the Bible portrays God's use of the weather by Gary Hedrick.

We also have the conclusion of Bary Gaudreal's two-part exposé on the United Church of God in Canada, a break-off group from Herbert W. Armstrong's Worldwide Church of God.

Professor Dennis Ingolfsland of Crown College in Minnesota and Pastor of Randolph Baptist Church examines how Islam supports the spurious gnostic writing known as the Infancy Gospel of Jesus.

Our concluding article is a brief piece I wrote responding to frequent attacks alleging that Christians are hateful for standing up for biblical principles like support for pro-life and pro-family issues.

As always, we love to receive your comments and questions!

This month's quiz is on places associated with cultic groups.

Blessings in Christ,

Steve Lagoon

President, Religion Analysis Service

SAVE THE DATE! / OCTOBER 5, 2019

Religion Analysis Service 2019 Conference on Christian Apologetics

Great Room on the campus of the University of Northwestern-St. Paul

Our presenters include:

Former Jehovah's Witness, Cindy Marty, will share her journey out of the Watchtower to an exciting life of service to Christ.

Dennis Ingolfsland, Professor of Bible at Crown College in Saint Bonifacius Minnesota will present on The Reliability of the Book of Acts.

Rick Dack, of Defending the Bible International, will present on Hollywood Versus the Resurrection.

Dr. Brett Williams, Professor at Central Seminary in Plymouth Minnesota will present on The Importance of Taking Literally the Genesis Narrative of Adam and Eve.

Jim Tuller will share his testimony of escaping from the Jehovah's Witnesses and Finding New Life in Jesus Christ.

Steve Lagoon, President of Religion Analysis Service, will present on Atheism's Difficulty in Explaining the Ubiquitous Nature of Religious Belief.

Katherine Magdal, a former member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormonism), will share her testimony of Finding Biblical Truth and Escaping the LDS Church.

Bruce Laughton will present on Understanding and Combatting Cult Mind Control and Manipulation.

Worship Music led by Pastor Don Anderson of Christ for People with Developmental Difficulties.

Watch the Religion Analysis Service website (RAS.ORG) for more information and how to register for the conference.

21 BIBLICAL REASONS WHY I CANNOT BELIEVE THAT THE UNITED CHURCH OF GOD IS A CHRISTIAN DENOMINATION, PART 2

by Bary Guadrealt

XII. DOES THE SOUL LEAVE THE BODY AT THE TIME OF DEATH?

A. Bible: The soul indeed leaves the body at the time of death.

“And it came about as her soul was departing (for she died), that she named him Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin.” Genesis 35:18 “Then he stretched himself upon the child three times, and called to the LORD, and said, “O LORD my God, I pray Thee, let this child’s life [literally soul] return to him.” And the LORD heard the voice of Elijah, and the life [literally soul] of the child returned to him and he revived.” [Brackets added]. 1 Kings 17:21–22 “. . . we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.” 2 Corinthians 5:8 “But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.” Philippians 1:23–24

B. UCG: The soul does not leave the body at the time of death.

“No conscious immortal soul leaves the body at the moment of death to go to dwell in bliss in heaven or to suffer unending torment in hellfire.” *Fundamental Beliefs of the United Church of God*. Published by The United Church Of God, an International Association. 2009. p.58.

XIII. IS ONE SAVED BY THE GOSPEL (OF GRACE) OR BY BEING OBEDIENT TO THE LAW?

A. Bible: One is saved by the gospel alone (The death, burial, and resurrection of Christ).

“Now I make known to you brethren, *the gospel* which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, *by which also you are saved*, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the

Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep . . .” 1 Corinthians 15:1–6

B. UCG: The gospel is based on righteousness and obedience to the law.

“The very basic teaching, belief AND DOCTRINE OF God’s true Church therefore is based on the righteousness of and obedience to the law of God.” Herbert W Armstrong. *Mystery Of The Ages*. New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1985, p.274.

XIV. WATER BAPTISM: The pathway to Salvation?

A. Bible: Baptism does not save, only the gospel of Christ saves.

“Has Christ been divided? Paul was not crucified for you, was he? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, that no man should say you were baptized in my name. Now I did baptize also the household of Stephanas: beyond that, I do not know whether I baptized any other. *For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel*, not in cleverness of speech, that the cross of Christ should not be made void.” 1 Corinthians 1:13–17

B. UCG: Baptism is required for salvation.

“Again, those who have come to repentance through the calling of God are to be baptized for the forgiveness of sins, following the example and instruction of Jesus Christ.” *Fundamental Beliefs of the United Church of God*. Published by The United Church of God, an International Association. 2009. p. 29.

XV. THE SABBATH: Sunday or Saturday?

A. Bible: The Church from its founding held its services on Sunday, the first day of the week on which, there was a message, fellowship, breaking of bread followed by prayer and a offering was given.

“*And on the first day of the week*, when we were gathered together to break bread, Paul began talking to them, intending to depart the next day, and he prolonged his *message until midnight*.” Acts 20:7 Once again then, when the church came to gather on *the first day of the week* there was a collection or offering for the needy saints. “Now concerning *the collection for the saints*, as I directed the churches of Galatia, so do you also. *On the first day of every week* let each one

of you put aside and save, as he may prosper, that no collections be made when I come.” 1 Corinthians 16:1–2 “And they were continually devoting themselves to the *apostles’ teaching* and to *fellowship*, to the *breaking of bread* and to *prayer*.” Acts 2:42

B. UCG: The church held services on Saturday.

“God gave instructions concerning the observance of the Sabbath when He listed it with the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. Thus it is an important aspect of God’s law, which we are to obey. No example can be found in the writings of the apostles or the practice of the New Testament Church that shows any hint of change in the example and teaching they received from Christ.” *Fundamental Beliefs of the United Church of God*. Published by The United Church of God, an International Association. 2009. p. 30.

XVI. THE PASSOVER: Was the Passover fulfilled in Christ or is it still to be practiced as a step in God’s plan of Salvation?

A. Bible: The Passover was fulfilled in Christ. Jesus was the fulfillment of the Passover lamb and all other religious festivals in the Old Testament.

“The next day he [John the Baptist] saw Jesus coming to him, and said, “Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” [Brackets added]. John 1:29 “Clean out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” 1 Corinthians 5:7 “. . .how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” Hebrews 9:14 “. . .but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.” 1 Peter 1:19

B. UCG: Celebrating the Passover is an important *step in God’s plan of salvation*.

“All three elements-the foot washing, the unleavened bread and the wine-are to be part of the annual observance of the Passover. . . Finally, it should be stated that *Passover represents an important step in God’s plan of Salvation*.” *Fundamental Beliefs of the United Church of God*. Published by The United Church Of God, an International Association. 2009. pp. 33–34.

XVII. THE FESTIVALS OF GOD: Are they fulfilled in Christ or are they still to be kept as part of God's plan of salvation?

A. Bible: All days, months and seasons were fulfilled in the person of Christ, the Savior of mankind.

“But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how it is that you turn back again to the weak and worthless elemental things, to which you desire to be enslaved all over again? You observe days and months and seasons and years. I fear for you, that perhaps I have labored over you in vain.” Galatians 4:9–11
“Therefore let no one act as your judge in regard to food or drink or in respect to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath day—things which are a mere shadow of what is to come; but the substance belongs to Christ.” Colossians 2:16–17.

B. UCG: Keeping the festivals “reveal God's plan of salvation.”

“We believe in the commanded observance of the seven annual festivals that were given to ancient Israel by God; were kept by Jesus Christ, the apostles, and the New Testament Church; and will be observed by all mankind during Christ's millennial reign. *These festivals reveal God's plan of salvation.*” *Fundamental Beliefs of the United Church of God*. Published by The United Church Of God, an International Association. 2009. p. 34.

XVIII. SECOND CHANCE SALVATION? Does a deceased unrepentant sinner get a second chance to receive salvation after this life?

A. Bible: The author of Hebrews and Paul declare that once one dies, judgment follows. Mankind (as a lost sinner) has to accept the gift of salvation in this life, as there is no second chance for salvation following death.

“And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this come judgment” Hebrews 9:27 “ . . . for He says, “AT THE ACCEPTABLE TIME I LISTENED TO YOU”, AND ON THE DAY OF SALVATION I HELPED YOU; behold, now is the “THE ACCEPTABLE TIME,” behold, now is “THE DAY OF SALVATION—“ 2 Corinthians 6:2 “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.” Romans 1:18–20

B. UCG: Mankind gets a second chance salvation.

“Having great mercy toward all people, God will offer salvation to all who lived and died in all ages without ever really knowing Him.” *Heaven & Hell, What does the Bible Really Teach*. Published by The United Church Of God, an International Association. 2009. p. 49.

XIX. GOD’S FOOD LAWS

Are Christians forbidden to eat foods in the Old Testament deemed as unclean, or are all foods now deemed clean and acceptable to eat (as mentioned in the New Testament)?

A. Bible: Jesus and Paul declared all foods clean.

“And He said to them, “Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him; because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated? (Thus He declared all foods clean.)” Mark 7:18–19 “Now accept the one who is weak in faith, but not for the purpose of passing judgment on his opinions. One man has faith that he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats vegetables only. Let not him who eats regard with contempt him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats, for God has accepted him.” Romans 14:1–3

B. UCG: Only foods declared to be clean in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 are clean and to be accepted. All other unclean foods are not to be consumed.

“We believe that those meats that are designated “unclean” by God in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 are not to be eaten.” *Fundamental Beliefs of the United Church of God*. Published by The United Church of God, an International Association. 2009. p. 38.

XX. THE CHURCH:

Did the Church and its Apostolic teachings fade away shortly after the Apostles died?

A. Bible: The Christian Church has never completely faded away from apostolic Christianity (teaching).

“And I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of *Hades shall not overpower it.*” Matthew 16:18 “to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations for ever and ever. Amen.” Ephesians 3:21 ‘Beloved,

while I was making every effort to write to you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for *the faith which was once for all* delivered to the saints.” Jude 3

B. UCG: The Church did fade away from its apostolic roots being “saturated” with “pagan religion” and “philosophy.”

“Historically the original apostolic Church, which adhered closely to God’s law, faded from view as a great false Christianity assumed prominence. Most of what goes by the name of Christianity is saturated with teachings and practices originating in pagan religion and philosophy. This is a major aspect of what the Bible calls ‘Mystery Babylon the Great.’” Yet in spite of persecutions and periods with small numbers, true Christianity never disappeared. Jesus promised that His church would never die out, and that He would never leave or forsake us. He promised to be with his people “even unto the end of the age”, empowering them to do His work. We believe that we in the United Church of God, an International Association, are carrying on in the same tradition.” *Fundamental Beliefs of the United Church of God.* Published by The United Church Of God, an International Association. 2009. p. 54.

XXI. IS HELL AN ETERNAL PLACE OF CONSCIOUS PUNISHMENT OR COMPLETE ANNIHILATION BY INCINERATION?

A. Bible: Lake of Fire is a place of conscious eternal judgment.

“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt.” Daniel 12:2 “And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” Matthew 10:28 “Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels’.” Matthew 25:41 “And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” Matthew 25:46 “Now it came about that the poor man died and he was carried away by the angels to Abraham’s bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. And in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried out and said, “Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue; for I am in agony in this flame.” Luke 16:22–24 “ . . . and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His

mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not the gospel of our Lord Jesus. And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power” 2 Thess 1:7–9

B. UCG: Hell is complete annihilation by incineration.

“This [hell] is not a presently burning place of torment, but a fire that will burn on earth in the future for only a time. As mentioned, our loving God gives everyone an opportunity to have eternal life and wishes no one to perish. But if people ultimately refuse to repent, the punishment is the second death-utter annihilation through incineration, ending their lives and existence.” *Fundamental Beliefs of the United Church of God*. Published by The United Church of God, an International Association. 2009. p. 60.

Conclusion: Does the United Church of God match up with Apostolic Teaching? Or did it “fade away” from orthodox Christianity?

The Word of God and His teaching are eternal and unchanging, because God Himself is both eternal (Psalm 90:2, Isaiah 40:8) and unchanging (Malachi 3:6, Hebrews 6:18, James 1:17). In the light of Scripture, on which the apostles based their doctrine, the United Church of God’s teachings ‘*simply fade away*.’” Practically every single doctrine of the Christian faith has been attacked and changed by the United Church of God. “As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed.” Galatians 1:9

NATURAL DISASTERS & THE BIBLE

by Gary Hedrick

Every annual cycle brings extreme weather events to many parts of the world, including our own. Sometimes these events—whether they're hurricanes, typhoons, tornadoes, thunderstorms, tsunamis, or floods—can be down-right deadly.

The great Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004, for instance, caused a series of killer waves on December 26 of that year, leaving 150,000 people dead by the end of that nightmarish day. The deadliest tornado in modern history was the one that struck the Manikganj district of Bangladesh on April 26, 1989. It wiped out two towns and carved out a path of destruction a mile wide and ten miles long. The human toll was 1300 dead and 12,000 injured.

Closer to home, who can forget the devastating impact of Hurricane Katrina along the Gulf coast back in 2005? Fifty flood walls and levees failed around the city of New Orleans, with disastrous consequences. Thousands of people perished and tens of thousands of others were left homeless.¹

Add Hurricane Harvey in 2017 and Hurricane Florence in 2018 and the extreme weather events never end. Whenever a natural disaster grabs the headlines, opportunists—including some in the religious world—are quick to capitalize on it for their own purposes. Some preachers, for example, declared that Katrina was God's judgment on America for its wickedness. Some well-meaning Christian antiabortion activists claimed that Katrina was God's punishment for "the national sin of abortion."² Even Muslim preachers joined the

1 The final tally was 1,833 lives lost and at least \$108 billion in property loss (see "Hurricane Katrina" from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Climatic Data Center at ncdc.noaa.gov).

2 As much as we empathize with the pro-life movement, we believe it only hurts the cause when spokespersons are intemperate and ill-informed in their pronouncements. Activists like Flip Benham (Operation Save America) and Steve Lefemine (Columbia Christians for Life in South Carolina), among others, have claimed a direct link between natural disasters and God's judgment. Lefemine, for instance, said a color satellite map of Hurricane Katrina looked to him like an image of a fetus at eight weeks—so he sent copies of the weather map to activists all over the country. He declared, "Providence punishes national sins by national calamities" ("Some Say National Catastrophe Was 'Divine Judgment'" by Alan Coopeman in *The Washington Post* Sunday, September 4, 2005], accessed online at *The Houston Chronicle* website at www.chron.com). Pro-life evangelicals uniformly agree that abortion is a national tragedy, of course, *but some of us might ask why God would devastate Louisiana so horribly and singularly for this particular sin when many more babies—tens of thousands more, in fact—are aborted in states like California, Illinois, and New York* (see "Table 103. Abortions—Number and Rate by State of Occurrence: 2000–2008" by the US Census Bureau [Births, Deaths, Marriages, and Divorces: Statistical Abstract of the United States], 76. Available online at www.census.gov).

chorus of religious voices claiming that Katrina was the wrath of God on an evil nation.³ Extravagant and self-serving claims about extreme weather can backfire, however. In the 1980s, for example, one well-known TV preacher famously claimed to have harnessed the power of prayer to take control of an approaching hurricane and redirect it away from his Virginia-based headquarters. Sadly, however, the storm moved to the north, came ashore, did millions of dollars in damage, and killed 15 people.⁴

During the 2012 cycle, Hurricane Sandy wreaked havoc in late October along the eastern seaboard, doing millions of dollars of damage to property and killing 285 people. In its aftermath, several religious bloggers and activists proclaimed that Sandy was God's judgment on America for the sin of homosexuality.⁵ So it seems a bit arbitrary to claim that God sent a hurricane to punish America for the widespread practice of any particular sin.

Even those of us who are opposed to the legitimization of homosexuality in our declining culture, however, can easily see the numerous fallacies in this reasoning. One problem with it is that there were many hurricanes before Hurricane Sandy (some much worse, in fact), and they had no connection with homosexuality.⁶ So it seems a bit arbitrary to claim that God sent a hurricane to punish America for the widespread practice of any particular sin. It also seems somewhat disingenuous to insist that God should punish Texas, Louisiana, Mississippi or other locations disproportionately for sins that are predominantly committed elsewhere.⁷ Crackpots in the religious-political world aren't the only ones who try to use the

3 Kuwaiti Muhammad Yousef Mlaifi wrote in the Arabic daily Al-Siyassa (under the headline "The Terrorist Katrina Is One of the Soldiers of Allah"), "It is almost certain that this is a wind of torment and evil that Allah has sent to this American empire" (Cooperman, *Ibid.*). Minister Louis Farrakhan of the Nation of Islam alleged that Katrina was "God's way of punishing America for its warmongering and racism" (see "Louis Farrakhan Biography" on The Biography Channel website at www.thebiographychannel.co.uk).

4 In September of 1985, Pat Robertson claimed that his prayers caused Hurricane Gloria to veer away from Virginia Beach, Virginia. See "Pat Robertson's World: In the Beginning There Was Hurricane Gloria" by Dinesh D'Souza in *American Spectator* (Nov. 1986), 16-19. Real-time footage of Robertson's prayer is available on YouTube (www.youtube.com).

5 Following Superstorm Sandy, John McTernan blogged, "God is systematically destroying America." A better way to express it is to say that we are destroying ourselves by our flagrant disregard of His moral law. What's happening in this decadent age is our fault, not His. McTernan's blog can be found at www.defendproclaimthefaithe.org.

6 Some hurricanes that rank ahead of Sandy are the 1935 Labor Day hurricane (Florida), the 1923 Southeast Florida hurricane, Hurricane Camille (Mississippi, 1969), Hurricane Andrew (Louisiana, 1992), the 1926 Miami hurricane, and the 1900 Galveston hurricane. Interestingly, one of our founder's ancestors, Adolphe Halff, perished in an earlier Galveston hurricane in 1859, when the ship on which he was a passenger capsized.

7 See footnote 2 above.

weather to advance their own agenda. Hollywood has gotten in on the act, too.

One case in point was Roland Emmerich's 2004 film *The Day After Tomorrow*, which grossed over half a billion dollars at the box office.⁸ It dramatized the fictional consequences of climate change, suggesting how global cooling might lead to a catastrophic ice age and destroy modern civilization. The film was immensely popular in both North America and Europe.

So what about it? As believers, what are we to make of extreme weather when it occurs? Is it merely natural forces at work, or can it be an expression of God's wrath or maybe even a harbinger of prophetic events? Let's see what the Bible has to say.

God is sovereign over all aspects of nature, including the weather God created for the world, and that includes the forces of nature that collide in our atmosphere to produce all kinds of weather. Nothing is beyond His control, including even the capricious and seemingly unpredictable forces of nature. King David affirmed this 3,500 years ago when he wrote: "The earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein. For He has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the waters" (Psalm 24:1). In other words, He is LORD of all because He made it all! But control over circumstances (God's sovereignty) isn't necessarily the same thing as control of circumstances (direct intervention).⁹

Most of the time, the LORD chooses to allow the natural world to run its course according to the laws He has ordained. He doesn't usually intervene. God doesn't control the weather the way a puppeteer controls a marionette with strings. Many of the Old Testament verses that talk about God exercising direct control over weather are metaphors like Psalm 135:7, which says, "He causes the vapors to ascend from the ends of the earth; He makes lightning for the rain; He brings the wind out of His treasures" (see also Psalm 147:8-9).

These figures of speech are meant to convey the idea that God is sovereign over nature, but not necessarily that He actually reaches

⁸ "The Day After Tomorrow" was the highest grossing film in Canadian history.

⁹ When a ripe apple falls from a tree, the principle of sovereignty would say that God is in control of that event in the sense that He established the physical laws that caused it— and perhaps also in the sense that He could have stopped it from falling if He wanted to. It doesn't necessarily mean, however, that He acted directly to cause the apple to fall to the ground. It's as simple as this: In the absence of any compelling reason to interrupt the process, He lets the apple fall. The overarching point here is that the principle of God's sovereignty doesn't mean that He causes everything that happens. It simply means that events never catch Him by surprise and circumstances are never allowed to thwart His ultimate purposes.

down and causes every event that occurs in the natural world. Most of the time, events like cyclones and tornadoes are simply the result of natural processes (like the collision of updrafts and downdrafts of unstable air during a thunderstorm).

When tragedies happen, it's human nature to try to make sense of them. That's perfectly understandable. Saying that God caused a tornado, for example, is one way of explaining why it happened. For a believer, it seems like a more satisfying explanation than saying that it was the result of unstable air in the atmosphere.

But is it really true? Did God really send the tornado? We know that God sometimes literally and directly manipulates the weather for His own purposes. Aside from the story of Job (which we'll talk about later), the Bible provides us with some notable examples: God sent the Great Flood in the days of Noah (Genesis 6-9). He sent thunder and hail down on the Egyptians (Exodus 9:22-34.) Divinely sent winds were instrumental in the events of the Exodus from Egypt (Exodus 10:19, 14:21). The LORD withheld rain to punish His people for disobedience (Leviticus 26:18-20). We know that God sometimes literally and directly manipulates the weather for His own purposes.

Abundant rain and crops, on the other hand, were a reward for obedience (Deuteronomy 11:13-15). As a form of punishment on His rebellious people, God sent stifling dust storms instead of rain (Deuteronomy 28:24). Hailstones rained down on Israel's enemies, the Amorites (Joshua 10:11). Loud claps of thunder confused the Philistines so they could be routed by Israel (1 Samuel 7:10). The LORD sent thunder and rain at Samuel's request to get Israel's attention (1 Samuel 12:17-18) David petitioned the LORD to suspend a disastrous, three-year famine in Israel¹⁰(2 Samuel 21:1).

Solomon said that God sends rain in response to humility and repentance (1 Kings 8:35-36). The LORD sent an "east wind" to create drought conditions for the Northern Kingdom of Israel (Hosea 13:15). He sent a violent storm to change Jonah's course (Jonah 1:4). Nahum declared that God metes out judgment on His enemies through tornadoes, storms, and droughts (Nahum 1:2-4).

When a violent storm was about to sink their boat on the Sea of Galilee, Yeshua's frightened disciples were astounded when He calmed the wind and the waves (Matthew 8:23-27). The answer, then, is yes God can and does manipulate the weather sometimes (we'll discuss this in more detail below). During a span of several thousand

¹⁰ Famines were generally the result of extreme drought conditions. This is confirmed by the fact that God answered David's prayer a few verses later by making the rain pour down (v. 10).

years of human history, though, we can only point to a handful of these instances in the Bible, so it's evident that direct intervention is not His usual practice.

Most of the time, His control of the weather is indirect. As we mentioned above, God has ordained (and set into motion) natural laws and processes that govern the universe and control the weather (Job 38:33, Jer. 31:35-36) and He normally doesn't interfere with those processes. Laws, by definition, cannot be ignored. If God routinely allowed exemptions from His natural laws, we would live in a world of magic, a disordered world without predictable cause and effect. There would be no absolutes, no mathematics (because two plus two might make something other than four), and no science (because two molecules of hydrogen and one of oxygen might combine to form something other than water) and that's not how He designed the world to function. But the LORD can (and does) intervene when it's necessary. In either case, whether He intervenes or not, He is always sovereign. God will never, ever say, "I'm so sorry, but that tornado spoiled My plan."

Extreme weather isn't always evil or the work of the devil, even though its results can be tragic. The Book of Job opens with an interesting story. There was a time when Satan¹¹ came before God and made an accusation against a godly man named Job (1:6). On that occasion, Satan claimed that the only reason Job served God was so he could enjoy His blessings. If God stopped blessing Job, Satan alleged, he would no longer serve Him. But God knew Job, so He granted Satan a special dispensation that allowed him to afflict Job and his family with a variety of painful circumstances, including natural disasters (1:12).

Shortly afterward, "the fire of God" fell from the heavens (v. 16)¹² and "a great wind" (possibly a devastating tornado) caused a house to collapse on his children, killing them (v. 19).¹³ Job was heartbroken, but he doggedly refused to give up his hope in the LORD. Even in the midst of unimaginable grief, he cried out, "Though [the LORD] slay me, yet will I trust Him" (13:15).

11 The term "Satan" here in Job 1 appears to be more of a title than a personal name. The Hebrew word means "accuser" or "adversary" and includes the definite article (Ha Satan, or "the Adversary"). There are other Bible passages that allude to the existence of a heavenly council whose members present themselves before the LORD on certain occasions (cp. 1 Kings 22:19, Psalm 89:5-7, Jer. 23:18, 22).

12 The messenger told Job that the fire had come from God because that's what he thought. However, the context makes it clear that the fire was orchestrated by Satan. Also, can fire from heaven be considered "natural"? Of course it can. Chances are, you've seen fire from heaven yourself—and probably more than once. We call it lightning—and yes, it's a natural phenomenon. What we have here, then, is the devil utilizing forces of nature to do his bidding.

13 The LORD put one limitation on Satan: He could not touch Job directly (v. 12). He could only work through Job's circumstances.

This passage indicates that the devil does have the ability, at least to some extent (and only when God grants him permission), to manipulate extreme weather events. But we shouldn't jump to the conclusion that every instance of extreme weather is the devil's work. Another interesting question is the extent to which weather and atmospheric conditions may have been affected by The Fall in the Garden of Eden. Are hurricanes, tornadoes and other extreme weather events a result of the Adamic Curse (Genesis 3:16-19)? Do these things happen only because we live in a fallen, imperfect world? The Book of Genesis seems to suggest that the weather from Creation to the time of the Flood was much milder than it is today, even though the details in Scripture are sketchy.

Evidently, there was no rain (Genesis 2:5-6), so that would preclude any threat prior to Noah's time from thunderstorms and floods.¹⁴ But does any of this mean that extreme weather is always the work of the enemy, or a result of living in a fallen world? Not necessarily. In fact, most extreme weather events are the result of natural processes that were ordained by God Himself and serve a useful purpose.

For example, most of us today see flooding as a bad thing. Here in south-central Texas, the rocky soil absorbs little moisture; so during the rainy season, there's a great deal of flooding. It's a major problem for us at certain times of the year. When flooding occurs, people sometimes drown when they foolishly try to drive through barricaded high-water crossings. People in the biblical (Mediterranean) world, however, saw flooding in a different light. For the Egyptians, for example, flooding was necessary; in fact, it was a blessing.

The ancient Egyptians recognized that the seasonal ebb and flow of the Nile River was nature's way of fertilizing and revitalizing the land so their crops could thrive later. Ancient people saw the earth as constantly changing and adapting. Water carved out valleys and canyons. It changed the contours of the land. They anticipated these changes every year. The same thing could be said about volcanoes and earthquakes (both of which are related to weather). They play a vital role in the way our planet functions.¹⁵

14 Some creationists have suggested that the reason it didn't rain before the Flood is that there were fewer condensation nuclei in the pre-Deluge atmosphere than there are today. Condensation nuclei are tiny particles around which water condenses to form raindrops—and precipitation cannot occur without them (see Ahrens and Henson in *Meteorology Today* [Boston: Cengage Learning, 2013], 117).

15 Some of this information is adapted from information on Rich Deem's God and Science website at www.godandscience.org (see in particular his apologetic monograph "Where Is God When Bad Things Happen?").

Earthquakes happen because the earth's crust floats on the surface in sections called tectonic plates. Deep in the earth's interior, beneath the surface crust, is a swirling mantle of superheated, melted rock or lava. The surface plates that support the continents rub against each other at times, and it's along these fault lines (where the plates touch) that most earthquakes take place. The action of the earth's liquified, molten interior, in which a solid inner core and a molten outer core spin in opposite directions, helps generate the earth's magnetic field and protects us from harmful radiation from space.¹⁶

Also, volcanoes are God's ordained way of creating new landmasses and of relieving pressure that builds up in those inner regions of the earth. Are any of these things a result of the Fall? No, it's just the way the planet was designed by God to work. As it turns out, even lightning, frightening as it may be, has its redeeming qualities. Lightning is one of the ways that nitrogen in the atmosphere is made available to living organisms on earth.¹⁷ Eighty percent of our atmosphere is made up of nitrogen. Lightning makes it possible for atmospheric nitrogen to replenish essential nitrates in the soil.

Again, there is nothing inherently evil about these natural processes. On the contrary, they are beneficial and necessary. The reason these extreme events can be dangerous is that we don't have the technology or understanding to predict them and to harness them for our benefit. We believe this problem will be remedied during the coming Millennium, when Messiah Yeshua will preside over a restoration of Paradise (like the ancient Garden of Eden) on earth. When God commissioned Adam to "subdue the earth" (Genesis 1:28), that may very well have included studying and harnessing the forces of nature for the benefit of humankind.

During the future and magnificent Kingdom Age, human achievement and technology will no doubt take gigantic leaps forward. Extreme events that we see today as catastrophic will be predictable and utilized for constructive purposes. But in our current Church era, God sometimes manipulates weather in answer to the prayers of His people.

16 "Why Earth's Inner and Outer Cores Rotate in Opposite Directions" by Laura Poppick in Live Science (Sept. 19, 2013). Accessed online at www.livescience.com.

17 The other way nitrogen is released from the atmosphere and made available to living organisms is "through bacteria in the soil that form nitrates out of nitrogen in the air" ("Nitrogen in the Earth System" by Nicole Gordon on the University Corporation for Atmospheric Research website at www.ucar.edu). She continues, "During electrical storms, large amounts of nitrogen are oxidized and united with water to produce an acid that falls to Earth in rainfall and deposits nitrates in the soil." Without lightning (and the accompanying action of nitrate-producing bacteria), the soil would become depleted of nutrients and crops couldn't grow.

Here's a study in contrasts. Back in the 1960s, when I was in high school, our family attended a Baptist church in Kansas where several of the leading families were farmers. During the summers, I helped out on one of these farms. It was hard work but it was also fun, and they paid well. One summer, we found ourselves in the midst of a drought. Everything was dry and dusty that summer. Thousands of acres of corn and hay were burning up in the fields. Farmers and ranchers all over eastern Kansas were in danger of losing their crops. And as if that wasn't bad enough, there was more: if they couldn't feed their live-stock, they'd have to sell the scrawny animals at a loss.

It was a recipe for disaster. So we prayed at church, asking God to send rain. We had special prayer meetings in homes, again, imploring the Lord to end the drought. The farmers themselves prayed in their fields. We sent messages to sister churches in other parts of the country, soliciting their prayers. But relief never came, at least, not in time to save the crops. It was a disastrous year for those farmers. Some of them had to sell off land or borrow money to get their families through the winter.

So why didn't the Lord send rain? Were these humble Christian farmers being punished for some heinous sin? I really don't think so. On the contrary, they were some of the most faithful, godly people in our community. Now fast forward almost 50 years. Where we live in south-central Texas, Christians got organized during a two-year drought a few years ago and started getting together to pray for rain. It finally came, in torrents! We were very grateful! What was the difference between Kansas and Texas? Why does God answer some prayers for rain and not others? Only He knows!

Most of the time, whether we like it or not, He allows factors like climate, geography, seasons and atmospheric conditions to determine the weather without Him intervening. Today, Christians in African nations like Somalia, Sudan, and South Sudan are praying for relief from drought and famine. Only God can decide how and when (or if) He will intervene on their behalf. In ancient Israel, the Prophet Elijah prayed during a time of drought and "the heaven gave rain" (see 1 Kings 18:44-45 and James 5:18).

So the biblical precedent clearly indicates that God does alter the weather in response to prayer under some circumstances. The New Testament says, "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much (James 5:16b). Extreme weather by itself is not a sign of the Second Coming. The term "Second Coming" doesn't appear in Scripture and the way we use it, it doesn't refer to a single event. "Second Coming" is an expression coined by theologians to encompass

future, prophesied events associated with the Messiah's return to Planet Earth. We believe those events take place in two phases and over a period of seven years.

The first of those events is the Rapture (or "catching up")¹⁸ of the New Testament Church (i.e., the Ekklesia),¹⁹ described by Yeshua and Paul in John 14:3, 28 and 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 and 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18. One of the Pauline passages says, "Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:51-52).

The second phase of the Second Coming takes place seven years later, with Messiah's coming in glory at the climax of the Armageddon Campaign.²⁰ Sandwiched between these two phases is the seven-year Tribulation Period, which itself appears to be divided into two halves of 42 months each. The first 42 months will be a time of relative peace and security for the nation Israel. At the mid-point, the "abomination of desolation" occurs, followed by three and a half years of horrific conflict and carnage on earth while the devil (working through his "prince," the Antichrist) makes one last-ditch effort to destroy the Jewish people.²¹

While it's true that the NT enumerates certain prophetic signs and trends that will precede the Lord's return, none of those indicators by itself is a sign of the end of the age. Several of those prophetic benchmarks are mentioned by the Lord himself in Matthew 24:3-14: False messiahs deceiving many people (v. 5); wars and rumors of wars (v. 6); nations and alliances of nations in conflict (v. 7a); famines, plagues, and earthquakes in various places (v. 7b); persecution of

18 The word "Rapture" doesn't appear in the English NT. However, the Greek verb translated "caught up" in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 is *harpazō* (ἁρπάζω) meaning "to snatch up." (The English word "harpoon" is another derivative.) The Latin Vulgate translates it in the same verse with a form of the verb *rapio*, which means "to snatch away." Matthew Henry (1662-1714) used the word "Rapture" in his exposition of 1 Thessalonians 4:17 (Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible, loc. cit.).

19 The Greek word *ekklesia* literally means "called out" (*ek + kaleo*). In the NT, it refers to believers in Yeshua the Messiah who have been "called out" of the world to become God's unique people (Titus 2:14).

20 Some good and capable interpreters believe the Rapture will happen concurrently with the Lord's coming in glory—meaning the Church is raptured after the seven-year Tribulation rather than before it. This is the post-Trib Rapture view, in contrast with the Independent Fundamental Churches of America (IFCA's) pre-Trib view. The timetable we are presenting here generally follows a premillennial, dispensational scenario. We recognize that a number of alternative views are represented among evangelicals.

21 Daniel 9:26-27 mentions a seven-year peace pact, presumably between Israel and her Arab antagonists, and most likely mediated by the "Roman" European Union. At the mid-point of this seven-year period (that is, after 42 months), the Antichrist breaks the treaty and moves in to occupy the Land. Taking his cues from the first-century Romans (who destroyed Jerusalem in AD 70), he desecrates the rebuilt Temple—an event referred to in Scripture as "the abomination of desolation" (Dan. 12:11, Matt. 24:15)—and tramples the Holy City underfoot for the final 42 months of the Tribulation (Rev. 11:1-2).

believers by the nations (v. 9); apostasy and betrayal by former believers (v. 10); the rise of false prophets, with widespread deception (v. 11); pervasive lawlessness (v. 12); and, the “gospel of the kingdom” preached to the whole world (v. 14). The key to interpreting the “signs” passages correctly is the principle of convergence.

That is, these events and trends only become prophetic signs when they converge at the same time and begin to increase in frequency and intensity.²² Yeshua told His disciples, “So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors!” (Matthew 24:33). So when a hurricane happens, leaving horrible devastation in its wake and the “Rapture alert” websites light up with discussion threads about how it’s a sign of the end of the age, they’re wrong. Those folks need to read their Bibles more carefully. Note the phrase “all these things.” It’s not one of these things, or some of them, but all of them. The events and trends outlined by Yeshua in Matthew 24 only become signs of the approaching end when they all start happening at the same time!

Strictly speaking, Yeshua is addressing His twelve disciples in Matthew 24. They represent the believing remnant of Israel, and He speaks to them as though He’s speaking to the nation. So the events He describes here will happen during the Tribulation Period, which is also known as “the time of Jacob’s [Israel’s] trouble” (see Jeremiah 30:4-9).

Should we infer from this that the believing remnant (i.e., Jewish believers who are living at the end of the age) is destined to go through the Tribulation? Not necessarily. The Lord is speaking to His disciples as proxies, as they sit on the Mount of Olives looking down on the Temple Mount so He addresses them just as He would have spoken to the entire nation.²³ He’s telling them that their successors

22 Referring to the signs of the end, Yeshua said, “All these [events] are the beginning of sorrows” (Matt. 24:8). The Greek word for “sorrows” is *odin*, which refers to the pains (contractions) a mother endures during childbirth. When the contractions increase in frequency and intensity, she knows she’s about to give birth. Likewise, when the prophetic signs increase in frequency and intensity, and they converge at the same time, Tribulation believers will know that the Lord’s coming is near. Since (technically speaking) this will be His coming in glory at the close of the Tribulation, does that mean there are no signs indicating the nearness of the Rapture seven years earlier? The short answer is yes, but a longer answer could explain that prophetic trends will become evident as *precursors to the actual signs that will occur later during the Tribulation*.

23 The correspondence between 12 tribes and 12 disciples is difficult to dismiss as mere coincidence. In fact, in John’s vision of the New Jerusalem, he makes the association when he mentions 12 gates, 12 tribes, 12 foundations, and 12 apostles (Rev. 21:10-14). However, we can’t make the claim that each of the disciples came from a different tribe, because some of them were brothers—and brothers who have the same parents obviously can’t come from different tribes. But the lack of any direct, one-to-one correspondence doesn’t mean that the disciples, corporately, didn’t represent the 12 tribes of Israel.

(i.e., Jewish believers living in Israel at the end of the age) will have the responsibility of proclaiming the message of the coming Kingdom to the unbelieving nation.

So the question is this: will Jewish believers (along with the rest of us) be here during the Tribulation (to proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom to the Jewish nation), like our post-Trib friends suggest, or does Revelation 7:4-10 indicate that God will raise up His own end-time army of Jewish evangelists after the Rapture?²⁴ As we contemplate questions about the timing of the Rapture (i.e., whether it occurs before or after the Tribulation), it's instructive to note the attitude of the biblical writers in their descriptions of the Lord's return. They clearly thought they might be alive when it happened²⁵ and they looked forward to it with joy, excitement, and anticipation. They called it their "blessed hope" (Titus 2:13).

This begs the question: If believers will go through the Tribulation, why did the New Testament writers see the end of the age as a positive, glorious thing, something God's people should look forward to with great expectancy? It doesn't make sense! This seven-year period (and the final three and a half years, in particular) will be a time of rampant, horrific famine, disease, warfare, social and political upheaval, persecution, betrayal, death, and the unleashing of terrifying, supernatural evil on the inhabitants of the earth.²⁶

Why would anyone be eager to experience something like that? The answer is that they weren't. What they were eager for was the Lord's return to snatch them up to be with Him: "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:3).

There's a bit of irony in the fact that critics often accuse pre-Tribbers of promoting an escapist mentality because we believe the Lord will remove us prior to the Tribulation. With all due respect, however, I'd like to point out that we're not the ones who are out there marketing survivalist products to naïve believers. We're not building underground bunkers so we can escape the savagery and wholesale

24 Note that God will arrange it so that during the Tribulation, the Jewish nation hears the Gospel from fellow Jews who have come to faith in Yeshua of Nazareth as their Messiah and Redeemer. This is particularly significant in light of the animus that has poisoned relations between Jewish and non-Jewish religious communities during the past two millennia.

25 Note, for example, Paul's use of the pronoun "we" (including himself) in phrases like "we who are alive [and] remain until the coming of the Lord" (see 1 Thessalonians 4:15). The Lord intended that every generation of believers should have the hope that they might live to see His return.

26 Some prophetic passages intimate that a significant percentage of the earth's population will be decimated during the second half of the Tribulation (see Revelation 8:9; 9:18; Zechariah 13:8).

destruction of the Time of Jacob's Trouble. That crowd consists almost exclusively of post-Tribbers.

It occurs to me that everyone wants to “escape” (in one way or another) the ravages of the Tribulation, including many critics of the pre-Trib position! It irks me when I receive a letter from an elderly friend of our ministry wanting to know if she should pay someone thousands of dollars for a huge stockpile of freeze-dried foods (and yes, I have heard from people like this). Let's be clear: Even if you were to enter the Tribulation someday, an underground bunker stuffed with expensive, ready-to-eat meal packs won't help you survive for long. Even if you have your own power generator, where will you get the fuel to run it for years on end?

Unless you spent a fortune on a large array, your solar panels will probably produce barely enough power to keep your lights on. Do you seriously think that the lawless bands of thugs and scavengers who will be roaming the earth in those days won't find the entrance to your underground bunker? And what about the powers of darkness that will be active during that time? Stockpiles of weapons won't help when you try to confront them.

If you have any illusions about escaping the Tribulation by going underground, you have no idea what you would be up against, my friend! In contrast to all of this post-Trib paranoia, the New Testament writers saw the end of the age as a positive, glorious thing—and something God's people should look forward to with great anticipation! The Jewish founder of our ministry used to say, “We're looking for Christ—not the Antichrist!”

In the Bible, when God unleashed extreme weather, it was directed at believers just as often as unbelievers. We have already determined that there were occasions in the Old Testament when God used the forces of nature to mete out His judgment or punishment. In the days of ancient Israel, however, extreme weather was most often a punishment directed at His own disobedient people, the Israelites, rather than at the unbelieving nations. Yes, He did send hailstones down on the Egyptians and He flooded the world in the days of Noah, but those were extraordinary measures required by extraordinary times.

Some well-meaning Christian supporters of Israel have even tried to make a connection between weather disasters and the world not treating Israel well. They say, essentially, that when we adopt a policy that is contrary to Israel's interests in the Middle East, God sends weather disasters as a form of divine retribution. It's easy to see

extreme weather as a form of judgment on “those wicked unbelievers,” homosexuals, abortionists, or misguided anti-Israel policymakers in world capitals including some people in Washington, DC.

But maybe we should be looking closer to home for answers. Our whole Judeo-Christian culture is crumbling before our very eyes, so extreme weather probably wouldn't even make the top ten on our list of real problems. We have strayed far from our Judeo-Christian roots—and what's worse, no one seems to care! Many of our pulpits are strangely and awkwardly silent about issues of righteousness and God's holy law.

Ruth Graham once said that if God doesn't judge our decadent and corrupt culture, He'll have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah. Sadly, signs of judgment are already evident—and many of our innocuous, shallow, feel-good evangelical churches are just as culpable as the LGBT or abortion lobbies. Are we willing to humble ourselves as God's people, recognize His discipline in our own lives, and repent of our sins, hypocrisy, and lukewarmness? The Bible says, “the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God” (1 Peter 4:17a).

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MUHAMMAD AND CLAY BIRDS: A RESPONSE TO THE INFANCY GOSPEL OF JESUS

by Dennis Ingolfsland

There is an ancient Greek text called *The Infancy Gospel of Thomas* (Not to be confused with the *Gospel of Thomas*). The *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* says that Jesus:

...made soft clay and fashioned from it twelve sparrows. And it was on the Sabbath when he did this. And there were also many other children playing with him. Now a certain Jew saw what Jesus was doing in his play on the Sabbath, he at once went and told his father Joseph: "See, your child is at the brook, and he has taken clay and fashioned twelve birds and has profaned the Sabbath." And when Joseph came to the place and saw it, he cried out to him, saying: "Why do you do on the Sabbath what ought not to be done?" But Jesus clapped his hands and cried to the sparrows: "Off with you!" And the sparrows took flight and went away chirping (*Infancy Gospel of Thomas*. 2.2-4. *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. 1, edited by Wilhelm Schneemelcher, 1991).

With one exception, virtually no one believes this story is true. First, the story wasn't written until about 100 to 150 years after Jesus' death, which is much later than our earliest sources about Jesus.

Second, our earliest sources about Jesus are all Jewish and the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* shows no knowledge of first century Judaism.

Third, according to the *Gospel of John*, Jesus' did his very first miracle, not when he was a child, but as an adult when he turned water into wine.

Fourth, the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* betrays elements of Gnostic thought which is characteristic of the second century AD but not the first century AD.

Finally, the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* tells a series of bazaar stories about Jesus that portray him as a vindictive little brat, which doesn't fit anything else we know about Jesus from much earlier sources.

For example, according to the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, when a little boy "took a branch of a willow and...dispersed the water which Jesus

had gathered together,” little Jesus called him a “godless dunderhead” and placed a curse on him causing the boy to wither up.

On another occasion, a boy was running and bumped into Jesus.’ Jesus cursed that child too and the boy fell down dead! Parents in the village understandably began to complain to Jesus’ father, Joseph, so according to the story, Jesus punished the complainers with blindness!

For these reasons, virtually no scholars (or anyone else) believes that the stories about Jesus in the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* are true—the only exception is Muslims. Muslims believe the story is true because Muhammad—who lived more than 300 years after the story was written—seems to have believed it! At least twice in the Qur’an Muhammad talks about how Jesus took a clay bird and made it come alive (Sura 3.49 and 5.10).

This creates a dilemma for Muslims. Since they believe that the teachings in the Qur’an were given to Muhammad from God word-for-word, they are forced to believe a story which no one but Muslims believe, written 100 to 150 years after Jesus lived. If the clay bird story isn’t true, it would mean that Muhammad did not get it word-for-word from God, and that would place the Qur’an, the prophethood of Muhammad and all of Islam in question.

Although Muhammad had great respect for Jesus, Muhammad adamantly denied that Jesus was the Son of God. That’s interesting because the same *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* that tells the story of the clay birds, also tells a story about Jesus standing in the Temple of God and calling it “My Father’s house.” In other words, according to the writer of the clay bird story which Muhammad believes, Jesus claimed to be the Son of God.

I HATE IT WHEN YOU SAY YOU HATE

by Steve Lagoon

I am tired of the all too frequent use of the word *hate* to label those with whom some disagree. If you opposes illegal immigration, you're accused of being xenophobic, of hating foreigners, of hating those different than you.

If you oppose same-sex relationships or marriage, you are accused of being homophobic, of hating gays and such.

If you oppose abortion, you are accused of being sexist or misogynist, of demeaning the rights of women.

It never seems to occur to those who sling the language of hate that people that oppose such things can do so for legitimate and rational reasons that have nothing to do with hate.

Isn't it possible that someone can truly be concerned about the safety of our country, committed to law and order, and even concerned for the safety and well-being of the immigrants themselves and the exploitation they endure, rather than being motivated by hate?

And isn't it possible to have deeply rooted principles concerning human sexuality that reflect one's faith commitment and have nothing to do with hate?

And isn't it possible to oppose the killing of innocent lives in the womb and yet be a strong advocate for women's rights? Do women's rights have to come at the expense of the lives of their own unborn children?

As a conservative Christian, I am guided by my biblical faith. A faith that implores me to love all people, period. And so while I advocate for controlled borders and a legal immigration system, I also strive to love every person I encounter irrespective of how they arrived in this country.

And so, while I advocate biblical morality concerning love and marriage, I strive to love every person I meet whether gay or straight (or whatever self-designation they may prefer).

And so, while I will never cease in my efforts to defend the most defenseless lives; those in their mother's wombs; yet will I

compassionately treat with love those who have unfortunately had or support abortions.

These are not mere empty claims. I see every day in the lives of my Christian brothers a love that manifests itself in caring and compassionate actions towards those with whom we disagree.

I urge those who oppose our values to recognize these truths. To refrain from the all too easy, and in fact, lazy attacks on those with whom they disagree by calling them hateful. Such language only inflames the dialogue and incites the very hatred they claim to condemn.

QUIZ: PLACES ASSOCIATED WITH CULTS

1. Which cultic group is associated with Brooklyn Bethel?
 - a. Christadelphians
 - b. The Children of God
 - c. Jehovah's Witnesses
 - d. The United Church of God in Canada

2. Which cultic group is associated with the Mother Church in Boston?
 - a. The Way of the Fenway
 - b. Theosophy
 - c. Unity School of Christianity
 - d. Christian Science

3. Which cultic group is associated with the Salt Lake Tabernacle and Temple Square?
 - a. Community of Christ (Formerly Known as The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ)
 - b. Fundamentalist Church of Latter-day Saints
 - c. The Grand Masonic Lodge of Utah
 - d. The church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (formerly known as Mormons)

4. Which cultic group is associated with the Universal House of Justice in Haifa Israel?
 - a. The Church of Universal Justice
 - b. Bahaism
 - c. Branhamism
 - d. Sikhism

5. Which cultic group is associated with Loma Linda University?
- a. Seventh-day Adventism
 - b. Second-day Adventism
 - c. Seventh-day Baptists
 - d. The Church Universal and Triumphant
6. Which cultic group is associated with Unity Village in Lee Summit Missouri?
- a. The United Church of Christ
 - b. The untied Church of Christ
 - c. The Unitarian-Universalist Church
 - d. The Unity School of Christianity
7. Which cultic group is associated with Jonestown in Guyana?
- a. People's Temple
 - b. None of the above
 - c. All of the above
 - d. Both b and c
8. Which cultic group is associated with Waco Texas?
- a. The Alamoans
 - b. Red River Rising
 - c. The Branch Davidians
 - d. The Millennial Dawn
9. Which cultic group is associated with the Hill Cumorah near Palmyra and Manchester New York?
- a. The Shakers
 - b. The Stillers
 - c. The Strangeites
 - d. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
10. Which cultic group is associated with Beth Sarim (The House of Princes) in San Diego California?
- a. The Rappites
 - b. John Alexander Dowie's Zion City in Illinois
 - c. Layman's Home Missionary Movement
 - d. Jehovah's Witnesses

Answers:

1. c; 2. d; 3. d; 4. b; 5. a; 6. d; 7. a; 8. c; 9. d; 10. d

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